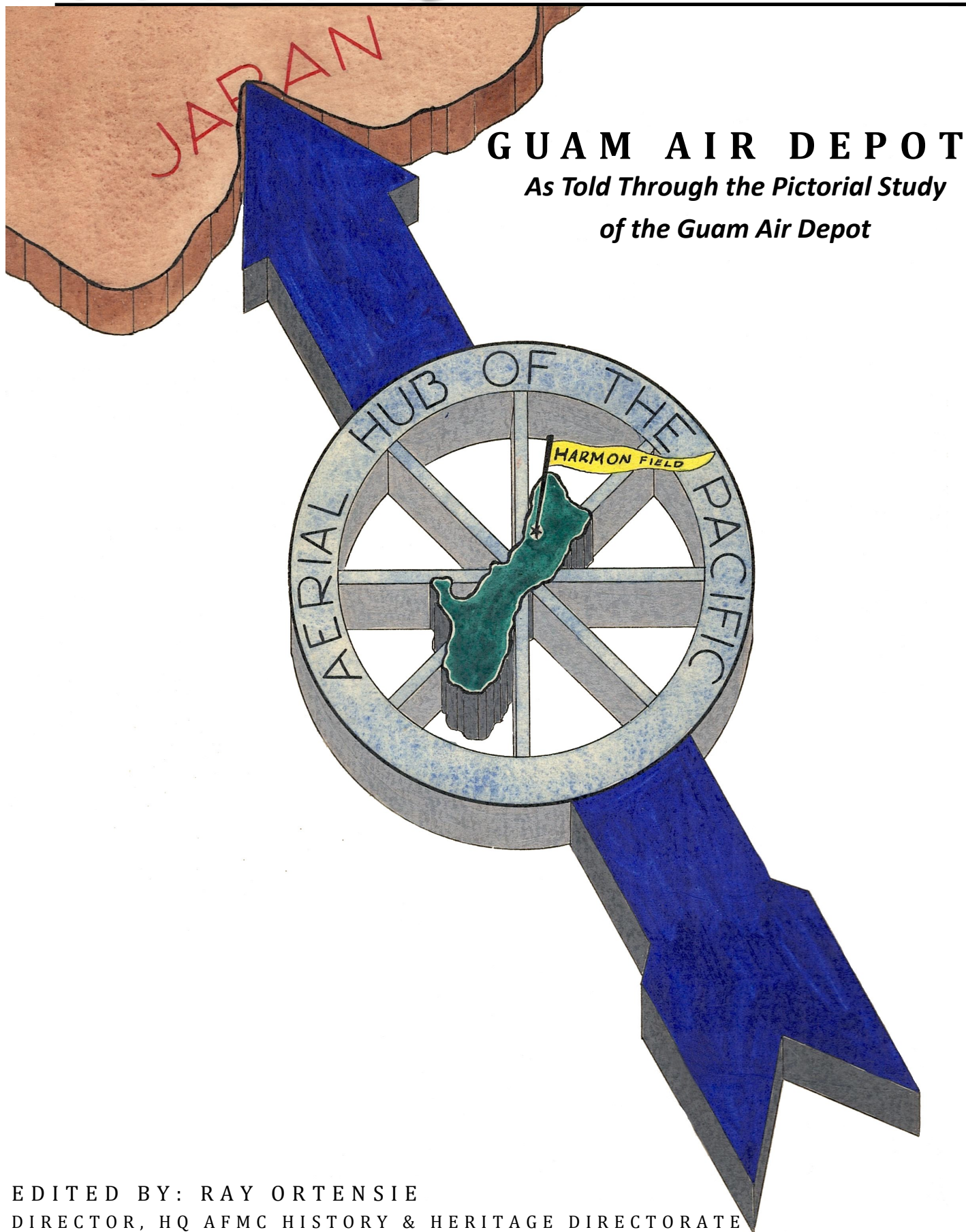


A Look Back...



