

HAWAIIAN AIR DEPOT

The Hawaiian Air Depot (now known as Air Depot, APO 953) was activated at Luke Field, on Ford Island, on 5 June 1931 (GO #14 HHD, 5 June 31). Activation became effective on 1 July 1931.

The activation of the Hawaiian Air Depot was actually the consolidation of three separately operated units — the Air Section of the Hawaiian General Area Supply Depot in Honolulu, and the Station Repair Section and Station Supply Section of the 65th Service Squadron, located at Luke Field. (History of the Hawaiian Air Depot, Basic, page 3, par 2.)¹

The history of both the Hawaiian General Area Supply Depot and the 65th Service Squadron is obscure. There are very few records available, and even these are fragmentary. A "piecing together" of these records reveals the following information: (See HAD Basic History page 4, par 4).

On 1 July 1921 the War Department established in Honolulu, T. H. the Hawaiian General Area Supply Depot (History of the Air Corps in the Hawaiian Department, 000.4, Historical Records, AG File, Seventh AF). Initial personnel comprised Major J. B. Brooks, AC, and one enlisted man. But by the close of 1923, the personnel of this Depot had increased to 3 officers, 13 enlisted men and 2 civilians (Ibid). In October of 1923, the whole of Warehouse No. 5,

¹Henceforth to be cited as HAD Basic History.

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QM Depot Area in Honolulu was turned over to the Hawaiian General Depot. Prior to this time, limited space had made the proper unpacking and distribution of Air Corps supplies very difficult (Ibid; HAD Basic History, page 8, par 6).

According to Major L.W.Tribbett, historian of HAD, the 65th Service Squadron was formed out of the 10th Air Park sometime prior to 1922.² The 10th Air Park, obviously an air corps organization was definitely on Ford Island prior to 1922 and was probably established there during World War I. (HAD Basic History, page 4, par 4).

The 65th Service Squadron comprised two sections, the Station Repair Section and the Station Supply Section, and their mission was to service, repair, overhaul and supply the airplanes in the Hawaiian Air Force. In August 1927, the first civilians were hired by Lt. Carl Cover, Commanding Officer of the 65th Service Squadron, Carl Burton was the first civilian to be assigned to Engine Repair. He later became Chief Inspector. In November 1927, Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio, permitted a number of civilians to come to Luke Field. 30 June 1931 - employees numbered 94. (HAD Basic History, page 6, pars 1, 2.)

In February 1931, the War Department directed the removal of the Air Section from the Hawaiian General Depot to Luke Field. The consolidation of the Air Section and the Repair Section of the 65th Serv Sq took place in May. By 5 June 1931, all three sections were consolidated. The Luke Field station stock record cards were used to merge accounts for the Repair, and the Supply activities into one account known as the Hawaiian Air Depot stock record (History of the Air Corps; HAD Basic History, page 9 par 1).

The first Hawaiian Air Depot Order (DO #1, 1 July 31) assigned four (4)

²6 June 1921 (History of the Air Corps in the Hawaiian Dept, 000.4 Historical Records, AG Files Seventh AF

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officers to various duties as follows:

Capt. B. T. Burt
Capt. R. B. Walker
Lt. J. B. Stanley, Jr.
Lt. P. H. Robey

Commanding Officer & Supply Officer
Engineering Officer
Assistant Engineering Officer
Assistant Supply Officer

Three months later, Captain C. F. Greene was added to the roster of officers and assigned as Adjutant to the Depot.

At the time of activation (1931) the Depot consisted of 4 officers, approximately 100 enlisted men, 94 civilians. Physical facilities included a 4500 foot runway, unpaved, of grassy turf, and seven (7) buildings (HAD Basic History, page 3, par 4).

During the first months of activation, the Depot acted as a supply and repair organization for the 5th Composite Group (6th Pursuit Sq, 19th Pursuit Sq., 26th Attack Sq, 4th Observation Sq, 50th Observation Sq, 23d Bomber Sq, and the 72d Bomber Sq). The types of planes serviced included FW-9s, LB-5s, LB-6s, O-19s, and observation amphibians. Major overhauls, minor repairs, and assemblies on planes and engines was the general routine. The story and events of Luke Field and the Hawaiian General Depot prior to 1931, are not meant to be complete. However, the effort was made to secure some of the ancient history, since these early organizations played such a vital role and since most of the personnel at the time of activation had worked at Luke Field during these early days.

