

The Airlifter

Newsletter of the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association

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Volume IV

Business Meeting

Due to the cancellation of the planned 2007 members' meeting/reunion and the need to conduct several matters of association business, a business meeting has been scheduled for Saturday, February 2, 2008 at the Clear Lake Hilton in Clear Lake, Texas. All active members and prospective members are invited to attend. The meeting will commence at 9:00 AM and continue as long as needed. Coffee, soft drinks and snacks will be provided. Briefly, items to be discussed are the adoption of permanent by-laws, nomination/election of officers to fill vacancies, 2008 reunion location, membership promotion, possible association projects and any other item that may be suggested. The Clear Lake Hilton is located on NASA 1 about 15 miles south of Houston Hobby airport across the road from the Johnson Space Center. If you plan to stay at the hotel, your best bet will be to make your reservations on the Internet at the Hilton web site http://www1.hilton.com/en_US/hi/hotel/HOUNBHF-Hilton-Houston-NASA-Clear-Lake-Texas/index.do for the best rate. If you are flying in and don't plan to rent a car, contact me at SEMcGowanJr@aol.com and I will give you the phone numbers for a couple of cab drivers that I know and trust. Since this is a business meeting rather than a social event, all travel expenses should be tax deductible.

If you've time to spare and would like to do some sightseeing, you might want to come in a day or so early or leave late. That weekend is Mardi Gras in Galveston, which is about 25-30 miles away. There are a lot of things to see and do in the Clear Lake vicinity. NASA is right across the road and worth the time to visit. There are several good restaurants in the Kemah-Seabrook area which is just down the road. The San Jacinto Battlefield and Battleship TEXAS are about miles away while downtown Houston is about fifteen miles. The weather in the Houston area should be fairly mild, probably in the sixties to seventies during the day.

Association Data

As most of you know, my personal laptop was stolen out of the trunk of my car in front of my house in late November. Unfortunately, most of the association data – records, old newsletters, etc. were on it and the backups were in the case. While some items will be impossible to duplicate, the good news is that the membership database up to member #73 was on my desktop. No association documents were in the case and I have the most recent bank statements and will be entering the information into a spread sheet ASAP. The worse loss, for me at least, were a couple of Zip disks containing photographs that I had planned to add to the web site. While I have my own originals, some were photos that people had sent me over the years.

World War II Troop Carrier Reunion

We have been invited to participate with a gathering of World War II troop carrier veterans in Fayetteville, NC in October. We will be discussing whether we want to make this our 2008 reunion at the business meeting. This particular group is an “umbrella” group who decided to start meeting together instead of having individual unit reunions due to the dwindling numbers of World War II veterans. Look for more information in future newsletters.

TCTAA Web Site

We now have our own Internet domain at www.troopcarrier.org and will be using it to promote the organization. The home page is at www.troopcarrier.org/home.html. We purchased the domain in October and were in the process of building it when my laptop flew out of the trunk of my car and flew away. We will be adding more to it now that I am back in the computer business. There is a guest book, Forum and Blog. There have been problems with SPAM on the Forum but I am keeping my fingers crossed that those issues may be corrected with new security functions that have been activated. The Blog has also been plagued by SPAM and we may have to delete it. Incidentally, the cost of the domain and service includes 50 Email addresses which will be offered to Life and 5-year members as they last. Drop me a note if you would like to have one and I will be happy to set it up.

Newsletters

It has been suggested and we were currently experimenting with sending out newsletters to everyone who has Email electronically as a means of reducing expenses. If you have problems with receiving your copy electronically, please let me know.

Christmas at Bastogne

The Christmas season is just behind us, and while it is a special time for everyone, it is the anniversary of one of the most dramatic events of troop carrier history, a time when our World War II predecessors really came through. In mid-December, 1944 the German army launched a major offensive that was designed to cut the Allied lines and force the American, British and other Allied troops who had been moving westward from France back into the sea. It was a bold move that caught senior Allied officers by surprise (although their field commanders, particularly George Patton, had been warning them that the Germans were not through.) European wintertime weather allowed the German troops to move into position and launch a massive attack that caused the green American troops who had recently occupied the Ardennes Region to retreat in a near rout. In an attempt to reinforce the line, the veteran 101st Airborne Division was diverted from a planned rest to occupy the town of Bastogne. The paratroopers had no more than occupied the town when they discovered that they had been completely surrounded and cut off from all lines of supply.

The winter of 1944 was one of the worst in decades, with low clouds, fog and rain and drizzle that turned to snow as cold weather came in out of the north. With all of the roads leading to the town cut by the Germans, the men of the 101st were lacking in ammunition, food and artillery. The German commander believed their situation was hopeless and sent in an offer of

surrender under a flag of truce. But the 101st commander, Brigadier General McAuliffe, sent a one-word reply – “Nuts!”

Improved weather conditions on the morning of December 23 allowed two Pathfinder teams to jump into Bastogne to set up drop zones. An hour and a half later a 16-plane C-47 formation made the first drops to the men of the 101st. Before the day ended, 241 C-47s delivered vital loads of ammunition and rations. At least 95% of the bundles were recovered and by nightfall 101st artillerymen were firing shells that had been dropped that afternoon. The drops continued the following day – Christmas Eve – and by the end of the day 300 tons had been delivered. Bad weather returned on Christmas Day but enough supplies had been delivered during the preceding two days to enable the paratroopers to hold out until the weather cleared.

A popular legend of World War II is that General George Patton ordered his chief chaplain to write a prayer for good weather at the height of the Battle of the Bulge. In reality, the prayer had been requested several weeks previously as Patton was planning to launch an attack before all hell broke loose in the Ardennes. Temperatures were well above freezing at the time and problem had been rain and mud. The attack had not materialized and Patton was later ordered to move north to relieve Bastogne. Heavy snow was falling and poor visibility prevented the close air support that Patton had learned to depend on. He remembered the prayer and ordered it printed and distributed among all Third Army personnel. Whether the prayer had anything to do with it or not is open to debate, but the day after Christmas dawned clear and cold, perfect weather for flying. Airdrops resumed while fighter/bombers and light bombers raked the German positions around the town.

Without IX Nine Troop Carrier Command, the men of the 101st at Bastogne would probably have been doomed. But the supply drops enabled the Screaming Eagles to stay in the fight, and to hold the town until Patton’s tanks broke through the German lines. The resupply had not been without cost – as many as 17 and perhaps as many as 21-25 C-47s were shot down during the resupply effort.