GUAM AIR DEPOT *As Told Through the Pictorial Study of the Guam Air Depot*

EDITED BY: RAY ORTENSIE
DIRECTOR, HQ AFMC HISTORY & HERITAGE DIRECTORATE

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

G U A M A I R D E P O T , 1 9 4 5

“With the European war over, the focus of attention was shifting to the Pacific Theater of Operations, and once there, would more than likely come to rest on the activities of the Boeing B-29 *Superfortresses* and the growing aerial offensive that they were daily carrying to the homeland of the enemy. The news release, that anywhere from 100 to 400 *Superforts* had bombed Tokyo and Kyushu again, was rather common knowledge, and yet how, where, and by whom were these sky giants prepared, supplied, and maintained was a question only the relative few, the expert, would ask. The task was naturally of prime importance – a prerequisite for strategic air operations. What kind of a system, what kind of a place, and who were the men that performed this job?

At the fields where these tactical aircraft were based, there were service groups that handled all 1st, 2nd, and 3rd echelon repair and maintenance work, and also keep a 30-day stock level of supplies. Everything over and beyond this that was done for the places was performed by an Air Depot. This was the general statement of the function of an Air Depot. To us it seems all too simple, too inadequate, too incomplete. At the present time in the Western Pacific, the groundwork for the most tremendous offensive operations in the history of aerial warfare was being laid, and at the center or hub of this potential network of operations, was the Guam Air Depot. It was here that the incoming planes were processed and sometimes assembled. Here also, all Air Forces, Commands, Wings, and Service Groups were supplied with Air Corps parts and equipment. And, finally, it was here that all serious or elaborate repair and maintenance was accomplished for all aircraft based in this area.

In the early summer of 1944 when the eventual fall of the Marianas seemed imminent, the possibility of their becoming strategic bases for long range bombing operations against Japan was in everyone’s mind who was well informed about the actual flying capacities of the *Superforts*. The argument was clinched when Admiral of the Fleet, Chester W. Nimitz, intimated in an interview from “Somewhere in the Pacific,” that they would be used in this capacity. It was no longer a question of what and where, but of who and when, and the men trained in the operation, maintenance, repair, and supply of the world’s largest bombers were ready and waiting to move in for the kill.

Months of preliminary planning and groundwork for the formation of a General Air Depot had been completed. There remained only the test of selecting the men to step into this full-sized job and take command. It was by no means an easy assignment. The quickened tempo of ground and aerial warfare in the Pacific had pushed ahead projected dates and assignments, and drastically revised both the location and operational date for the Depot. All of this resulted in the almost unique and devilish task of taking a group of trained aircraft technicians into a jungle area and putting them to work overnight, constructing their own Depot. The job, however, was accomplished, and no small amount of credit belongs to Colonel C.F. “Swede” Carlson, Command Officer of the Guam Air Depot, who toiled day and night to prepare his field and shops for the tactical aircraft that would be needing them so badly in the few short weeks to come.

Colonel Carlson and his provisional Headquarters staff arrived on Guam 9 October 1944. Accompanied by a five-man Marine guard (for there were Japanese snipers lurking in the thick, verdant jungle overlooking the cleared area), they toured the present site of Harmon Field for the first time, getting a rough idea of the tremendous amount of work that lay ahead. A fierce battle had been fought in and around this whole section, and the nasty remains of it were still cumbering the earth.

During the interim between the arrival of his advance party and the first Air Depot Groups, a provisional Headquarters was set up in an Engineering camp and operations were not neglected. Liaison was established and maintained with Naval Air and Ground Forces, and plans were studied and worked on and requisitions were processed for the 73rd Bomb Wing of the 20th Air Force. In short, the stage was set for bigger things to come.

