

738 TROOP CARRIER SQUADRON, MEDIUM

MISSION

LINEAGE

738 Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) constituted, 14 May 1943
Activated, 1 Jun 1943
Redesignated 738 Bombardment Squadron, Very Heavy, 5 Aug 1945
Inactivated, 17 Oct 1945
Activated in the reserve, 16 Aug 1947
Inactivated, 27 Jun 1949
Redesignated 738 Troop Carrier Squadron, Medium, 26 May 1952
Activated in the reserve, 13 Jun 1952
Inactivated, 1 Jan 1953

738 Expeditionary Airlift Squadron

STATIONS

Alamogordo AAFld, NM, 1 Jun 1943
Davis-Monthan Field, AZ, 1 Jul 1943
McCook AAFld, NE, 30 Jul 1943
Charleston AAFld, SC, 3 Oct-8 Dec 1943
San Giovanni, Italy, 21 Jan 1944-Jul 1945
Sioux Falls AAFld, SD, 1 Aug 1945
Pyote AAFld, TX, 17 Aug-17 Oct 1945
McChord Field, WA, 16 Aug 1947-27 Jun 1949
Portland Intl Aprt, OR, 13 Jun 1952-1 Jan 1953

ASSIGNMENTS

454 Bombardment Group, 1 Jun 1943-17 Oct 1945
454 Bombardment Group, 16 Aug 1947-27 Jun 1949
454 Troop Carrier Group, 13 Jun 1952-1 Jan 1953

WEAPON SYSTEMS

B-24, 1943-1945

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

Offensive, Europe

Air Naples-Foggia

Rome-Arno

Normandy

Northern France

Southern France

North Apennines

Rhineland

Central Europe

Po Valley

Air Combat, EAME Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations

Bad Voslau, Austria, 12 Apr 1944

Linz, Austria, 25 Jul 1944

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Since the squadrons function collectively as a group, there is little difference between the history of one squadron and the history of another. Their targets are the same, the table of organization is the same, and their routine is the same. Thus, the 738th Bombardment Squadron followed the same pattern as the 736th and 737th, followed the group from Tucson to McCook to Charleston to Italy.

Under the command of Major Corwin E. Grimes, of Olean, New York, the 738th played an integral part in the establishment of the group in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations. Back at McCook, as with the other squadrons, men were joining the organization every day, coming from army technical schools where they had learned the principles of turret mechanisms,

propellers, instruments, electricity, cooking, weapons, ammunition, and a hundred other specialties that make up a well-trained bombardment squadron. We had a good team then, green from the lack of experience, perhaps, but on its way to bigger things, for we were beginning to learn that the army operated as a coordinated team with each man having a certain part to perform.

It was tough sledding at first, but there were a few laughs along the way like the time we were on parade at McCook and were supposed to pass in review before the commanding officer. A young lieutenant commanding the platoon, however, had his wires crossed, and gave the wrong column movement only to find us marching off the field and away from the surprised colonel.

When the group left the Second Air Force with its "secret" troop movement and joined the First Air Force at Charleston, South Carolina, the squadron moved into little plywood huts, similar in size and shape to the pyramidal tents that we would come to know so well in Italy. These little prefabricated buildings were quite a bit more pleasant than tents, and even more comfortable than the regular army barracks.

In a regular barracks a tired soldier would have to suffer the snoring of perhaps forty buddies, but these new huts held only six. The canvas cots were not as comfortable as regular GI bunks, but they were still nice to come home to after working on the line or playing on the town. At Charleston the squadron gave a party and dance before starting final preparations for the trip across. The fact that there were few dancing partners soon turned the dance into a beer party - our last fling before heading for Sunny Italy. The next stop with the group was Camp Patrick Henry where we were processed for overseas movement. This included physical inspection, clothing check, a few "shots," and a ticket for an ocean cruise.

For some of us it was a one-way ticket. Then we climbed the gangplank of the USA T John Lawson and settled down aboard the ship with the 739th squadron. The trip over contained all the humor, pathos, and drama of a modern novel; but, surprisingly enough, we lived through it all, and it wasn't long before we were flying missions against Nazi-land. The 738th and the 739th were the first two units of the group to reach the new base at Cerignola. There was some debate over who would get first selection of location for the squadron, but it was settled by the toss of a coin between the squadrons' executive officers.