Following is a brief yearly breakdown of the outstanding features of the Hawaiian Air Depot's development: (HAD Basic History, page 49 ff).

1931: Immediately following its activation, the Hawaiian Air Depot felt the pressure of the depression. All new planning was more along the lines of fighting for existence rather than expansion.

Fourth echelon maintenance was usually performed in this manner:

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When a plane came into the Depot, it was completely disassembled, the wings sent to the wing department, the engines to the engine unit, and so on down the line. In these units each part was disassembled, inspected, repaired, and cleaned. The plane was then completely rebuilt from scratch. An average of 10 engines per month were given a major overhaul, and at least one plane a week was processed through the shops for 3d and 4th echelon maintenance. Civilian personnel in the Depot increased to 116 by the end of the year.

1932: The Commanding Officer during the last nine months of the year was Captain C. F. Greene. (HAD Basic History, page 49, par 1.) Drastic reductions in government expenditures seriously affected the Depot, and each unit functioned without any marked change. All wages of civilian employees were reduced 15%, and, a two-day lay-off per month without pay was enforced. This resulted in a lower production and progress rate. Every effort was made to save money and materials. Often totally damaged spare parts had to be repaired for immediate use. Civilian employees numbered 134 at the close of the year.

1933: Lt. Colonel Lawrence F. Stone was appointed Commanding Officer of the Depot in April of this year and served until May, 1935. The policy of expenditure reduction continued. The work was routine. No new planes were added to the Depot. Civil employment dropped slightly, wage cuts continued. The same methods of servicing and repairing planes continued. Every possible effort was made to conserve. Sheets of paper were used on both sides and, if possible, used more than once. Damaged aircraft which under normal circumstances had very little salvage value were completely repaired and returned to service.

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The civilian personnel figure increased to 160 during the middle of the year, but dropped to 132 by December. (HAD Basic History, page 53, par. 1)

1934: This was the most static year of the Hawaiian Air Depot's existence. No new planes arrived in the Hawaiian Department. Wherever possible, expenditures were reduced, and salvage of all usable parts were made. There was practically no variation from the policies of 1933. Civilian personnel stood at 137 by the close of the year.

1935: Captain E. R. Page took over as Commanding Officer from May until October. He was succeeded by Lt. Colonel F. H. Pritchard, who served until May/36. The same static conditions prevailed, with the same type of planes still in service. Production efficiency was deterred since employees could not keep up to date on the latest methods of aircraft maintenance. Four years of static operations were resulting in a greatly reduced production rate. Four years of continuous operation, and the officer personnel showed a meagre increase from four to six, while civilian personnel rose from 116 to 181. (HAD Basic History, page 67, par. 3)

1936: Major C. E. Branshaw became Commanding Officer of the Depot in May of this year. (HAD Basic, page 68, par. 1) During this year the expansion boom came in the Hawaiian Air Depot. The Depot was still in its infancy yet its importance was being recognized by various organizations benefiting from services rendered. It was during this year that plans were being drawn and initiated to make the Depot the important organization it is today. (HAD Basic, page 71, par. 3) Inasmuch as the Depot's activities were largely industrial in nature, it was organized primarily along industrial rather than military ~~concerns~~ ^{lines}. In this connection it followed as closely as possible established and proven industrial methods of procedure in accounting practice, storage and issue of supplies, and in engineering

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and shop methods. (HAD Basic, page 72, par. 1) This Depot as it still functions today was organized into three main sections: Headquarters, Supply, and Engineering. There was also an Operations section, the duties of which were minor in nature. (HAD Basic, page 72, par. 2)

- (1) Headquarters: -- handled all correspondence, personnel cards, hiring, firing, promotion and demotion of employees, payrolls, leaves, transfers, and usual records pertaining thereto, together with the normal administrative functions of any post headquarters. (HAD Basic, page 72, par. 2)
- (2) Supply: -- charged with the responsibility of procuring, storing, and issuing of all property, and the internal administration of the section.
- (3) Engineering: -- charged with the responsibility of the necessary reconditioning, overhauling, modification, technical changes, etc., of all aeronautical equipment in the department. It was also prepared to manufacture, when necessary, practically every article required when procurement by normal methods was impossible. (HAD Basic, page 72, par. 2)

All in all the duties of these three main sections were no different from those of today.