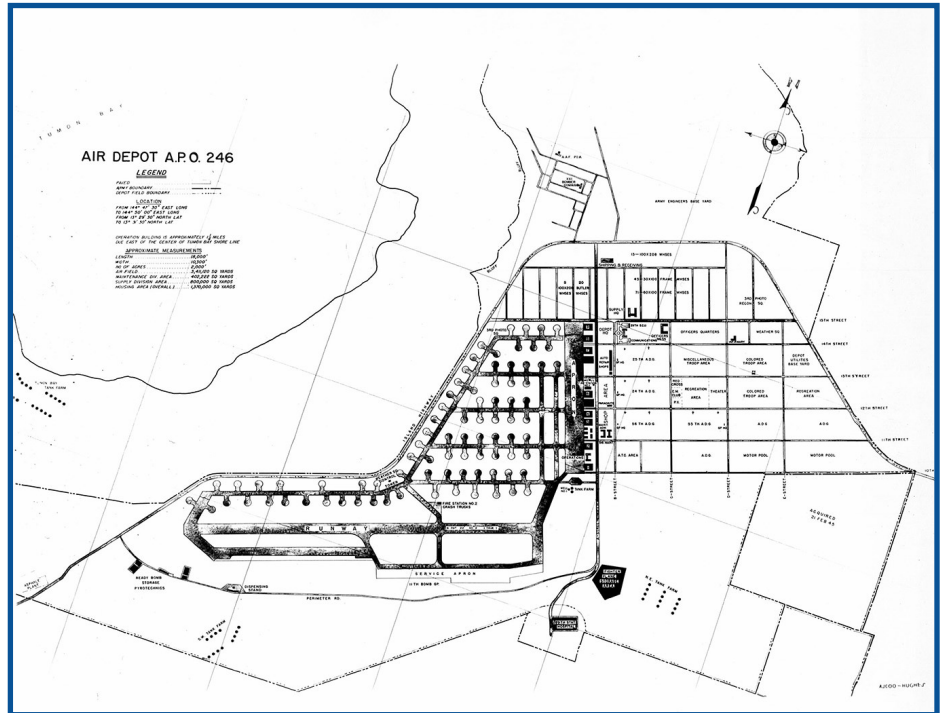
The first two Air Depot Groups (the 56th and the 24th) to be assigned to the Depot arrived by boat on 9 November 1944. After debarking at Apra Harbor, they were transported in their own freshly unloaded and newly processed trucks to the empty and unfinished hangars at Depot Field. Of course, it was pouring rain as this was the height of the rainy season, and the mud was just a few inches shy of being knee deep. The men had been informed that from thirty to ninety Japanese were still being killed or being taken prisoner each day, and most everyone was a bit leery of wandering any distance from the hangars. At chow time, the first but not the last round of “C” rations was passed out, and those “USO Commandos” who had never been hardened to this type of diet back in the States were happy to discover that it wasn’t so bad. Except for inadequate latrine facilities conditions were not too bad either, and a large supply of main helped things along considerably. Guards, loading gangs, and drivers were pressed into immediate service, and there was no end to the demand for more. Night and day men were called upon to work, sometimes on an “around the clock” schedule, but the work had to be done and everyone pitched in with a vengeance.”

GUAM AIR DEPOT, 1945



The Guam Air Depot was an area of indescribable shape, located approximately in the middle of this relatively large Pacific Island. Within its irregular borders, was an airstrip 7,050 feet long, nine (and soon more) huge hangars, 77 hardstands, and over 150 warehouses. It took over 8,000 men to operate the Depot, and they lived in a housing area of 1,370,000 square yards.

The original base development plan was found to be inadequate to the exigencies of many practical situations, and had to be constantly altered and revised by the Air Depot Commanding Officer.



GUAM AIR DEPOT, 1945



Top: Pictured above is the area used as the main runway as it appeared on 28 September 1944 after initial clearing looking west.

Right: Colonel C.F. "Swede" Carlson. He and his provision Headquarters staff arrived on Guam 9 October 1944 accompanied by five Marine guards.



GUAM AIR DEPOT, 1945



Top. Supplies were being unloaded from four ships in the harbor, dumped on the beaches by Navy barges and reloaded into trucks by hand. Having no prepared covered storage at the field, all this material was lined up on the side of one of the roads at the Depot, and dubbed the now famous "mile of supply." Within one week, the first supplies were flown to Service Center "A" at Saipan by Lt Col Hansen in a Douglas C-47 *Skytrain*.

Bottom: Chow time troops gathered for "C" rations in make-shift facilities.



Top: On 24 November 1944, the war came home to Guam. Seventeen battle and flight weary Boeing B-29 *Superfortresses* settled down to rest on our as yet not fully completed airfield. They were returning from their first bombing mission to Tokyo, and for the first time the men could see how they were backing up the “man behind the gun.”

Those planes not requiring 4th echelon work were serviced here and returned to their bases the following day. However, the sight of the giant birds proved to be new inspiration for the men and they went back to their jobs with the renewed vigor that came from the satisfaction of feeling that they were doing their part.

Right: Christmas Day 1944 was made more enjoyable for the men by a native show that was put on in the 24th Air Depot Group Theater by some of the friendly people in a neighboring village. The couple in the picture to the right, although they appear to be swinging out Harlem style, are actually doing a native stick dance.