The 739th won, picked the long stable, left us with the olive grove. In this olive grove we spent eighteen months, and managed to build around it a maze of buildings to house the numerous departments of the squadron. The tents which found shelter beneath the lean branches of the Italian over-grown shrubbery soon began to branch out into more complex forms of housing with wooden floors, wooden walls, wooden roofs. Soon our olive grove was one of the most ideal camp sites on the base- muddy, perhaps, in winter, but cool during the hot summer days and nights. Major Corwin Grimes was our commanding officer during most of this transition. When he finished his missions, he was replaced by Major Ligon Smith, another square-shooting soldier and a darn good pilot.

Our executive officer was Major William Hudson and, under him, our adjutant, Captain James Williams. On the line we took orders from Captain John Skinner, engineering officer, and Sergeant Nutting, line chief. The sergeant later received a commission and was transferred from the organization as a second lieutenant, leaving Sergeant Gooch in charge. There is an old saying about first sergeants, THE OLIVE GROVE of the 738th Bombardment Squadron was cool in

summer and warm in winter, or at least cooler and warmer, respectively, than the open fields of the other squadrons. The road through the center of the olive grove conveniently led to town, and when "Way Field" threatened us with an hour of drilling and marching, we would leave the olive grove and San Giovanni and Way Field far behind us.

but it doesn't apply to Leo MacNamee who was the only first sergeant to remain with the group from its start to its finish. He put us on a lot of details, but he helped us out of a lot of tight spots, too. Mac was, in army vernacular, one good joe! But there were a lot of good joes in the 738th, and there was a nickname for every character and personality in the squadron. There was Moe, Rabbit, One-spoon, Gook, Sun-hatched, Mousey, Moose, Boots, Chubby, Dusty, Hippo, Arab, Big Ike, and Pop, and hundreds more.

These were the names that floated through the smoke-filled air at the club. It took us a long time to build the squadron's enlisted men's club, but it was worth waiting for- and the vino tended to brighten our spirits. The "crap games" went hot and heavy every pay-day night in the "little bar around the corner" and multo tire changed hands time and again as acey-d ucey or six-and-a-post-hole bounced back from the cushioned sideboard. We lived hard, we played hard, we worked hard, we fought hard, as members of the 738th squadron, and more than once our squadron came through with a top record.

We're proud of that record, and in years to come we'll remember the olive grove, and the enlisted men's club, and the nicknames, and the missions over Vienna, for these were all a part of our squadron - and we'll always remember our squadron.

With the group and its three other squadrons, the 739th Bombardment Squadron (H) was activated at Tucson, Arizona, in July of 1943, under the command of Major Franklin Tomlinson, of South Orange, New Jersey. With a few changes of command, the squadron remained about the same throughout its training at Tucson, Orlando, McCook, and Charleston, and throughout its combat time in Italy.

Amos G. Allen, Jr., the squadron executive officer, headed the staff of ground personnel with Harold Crunk as first-sergeant. When Major Allen was transferred to group headquarters, Thomas Browne, and, later, Wymond Ehrenkrook became the squadron's executive officer. Harold Crunk was replaced by Sergeants Gene Nash and Vernon Frederic as first-sergeant, and with the transfer of Captain Martinson, squadron adjutant, Stanley Shea held down the desk in the orderly room. Lieutenant Luber, former bombsight maintenance officer, took charge of the squadron's armament section when Captain Moran was transferred to 15th Air Force headquarters as Provost Marshall.

Captain Burn and Lieutenant Cohien retained their positions as communications officers, and Thomas Cely remained as squadron supply officer. The enlisted personnel of the squadron remained rather much the same throughout our stay in Italy. Sergeant Lopez became section head of ordnance, and Sergeant Haupt, section head of engineering. Bernard Mizera retained control of the armament section and Gilbert Tunnel remained as head of communications. And those were the boys from whom we took orders.