Since its original organization this depot has been operating as a sub-depot of the Rockwell Air Depot, located at Coronado, California. This system did not interfere in any respect with the administration of the Hawaiian Air Depot, but merely determined channels of procurement and supply. Practically 75% of all supplies destined for the Hawaiian Air Depot were retained at the Rockwell Depot, subject to requisition. The system was criticized in view of the growth of the Hawaiian Air Depot. Steps were

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taken in the early part of the year to place this Depot on an independent status which eventually became a reality before the close of 1936. (HAD Basic, page 73, par. 1)

The Hawaiian Air Depot was under the direct control, through the Air Officer, of the Commanding General, Hawaiian Department. Specific regulations and instructions pertaining to all technical and supply matters were issued by the Materiel Division. Necessary funds for the operation of the Depot were also allotted by the Materiel Division. All incoming and outgoing correspondence was routed through the Commanding General, Hawaiian Department, except routine personnel reports and correspondence relating thereto, which was forwarded direct. (HAD Basic, page 73, par. 2; GO #14 HHD, 5 June 31)

The growth of the Depot had been slow and paralleled closely the funds appropriated for its operation. Even during 1936 the number of personnel had hardly varied since the Depot was first activated. A total of 348 now comprised the number of personnel of the whole Depot, 212 of whom were civilians, 5 officers and 129 enlisted men. Funds allotted for the pay of civilians amounted to \$298,494.83. This year may be called the "embryonic stage" in the growth of the Depot. (HAD Basic, page 73, par. 3)

The normal allotment of officers for the Depot was five, although authority for seven existed. Close supervision by specially trained officers was mandatory since many civilians lacked background and experience found in the civilians on the mainland. The need for an adequate number of trained officers could not be stressed too strongly, particularly at this time, when all tactical units within the Hawaiian Department were rapidly expanding, thereby increasing enormously the demands upon the Depot. To

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meet these constantly increasing demands required a much better organization, and a higher degree of operating efficiency than existed heretofore. This could only be secured by the close attention of officers experienced in depot engineering, supply, and administration. Many difficulties -- a poor layout, a generally mediocre civilian organization, complex racial strains, difficulties in securing supplies, equipment, etc -- constantly presented problems not encountered at any mainland depot. Trained and efficient officers, with a wide range of experience, were required. (HAD Basic, page 74, par. 1)

Considerable improvement was made during the year 1936, in the flow of supplies. During the first four months, the Hawaiian Air Depot received 600,000 pounds of freight. Requisitions took not more than 6 months to get here, many in three, some in two or three weeks. Stocks were kept at high levels, with one year's supply on hand. (HAD Basic, page 77, par. 3) On 14 September alone, the Depot received 70,000 pounds of Air Corps supplies. In November, the USAFT Scottsburg brought in 300,000 pounds (HAD Basic, page 78, par. 1) When these supplies were uncrated and placed in stock, the Depot was in a better position than any year previously to promptly meet requirements of the various stations it served.

Until 1936, no definite steps were taken to civilianize the Hawaiian Air Depot. On 30 September 1936, a request was submitted to the War Department for complete civilianization of the Depot. (HAD Basic, page 74, par. 2) A definite program was formulated, but progress was slow, due to many diverse personnel problems that had to be overcome. It was doubtful if any general policy involving the transfer of civilian employees from the mainland would be successful. The Depot had to contend with the following personnel problems (HAD Basic, page 76, par. 1):

- a. Limited supply of skilled mechanics.
- b. Ex-enlisted men employed in the Depot, in key positions, had no

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background of theoretical or practical experience at other depots or in commercial work. The qualifications of these men failed to meet the standard desired.

- c. Complex civilian organization -- imported whites, Orientals, whites of mixed extractions, ex-enlisted men, and enlisted men.