GUAM AIR DEPOT, 1945



Top: On 7 December 1944, all officer personnel of the Depot attended a presentation ceremony of the dedication flag in front of the provisional Depot Headquarters building. The flag and flagpole (the latter having formerly been the property of the 77th Army Infantry Division which had played such a crucial part in the reconquest of Guam) were presented to Colonel Carlson by Lieutenant General Millar F. Harmon, Commanding General, Army Air Forces, Pacific Ocean Areas.

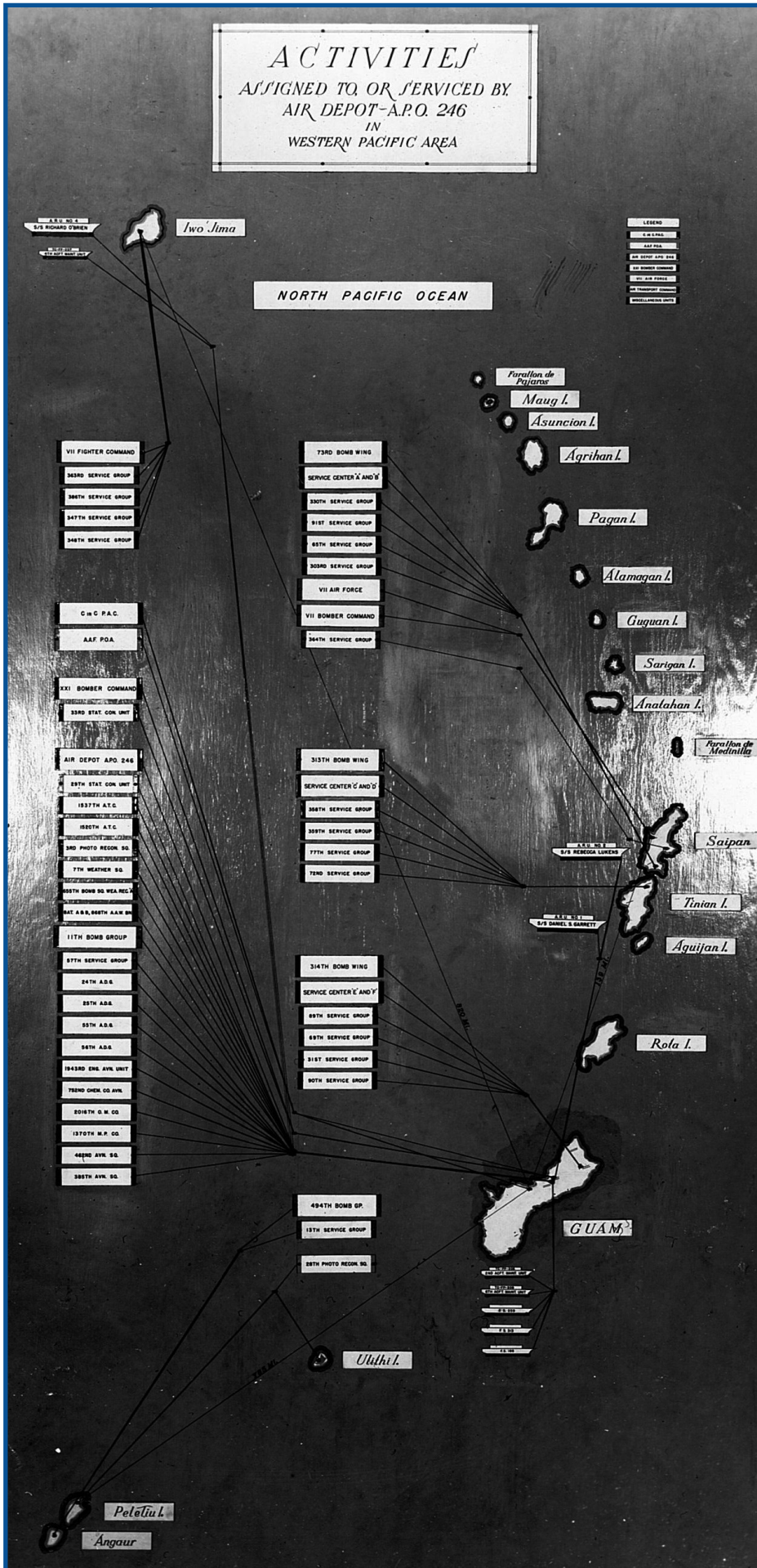
Bottom: Slowly but surely a tremendous Air Depot began to emerge out of the formless mass of man and material that was continually flowing in. The field itself was nearing completion, buildings were constructed, shops were built, living quarters improved—in short, the Guam Air Depot was passing out of the blue print stage and approaching reality. A fine example of this construction progress was the Depot Headquarters Building, pictured, that was completed 31 January 1945.