The mysterious disappearance of Major Tomlinson over Switzerland led to the instatement of Major Darwin Swanson as commanding officer of the squadron, and, upon completion of his tour

of duty, he was replaced by Major Milton Fryer, one of the best pilots and commanders the squadron ever knew. But as we watched our leaders come and go, we found that the changes of command in no way influenced the efficient operation of the five-hundred-odd men who maintained and flew the heavy Liberator bombers assigned to the 739th. A testimony to our perfect record is old 312, Miss America, who came through all our months of combat with a total of 133 sorties, representing half again as many missions to some of the hottest targets in Air Force history. In the spring of 1944, the 739th had the distinction of becoming the group's "Mickey" squadron. In this capacity we maintained nothing but radar planes to lead the missions for the entire wing. This, of course, meant harder work for some of the members of the squadron, especially the radar section, but for the most part a "mickey" squadron has an easy life in combat. Since radar planes carry only half the bomb-load of regular bombers, the work for armament and ordnance became much easier. And the entire squadron noticed the difference in the length of chow lines and PX lines as the combat crews left the squadron; a radar squadron keeps only the "mickey" navigators.

This "vacation" lasted but a short time, though, and the radar planes were once again distributed among the four squadrons of the group. Then the 739th went back to work. But it was not all work. We found many hours for play at the 739th Enlisted Men's Club "where the elite meet." A nightly crap game, organized by "Jersey Joe," provided us with innumerable hours of excitement when we found something to do with the lire that we collected from the government each month. Poker games, ranging in stakes from five and ten cents to five and ten dollars, were another favorite drawing card at the club. But most of the time, we would just gather around the bar in good old Army bull-sessions while Matthews, the Italian bartender, passed out various concoctions of Italian "poison."

Our favorite squadron joke was "Misfoot," a humorous character of Maltese descent. We still smile at the thought of his run-in with the MP's in town when he was arrested as an Italian impersonating an American soldier. But then, everyone took his share of "ribbing" at the club, from Whitey, the squadron sage, to Cognac Joe, the squadron elbow bender. But all that is past history. The 739th Squadron no longer exists as a complete organization as we knew it. Still, the 739th does exist, if only in our memories. And there it can never die, for many of the friends that we made in the squadron are lasting friendships, many of the things we learned are lasting knowledge, many of our memories are lasting memories.

Throughout the coming years somewhere, sometime, something will remind us of ... The long, cold nights of guard duty on the line when we would try in vain to catch a few minutes sleep in the cockpit of one of the heavy bombers. The ancient Italian stable that housed the majority of the squadron's offices as well as the mess hall and a barber shop. Can we forget the mess hall with its long tables and sagging benches, its noon meals of C-rations or spam, its midnight snacks and our attempts to "borrow" a loaf of bread for toasting?

The pup-tents in which we slept during our first month in Italy. And the deluxe fox hole that four of the armament boys under the direction of Claude Morton built at the squadron's cross-roads. The pyramidal tents that grew like Rube Goldberg inventions and the radar boys that were regular "eager beavers" at tent construction. The explosion of the bombers on the line one night that sent us leaping from our warm beds and into muddy fox-holes. The first EM club in the old transportation building and the new one that was built near the dispensary. And its nightly bridge

games, and poker games, and the weekly Italian orchestra with its sickening arrangement of Don't Fence me In. The Hungry John Lawson that plied the midwinter waters of the Atlantic to bring us to "Sunny Italy." That New Year's day turkey dinner that spread an epidemic of the GI's throughout the squadron to make one long, continuous line from the many tents to the few latrines in the squadron area. The six-man huts at Charleston and the beer parties at McCook. And thousands of other little memories that crop up in our minds now and then. Especially the nicknames and the friends that we lived and worked and fought with for two years ... By-the-book Allen, School-boy Martinson, Zak, Joe the Polak, Paul Will, Rabbit, the Greek, Hoppy, Handle-bar Winkler, Jim the postman, WAC Mary, Pappy and the camera, the George Frank-Al Diniak Team, Ray "geezer" Wright, and so on throughout the squadron.

Yes, the 739th is gone. And we're glad that it has, for the squadron stands for the many months we spent in Italy and all its filth and poverty and disease. But there is still a warm spot in our hearts, and there always will be, for the squadron that fostered us through the Second World War. Gentlemen, put on your best suit of "civies" and raise a glass of good-old American beer to the best outfit that ever led a mission over Germany!

Air Force Lineage and Honors

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Sources

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