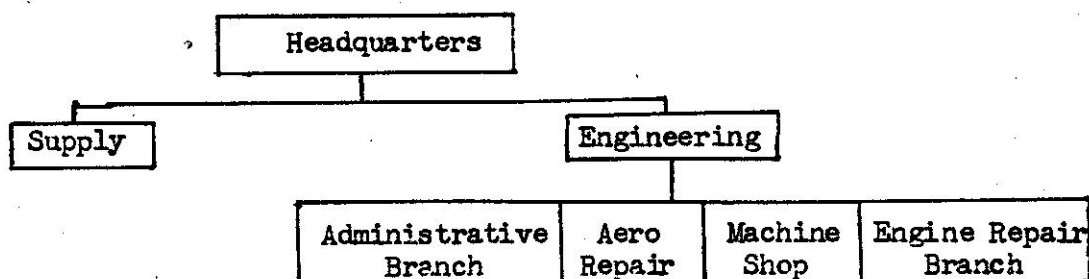
Imported whites were the best in the whole lot.

During the course of 1936, several skilled civilians were secured from the mainland. The War Department having approved the proposed program for complete civilianization, the Depot followed what was believed to be a well-planned program and continued so far as funds permitted. Enlisted men were gradually being returned to the tactical units, 53 being relieved from the Engineering Section alone since the first of the year. By October of this year, enlisted ~~men~~ personnel had decreased 35%. (HAD Basic, page 76, par. 2)

The Depot continued to grow with each passing day. This expansion naturally resulted in the need and demand for more space and buildings. A larger layout was mandatory. Further expansion on Luke Field became impossible, and the need for expansion was growing greater, with an ever-growing air force. A problem of prime importance arose: to find a location larger than that at Luke Field. Necessary planning and coordination ensued, and in September construction began on Hickam Field, the new location for the Hawaiian Air Depot (HAD Basic, page 82, par. 2). The first construction was ~~construction was~~ the railroad along what is now Hangar Avenue, in Hickam. The construction of the engineer shops and supply buildings was soon to follow.

In September two additional officers were assigned to the Depot. There were now seven officers. New aircraft also arrived: 10 P-12E's, 5 A-12's, and 6 B-12A's. The 5 A-12's were sent to Wheeler (HAD Basic, page 91, par. 1).

The organization of the Hawaiian Air Depot at this time was found in the following organization chart:



1937: Commanding Officer: Major C. F. Branshaw (HAD Basic, page 96, par. 1). The completion of the civilianization program was at hand. All classes of workmen, including airplane and engine mechanics, instrument men, and other specialized personnel, had arrived or were enroute to Hawaii to replace the soldiers who had carried on for many years. By the first of May the Supply Department was composed entirely of civilians, demonstrative of the fact that a permanent civilian personnel is better suited to operate an Air Depot. Only 15 enlisted men remained in the Depot now. (HAD Basic, page 100, par. 1)

During this year the Depot was established as an independent Air Depot (HAD Basic, page 100, par. 2). Thus the Hawaiian Air Depot was gradually taking its proper place among the major depots of the Air Corps and could no longer be considered a "stepchild", or a subordinate unit of a mainland depot. Modern machinery gradually replaced the older equipment. On one army transport alone, freight for the Depot weighed 500,000 pounds. Results of an inspection conducted in October by Major C. W. Sullivan, Technical Supervisor for the Rockwell Air Depot Control Area, were very satisfactory. (HAD Basic, page 101, par. 1)

Civilian personnel now totaled 283. Deficiencies in personnel still existed because of insufficient funds. No specific number of civilians was authorized, strength being based solely on the availability of local funds

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and labor markets. (HAD Basic, page 101, par. 2)

It was found vitally necessary to reorganize and modernize the entire Civil Service administrative procedure as practiced under the War Department at that time. Recommendations were submitted to the War Department, stressing strongly the necessity of establishing equal wage scales by government agencies, which had been operating in the same locality such as the Navy Yard. (HAD Basic, page 102, par. 1)