GUAM AIR DEPOT, 1945



Top: Naturally, the “PK” was of highest priority with men overseas, and the beer line shown here, indicates that the men at the Depot were not exceptions to that rule.

Bottom: The ingenuity of the American soldier was one of the remarkable discoveries of World War II. Pictured is the work of the 56th Repair Squadron’s recreational area.



It is a well attested fact that Supply was a major factor of ever increasing proportion in modern aerial warfare. This was particularly true of the Pacific side of World War II. The Guam Air Depot was the central supply point for all aircraft operating in the Western Pacific Area when it was established, by far the most active sphere of aerial action in the entire world. The Depot supply lines extended as far south as Angaur, and as far north as Iwo Jima. Between these far distant points were the B-29 bases on Saipan, Tinian, and Guam, requiring probably the heaviest Air Drop supply distribution of any bases presently operating in any theater of the war. It was noteworthy that with this extended area to deal with, Aircraft Out of Commission for Parts was 0.2—the lowest figure of any Air Depot in the world.

GUAM AIR DEPOT, 1945



Top. This is the Supply Division area, in four different type warehouses, some 18,000,000 airplane parts falling into 60,000 different categories were stored.

Right: The first administration building to be completed on Air Depot Field was the Supply Division Headquarters on 15th Street.



GUAM AIR DEPOT, 1945



Top: One of the many busy offices in Supply Headquarters.

Bottom: Colonel Ralph D. Garretson, Chief of Supply Division, and his secretary, Miss Harriet Chandler (resident of Agana Heights).

