
1

PRE-WORLD WAR II - 1918/1941

The history of the 2nd Bombardment Group (H) traces its origin to 10 September 1918, when, the First Day Bombardment Group was organized at Amanty, France. The 11th, 20th, 96th and 166th Aero Squadrons were assigned to the organization at this time. The 96th Squadron, equipped with French built Breguet bombers, had operated independently before it became part of the First Day Bombardment Group. The other Squadrons were being equipped with the DeHaviland (DH-4) aircraft.

The Group entered combat on 12 September 1918, attacking enemy troop concentrations to interfere with the enemy's reinforcements and supplies to the front during the Allied offensive at St. Mihiel. At the opening of the St. Mihiel offensive, however, only the 11th, 20th and the 96th Squadrons were ready for combat. The 96th Squadron, by virtue of experience, did the most effective work at the beginning of that campaign. The Group also took part in the Meuse-Argonne offensive, attacking behind enemy lines, and conducting bombing operations that helped to protect Allied ground forces by diverting German pursuit planes from the battle lines. The Group participated in one of the great bombing raids on 9 October when 353 Allied planes (including 200 bombers), under the command of William Mitchell, struck a concentration point where German troops were preparing for a counter attack against the Allied offensive in the Meuse-Argonne area. The Group also participated in the Lorraine offensive and campaign honors were given the Group for those three campaigns.

During the period from September 1918 to November, the Group dropped a total of 194,340 pounds of bombs and received many commendations. In November, soon after the Armistice had been signed, the 1st Day Bombardment Group was demobilized in France. The 11th, 20th and 96th Squadrons returned to the United States, 2 May 1919.

The 49th Aero Squadron, not a part of the 1st Day Bombardment Group, arrived in England 1 February 1918, moved to France 2 July 1918 and flew the Spad XIII in combat. The unit returned to the United States on 22 March 1919 and was demobilized.

On 18 September 1919, Headquarters Detachment, 1st Day Bombardment Group (which may or may not be related to the wartime Group) was organized at Ellington Field, Texas. One week later, the unit and its assigned Squadrons, the 11th, 20th, 96th and 166th, moved to Kelly Field, Texas. Headquarters Detachment, 1st Day Bombardment Group was redesignated Headquarters Detachment, 2nd Group (Bombardment) 31 March 1921. After almost three years at Kelly Field, the organization moved to Langley Field, Virginia on 30 June 1922, and approximately six months later it was redesignated 2nd Bombardment Group Headquarters. On 8 April 1924, the 1st Day Bombardment Group Headquarters, which had been demobilized in France in November 1918, was reconstituted and consolidated with the 2nd Bombardment Group Headquarters. As a result, the consolidated unit, which

was designated the 2nd Bombardment Group, Headquarters, could trace its history back to the organization of the World War I Group in September 1918.

The organization spent more than 20 years at Langley Field, Virginia. Little is known of its activities in the 1920's and early 1930's but in the 1930's, the Group participated in Air Corps exercises, cross country flights, good will missions to South America and other such activities of a similar nature. In March 1936, it dropped food supplies to communities in Pennsylvania, which were isolated by heavy floods. In that operation, 30 aircraft dropped 8,000 tons of supplies.

Long distance flights were made as early as 1937, using B-10 aircraft. Nine of the Group's planes participated in the Panama flight of 4-12 February. That mission, reported to be one of the first instances in which land based planes flew in formation for a long distance over water, representing a round trip of 4,216 miles.

On 4 March 1937, the Group received the first B-17 delivered to the United States Army. During the next few years, the Group made successful pioneering flights using that type aircraft. Two such missions were a goodwill tour of Argentina by six aircraft in February 1938, and a flight to Columbia by three B-17s in August 1938. During GHQ maneuvers in May 1938, interception of the Italian liner, Rex, 725 miles at sea, by three of the Group's B-17s was hailed as a feat, but brought loud complaints from the United States Navy. Lt. Curtis LeMay, 49th Squadron, was a navigator on that flight.

Another "first" for the Group occurred in August 1938 when the Group was assigned the first B-15, reported to be the only one delivered to the United States Army. The B-15 was flown almost exclusively by Major Caleb V. Haynes, Commanding Officer of the 49th Squadron, and engaged in several outstanding missions. One, flown at the request of the American Red Cross, in which medical supplies were carried to Chile, where an earthquake had caused wide devastation.

The 11th Bombardment Squadron was transferred from the Group 3 June 1937. The 20th Squadron remained with the Group as well as the 96th Squadron. The 166th and the 49th Squadron were consolidated 16 October 1936 as the 49th Bombardment Squadron and was then redesignated as the 49th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) 6 December 1939.

The 429th Squadron was attached to the 2nd Bombardment Group (H) December 1940.