Under the provisions of WD Circular 1-8, OCSO, a Radio Repair Section had been organized at the Depot in 1936 (HAD Basic, page 106, par. 1). Captain H. W. Serig was appointed Officer-in-Charge. By this Circular, Signal Radio Sections were established in all Air Depots except the Philippines. All radio equipment and its associate parts were to be handled by this new section, including radio supplies. An agreement between the Chief Signal Officer and the Chief of Air Corps was drawn up in Washington (HAD Basic, page 106, par. 1). The Air Corps was to install and remove all radio equipment and the Signal Corps as represented by the Signal Repair Section, would inspect, repair, and test all radio equipment pertaining to aircraft in a control area. But the absence of a Signal Corps Supply Section in the Depot was keenly felt. This difficulty was corrected on 22 July 1937 when Major J. C. Van Ingen was appointed as Signal Supply Officer. (SO #172 HHD, 22 Jul 37; HAD Basic, page 106, par. 1) Footnote: in 1939, the final approval for an appropriation was made and the Depot was granted authority to set up the Signal Section with Signal Corps funds. Major Van Ingen was assigned to organize it. (HAD Basic, page 141, par. 1)

The Major achievements of 1937 were as follows (HAD Basic, page 106, par. 2):

- a. Complete civilianization - release of 85 enlisted men.
- b. The construction of a new instrument building and the assignment of expert civilians to run it.

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- c. Establishment of the Radio Repair Section and Radio Supply Section.
- d. Procurement and installation of many items of important new machinery.
- e. The establishment of the Hawaiian Air Depot as an independent Air Depot. Supply requisitions could now be submitted directly to the Materiel Division.
- f. Overhaul time (the number of days in the Depot) on all airplanes had been reduced 50%.

1938: Major C. E. Branshaw was relieved in December of this year from his duties as Commanding Officer by Major A. S. Albro (HAD Basic, page 112, par. 1).

Careful study revealed that the original proposals for the establishment of the Hawaiian Air Depot at Hickam Field were inadequate. The chief objection to the proposed plan was that it recommended the establishment of the new Depot on a temporary basis. In view of the rapid expansion of the Depot, and the desire of all branches of the service to reach the peak of efficiency the plan appeared to be based on unsound tenets. (See HAD Basic, page 116, par 1, for an excellent discussion of the problems involved). Some of the objections to the plan were as follows: (HAD Basic, page 116, par. 1).

- a. The shop layout was barely adequate for the repair and overhaul of 103 planes in the Hawaiian Department, with the number of planes undergoing overhaul at any time averaging 14. Twenty five planes undergoing major repair at all times could not be accommodated. A larger clear floor space was needed. (The total floor area provided for the Engineering Shops by the proposed plan was slightly less than that occupied at Luke Field). A Depot's requirements are exactly proportional to the number of airplanes it services (HAD Basic, page 116, par. 1).

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2. The proposed \$600,000 for physical facilities were inadequate.
3. There was no provision for a Depot Supply Department.
4. Neither was there a provision for test blocks.
5. Original installations must be permanent.

Thus it was felt that the original location at Luke Field was just as good as the proposed temporary move to Hickam into inadequate facilities. The Depot recommended to the Chief of Air Corps that the initial construction of the depot at Hickam Field consist of a main shop building, an equipment repair building, test blocks, and administrative office, and a storage and warehouses for Depot Supply. (HAD Basic, page 119, par 1). All recommendations were approved by the Chief of Air Corps, and the work began.

Since 1 January 1938, this Depot had taken on an additional function of a signal section to supply all organizations of the 18th Composite Wing. (HAD Basic, page 119, par 2). Investigation of the demands which would be made on the Signal Repair and Supply Sections indicated that the then existing force was entirely inadequate to meet the requirements. A recommendation was made by the Depot to the Chief of Air Corps that funds be provided for the fiscal year 1939 for more Signal Corps civilian personnel. Funds were never made available. It became necessary to utilize the services of enlisted men in this Depot supplemented by such civilian employees as might have been provided through the meagre savings made from appropriation funds. (HAD BASIC, page 120, par 1).

A few all metal planes (C-33's) arrived this year. These new planes required different types of overhaul, different from those used on fabric cover jobs. The Engineering shops had to learn some new methods.

By the end of the year there were 306 civilians working in the Depot.