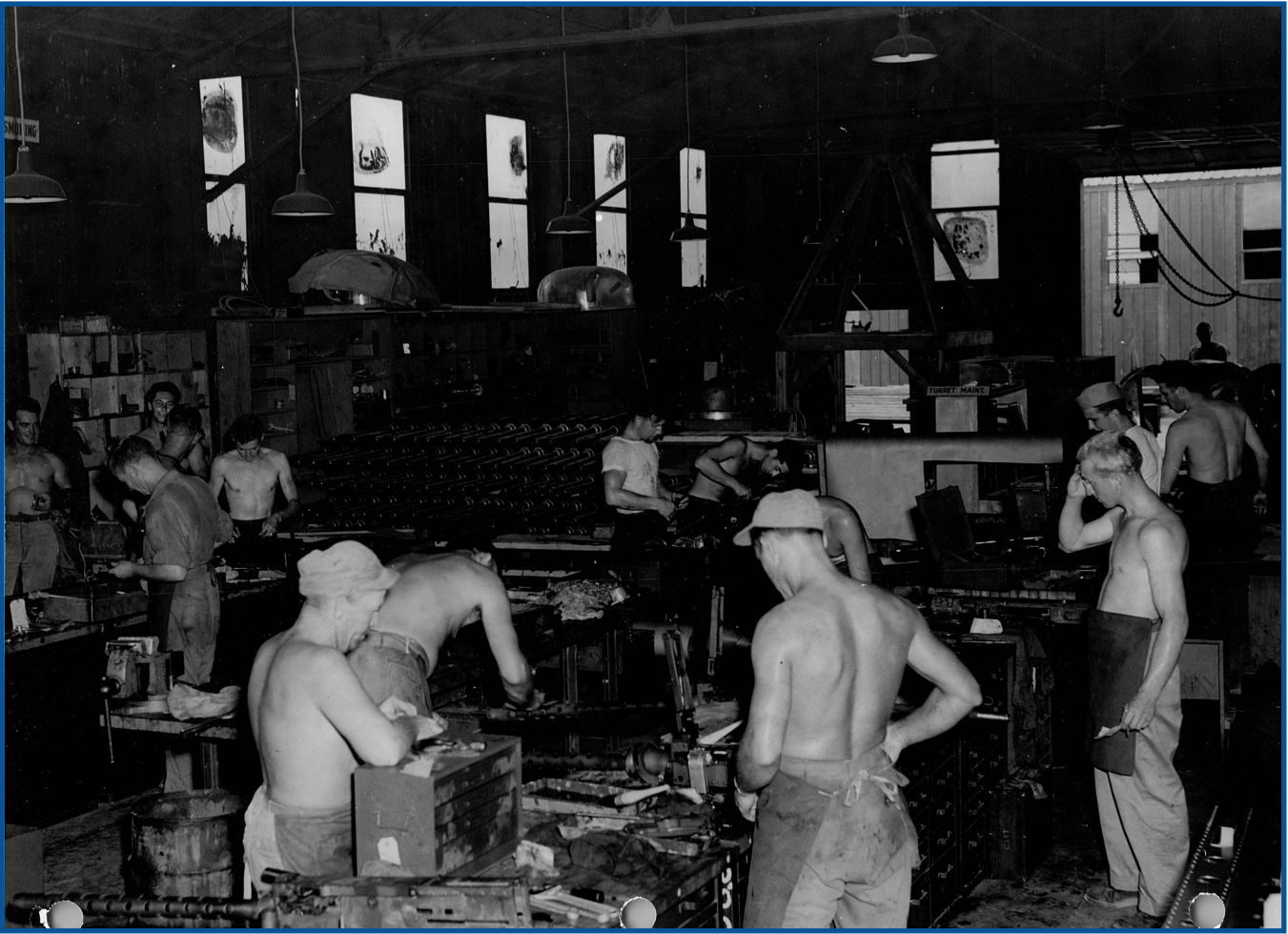
GUAM AIR DEPOT, 1945



Top: Loading platform of the Shipping and Receiving Station.

Bottom: Boxed up belly tanks

GUAM AIR DEPOT, 1945



Top: Armament shop.

Right: Part of a cargo of air freight is lifted onto a Douglas C-47 Skytrain earmarked for delivery, same day, to Service Center A, Saipan.





Top: This was the first Boeing B-29 *Superfortress* (42-24674) of the 878th Bomb Squadron, 499th Bomb Group (Isley Field, Saipan) repaired and flight tested by the Maintenance Division, 17 January 1945. [Four months later, aircraft was lost during a mission against the Nakajima aircraft factory in Tokyo.] Since that time, the Division had repaired and returned to combat, twenty-three more *Superfortresses*.

Right: Colonel Leslie E. Martin, Chief of Maintenance Division, caught in the process of inspecting a sheet metal job "on the line."



GUAM AIR DEPOT, 1945



Top: Line crew at work on one of the Iwo Jima North American P-51 *Mustang*'s of VII Fighter Command.

Bottom: Parachute Shop.



