

Aug. 70,000 groups
 Sept. 120,000 groups
 Oct. 216,000 groups
 Dec. 415,000 groups

The ATC on Ascension

During the second half of 1942, you could have stood on Palm beach, Florida, and looked at a sight such as the world had never seen, as every thirty seconds planes roared on by—from ambulance transports and Navy planes to mediums to vicious-looking huge bombers headed in one direction—southeast, toward Puerto Rico, Brazil and across the ocean to Africa. With volcanic hills behind a U.S. tiny airfield on Ascension, a small secretive island in the middle of the South Atlantic, 1448 miles from Brazil, 1362 miles from Africa, troubled by birds, at no time in history was this airfield more vital than during 1942. Its story portrays no flashy scene of action, of bombs bursting, yet it was vital for the Air Transport Command whose mission was supplying the Allies for battle-victory in North Africa. Only after Accra became dispensable in December with a new more direct route to Dakar would flight scheduling subside.

Ascension's runway at Wideawake Field was blasted out of a volcanic mountain side by engineers in Spring of 1942, and by July 10, the first Liberator had landed. Supplies and aircraft reached British forces by two basic ways through the South, by sea or air. Air was the quickest, and was why the run was so vital. Accra became the chief airport of call for U.S. ferry pilots on Africa eastward from Ascension. Accra consisted of giant rolling open country, red brown in the dry season, and

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AN OUTPOST

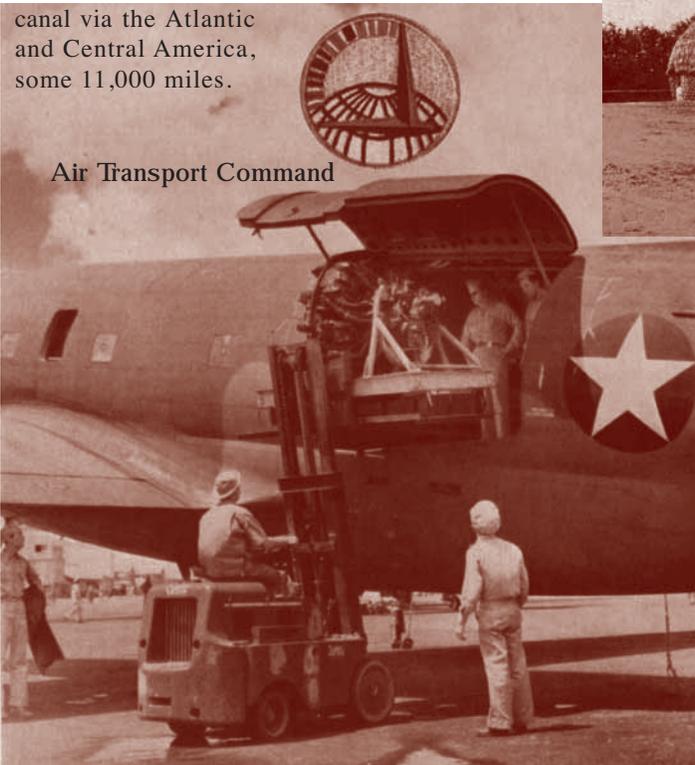


Take-off from Accra to Marrakech, 3000 miles away. It is about 12,000 miles from Accra, Ghana, to Guadalcanal. From Marrakech to Guadalcanal via the Atlantic and Central America, some 11,000 miles.

engulfed by rats, mosquitoes, giant ant hills and fleas. Malaria was rampant. From the outer limits of Accra, the trans-African ATC route reached Egypt or turned to Marrakesh, Morocco, in a 3,000 mile stretch across two extremes of weather in non-air-conditioned airplanes—blistering desert heat and violent dust storms of 1,500 miles and torrential jungle rainfall of almost continuous overcast. The inhabitants on the African outposts liked Americans and trusted them. Had the Nazis been suspicious of how great operations were in the South, they would have been stirred to interfere, but it was one of the war's best kept secrets. Over three million ton miles were flown by the ATC over the South Atlantic, a major accomplishment.



Air Transport Command



Native style huts for Americans at Marrakech air base. The saga of liberty arched across many lands.