1939:

Major H. G. Montgomery relieved Major A. S. Albro in June of this year

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The entire Depot was still stationed at Luke Field. During the fall months some of the units did move to the new Dock Hangars at Hickam Field (HAD Basic, page 127, par 2). In fact, the entire Aero Repair Branch moved to Hickam.

The first B-18's assigned to the Hawaiian Department arrived this year. In March, the first DIR (Depot Inspection and Reconditioning) ever to be accomplished in the Depot was completed on a C-33 type aircraft (HAD Basic, page 127, par 5). \$1300 was allotted in June for the installation of a Bombsight Unit within the Depot.

A report filed on 20 March 1939 revealed the following organizational set up (HAD Basic, page 140, par 1):

1. In addition to the Depot Headquarters, where general administrative duties were performed, the Depot was composed of two major divisions -- Engineering and Supply. The third department was the Signal Corps Radio Repair and Supply Unit.
2. Engineering Division: Major B. H. Toohar, with 243 employees.
 - a. Inspection, maintenance, and repair of all aircraft, aircraft engines, and instruments, and other Air Corps equipment in the Hawaiian Department.
 - b. Spare parts, tools and miscellaneous items were manufactured as required to meet immediate needs.
 - c. Acted in an advisory capacity with the various Air Corps tactical units in the Hawaiian Department in all technical matters.
3. Depot Supply Department: Major W. J. Hanlon, with 75 employees.
 - a. Responsible for the procurement, receipt, recording, storage and issue of over 40,000 items of Air Corps equipment and

- b. Controlled the Contracting and Purchasing Unit, which made all local contracts and purchases for the Air Corps in Hawaii.

4. Signal Corps Supply: Major J. C. Van Ingen.

- a. Supply agency for Signal Corps property pertaining to aircraft from which issues were made to all Air Corps activities in Hawaii.
- b. Radio Repair Unit - Maintenance and repair of all aircraft radios and related equipment was performed.

5. Twenty-four Depot buildings, temporary in structure, have been remodeled and equipped so as to permit efficient operation.

A letter written on 7 November 1939 by Major Montgomery has this to say (HAD Basic, page 141, par 3):

- 1. The last payroll covered 395 employees.
- 2. The entire Aero Repair Branch, including Hangars #70, and #79 were moved to Hickam repair docks. There are about 50 men employed there.
- 3. All troops were removed from Luke Field, leaving only the Hawaiian Air Depot.
- 4. The machine shop was expanded; the Parachute Department was expanded to twice its size.
- 5. The Depot had received permission to have a Station Engineer Shop and a Station Supply Shop at Hickam

The civilian personnel figure rose to 407 during the year, an increase of 101 employees, or 30%.

1940:

In accordance with instructions from the Adjutant General, Washington, D.C., (11 Sept 1939), the Hawaiian Air Depot began making preparations for the

movement from Luke Field to Hickam. The transfer had been anticipated for sometime. Hickam Field had been in operation for over a year (HAD Basic, page 156, par 4) (see Hickam Basic, page 14 par 3). (GO #28, HHD dated 13 Sept 1940). On or about 27 May 1940, the 14th Naval District became interested in obtaining the use of two small hangars, #75 and #76 on Luke Field. It was estimated that the hangars would be evacuated in approximately two weeks. (HAD Basic, page 156, par 5).

Depot buildings at Hickam were not completed until October 1940. All equipment from Luke Field was moved into the Repair Docks and such temporary sites as could be furnished by the Commanding Officer at Hickam. By 11 Oct 1940, the movement to Hickam was fully completed. On that day all Depot buildings on Luke Field were turned over to the U. S. Naval Air Station. Luke Field ceased to exist as an army post (HAD Basic, page 161, par 3). (GO #28, HHD, 13 September 1940).

On 5 November 1940, the responsibility for the Hawaiian Air Depot came under the Commanding General, Hawaiian Air Force (GO #41, HHD, 5 Nov 1940). The Commanding Officer, Hawaiian Air Depot is responsible to the Hawaiian Air Force Commander in all matter pertaining to the functioning of the Hawaiian Air Depot. (GO #41, cited).