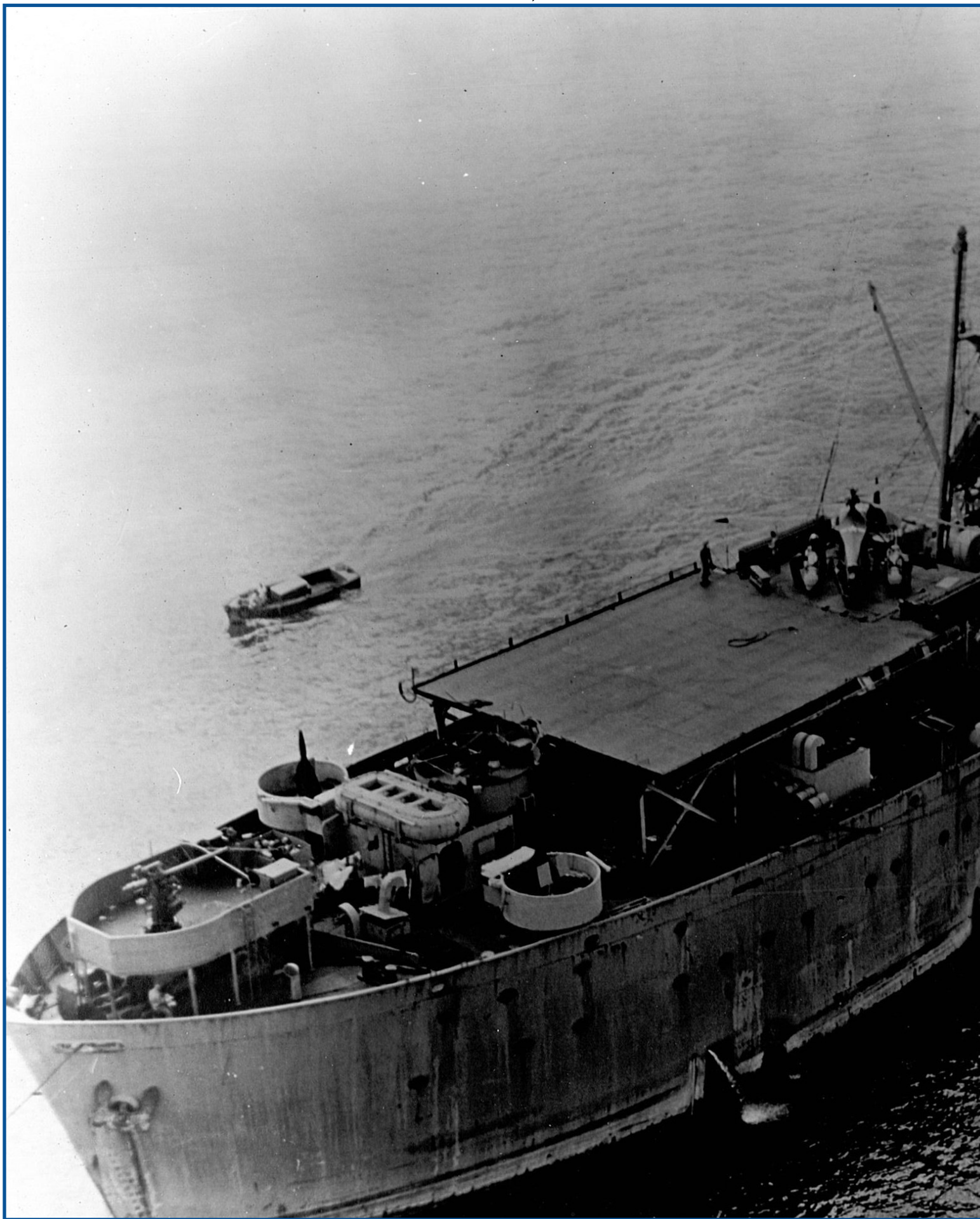
GUAM AIR DEPOT, 1945



Top: The Maintenance Division was responsible for all 4th echelon repair and maintenance that was done for aircraft in the Western Pacific Area. This included the 20th Air Force operating on Guam, Tinian, and Saipan, and the 7th Air Force operating on Guam, Iwo, and in the Palau Group. The job was immense and growing bigger every day. The division worked on the following types of planes: B-24, B-29, F-13A, F-5B, P-38, P-61, P-47, P-51 Mustang, C-46, C-47, and C-87. The picture shows the 402,222 square feet of the Divisions area.

Bottom: Depot Oxygen Plant.

Opposite page: Aerial view of outdoor storage area.



GUAM AIR DEPOT, 1945



An all important function of the Depot's activity in the vast theater of its responsibility was performed by the Aircraft Repair Units (Floating) and the Aircraft Maintenance Units (Floating). These boats move into the extreme forward areas (Okinawa, Iwo Jima) at the earliest possible date and perform 3rd and 4th echelon work for a period of time until ground installations can be set up and put in motion.

GUAM AIR DEPOT, 1945

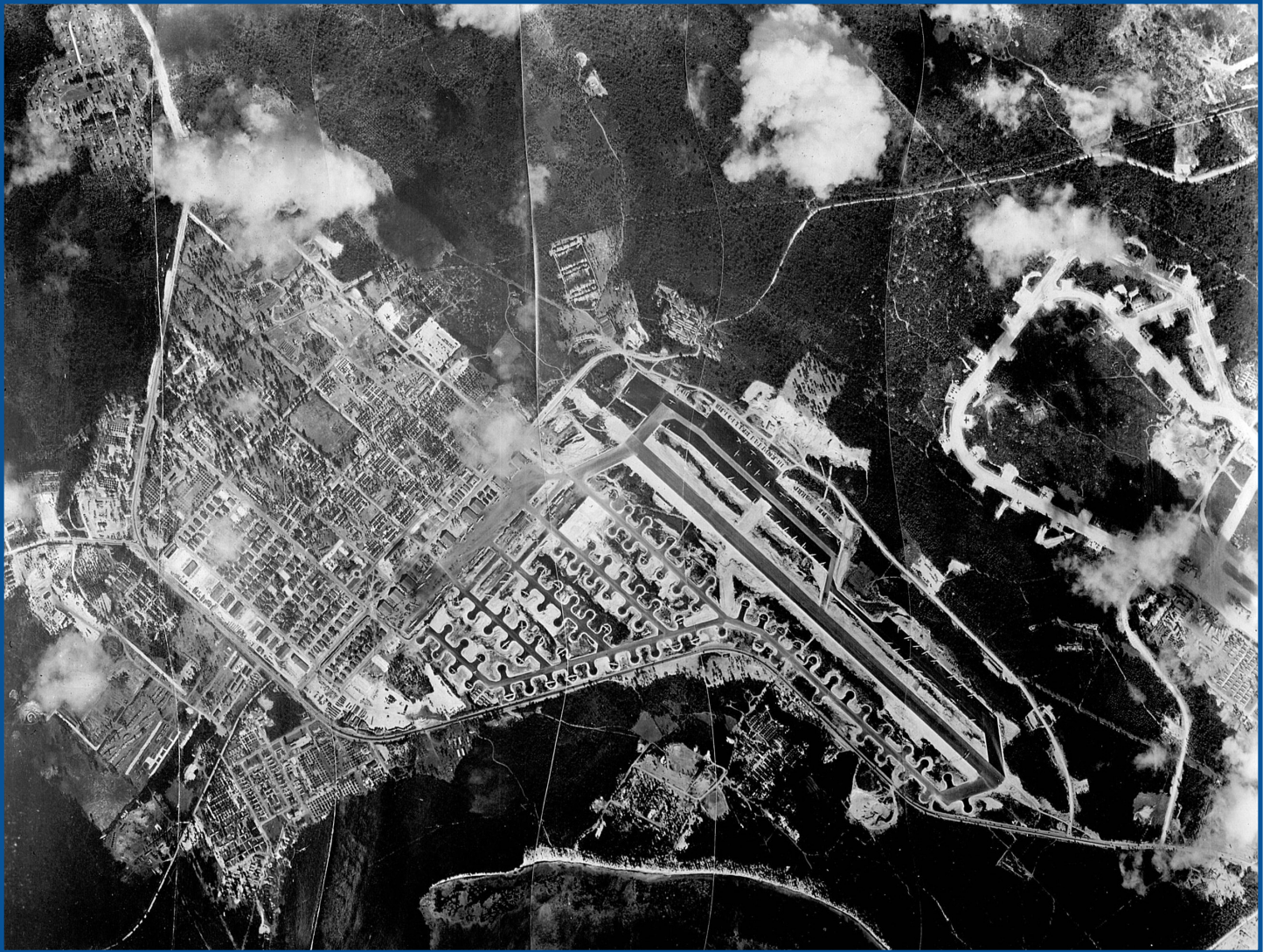


Top: It was symbolic that on the day that Germany fell, Harmon Field, Guam Air Depot, was dedicated by Admiral of the Fleet Chester W. Nimitz. Symbolic in the sense that one event heralded the end of the war in Europe—while the other dedicated the field, and in a larger sense the determination of the free peoples of the world, to the task of pushing the war in the Pacific to a successful conclusion.

In Admiral Nimitz's own words, "It is fitting this airfield, which is in constant use by the aircraft that bomb Japan, should be dedicated to the memory of a man who from the beginning of the war, until his untimely death, devoted all his energies to bringing about the defeat of Japan."

Left: Admiral of the Fleet Chester W. Nimitz, Major General Willie H. Hale, Command General for Air, Forward Areas, Pacific Fleet, and Colonel Oscar F. "Swede" Carlson, Command Officer, Guam Air Depot, at the dedication ceremonies of Harmon Field. Also in attendance was Major General Curtis E. LeMay, XXI Bomber Command, and Major General Henry L. Larsen, Island Commander of Guam.

GUAM AIR DEPOT, 1945



Top: Aerial shot of the Guam Air Depot in May 1945.

Bottom: Air Depot Field looking east in October 1944.



AFMC History & Heritage Program

HQ AFMC/HO

4225 Logistics Ave., Room S133 • Wright-Patterson AFB 45433-5006 • DSN: 713-1797 • Comm: (937) 713-1797

For inquiries, contact: R. Ray Ortensie • For heritage and exhibit questions, contact: Jack Waid

E-mail: HQAFMC.HO@us.af.mil