



The Airlifter

Newsletter of the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association

March 31, 2009

Volume IX

A Message From Our Chairman

Troop Carrier Tactical Airlift Association Members -

One year ago this week, several Troop Carrier Tactical Airlift Association founders met at Clear Lake, Texas to formally launch the Association. Many steps towards that launch had been taken over the preceding three years, and though there were setbacks, the founders and the other early members learned and persisted.

A TCTAA Board of Directors and TCTAA Officers were elected at the meeting. The By-Laws were modified to fit current realities, and plans made for future activities. One of the latter was last November's Convention in San Antonio. Full credit for that goes to our San Antonio members who worked long and diligently to make it a reality. Few of us need to be reminded that conditions nationwide then were less than ideal, and that remains the case now and into the near future.

Another accomplishment has been a big increase in membership, from around thirty to well past a hundred members. Recruitment of new members remains a big challenge, and it is going to take major effort on every current TCTAA member's part. As with any organization of this kind, it must either grow or go.

Most of our current membership is oriented towards aircrews and the flightline. We too often tend to forget that there is hugely more than that involved. Aerial Port personnel, Flight Nurses, Combat Controllers, Army Liason Teammembers, Weather Specialists, Intelligence Units, and many, many more were vital to the tactical airlift mission.

These too often forgotten men and women are also eligible to join, and should be actively recruited. We needed those people then, and we need them now.

New members remain a high priority for TCTAA.

*Ace Bowman
Chairman*

Financial Report

Thanks to the creative efforts of Andy Vaquera and Hector Rodriguez, the cost of our convention in San Antonio was kept to a minimum. As of our most recent bank statement, dated February 28, 2009, we had \$7,131.09 in our treasury.

Board Meeting in Jacksonville, Arkansas

Chairman Ace Bowman and President Hector Leyva recently called for a board meeting to be held in the Little Rock area. Ralph Bemis has reserved space at the Jacksonville Museum of Military History, which is in the vicinity of Little Rock Air Force Base, on May 14-15. A number

of items will be discussed, including the time and place of the next convention as well as possible vacancies on the board due to health and other issues. Contact Hector at hector145@msn.com if you're interested in attending.

Renewal Time!

It is the first quarter of a new year, which means its renewal time unless you have already paid for more than one year or a five-year or life member. Dues are \$25.00 a year, \$100 for five and \$250.00 for life members. Please send your dues to Treasurer Ralph Bemis, 527 Pickthorne Rd. Cabot, AR 72023. We set a goal at the San Antonio board meeting for every member to recruit three new members in 2009. Spread the word about our organization!

Facebook TCTAA Group

We recently set up a group for the TCTAA on Facebook, a social networking site that has grown considerably recently as it has been attracting an older audience. Originally conceived by a college student and used mostly by students, it is now a worldwide networking site. About half of our registered members have joined, and are participating with various levels of interest. To join, go to www.facebook.com. Once you've registered, do a search for Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association and you'll find our group. What is amazing is that our FB group has attracted the interest of almost 200 post-Vietnam airlifters, most with a C-130 connection who have served at Little Rock, Dyess and Pope AFB, NC. Now, if we can just get them all to join the Association.....!

Membership List

By our by-laws, the TCAA sends out an updated membership list once each year. Since many of our members do not have Email and because of compatibility issues, we'll be sending out an updated membership list by mail in the very near future. To save space, it will consist of name, address, phone number and Email address of each member.

An Loc and the Easter Offensive



One of the most courageous events in troop carrier/tactical airlift history was the resupply of the besieged South Vietnamese garrison at An Loc in South Vietnam in the spring of 1972. Several of our members were involved, which gives An Loc a special significance for our group. One of the things that made the events at An Loc particularly difficult was that by the spring of 1972 the war in Vietnam had ebbed down to a low point and most American troops had been withdrawn. The C-130 force, which had had consisted of 12 squadrons at the height of the war, had decreased to four at CCK Air Base, Taiwan and one at Clark, which was in the process of inactivation. All USAF C-7s and C-123s had been withdrawn from Southeast Asia as "Vietnamization" was taking place. The Vietnamese Air Force air transportation arm had been beefed up with the assignment of C-

119s and C-123s and when North Vietnamese troops burst out of Cambodia toward Saigon, the VNAF was expected to hold the line. Elite NVA units surrounded the town of An Loc and laid siege to the city, cutting it off from all round supply routes. Initial supply efforts by Vietnamese and US helicopter crews proved too costly due to the proliferation of heavy weapons the North Vietnamese had set up around the city.

On April 12 South Vietnamese airlifters began airdrops in an effort to supply the defenders in the face of heavy ground fire. After losing three airplanes to ground fire, the C-123 crews began dropping from altitudes above the effective range of the ground fire but without a means of insuring accuracy, the loads drifted aimlessly and as often as not ended up in enemy hands. A captured North Vietnamese later asked his captors for the fruit salad from the US C rations. He had grown fond of the dish while eating rations dropped from the sky that had been intended for them! Only about a quarter of the loads intended for An Loc actually landed where they could be retrieved by the defenders. As a result, the US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam decided to order the US Air Force to take over the drops. The first mission was scheduled for the evening of April 14 and three crews from the 374th Tactical Airlift Wing were briefed for the mission, but it was delayed until the next morning.



On the morning of April 15 three C-130s took off for An Loc. The first crew was from the 776th TAS and was commanded by Major Robert F. Wallis. TCTAA president Hector Leyva was his loadmaster. In spite of several hits from ground fire, the crew managed to drop their load, although it was not recovered by the friendlies. The second airplane had problems with the cargo ramp and aborted the run-in, leaving the third crew, commanded by Captain William R. Caldwell, to make an attempt. Caldwell's crew members were Lieutenants John Herring and Richard Lents, TSgt. Jon Sanders, SSgt. Charles L. Shaub and Sgt. Dave

McAleece. Their call sign was Spare 617. When they were thirty seconds from the drop, the airplane encountered a barrage of ground fire. A bullet came up through the floor and killed Jon Sanders, the engineer, instantly. Lts. Herring and Lents were both wounded. One round ruptured a bleed airline in the cargo compartment, allowing hot air to roar into the cargo compartment. The load of artillery shells began to smolder. Loadmaster Shaub called for the load to be jettisoned but the electrical connection for the ADS button had been shot out and it wouldn't work so he jettisoned it himself. As the bundles went off the ramp, two exploded.

The airplane had suffered considerable damage. All of the cockpit crewmembers except for Caldwell had been hit and the engineer was dead. Both engines on the left wing were on fire, so Caldwell shut them both down and closed the wing isolation valves for the left wing. The loadmasters reported that there was a fire in the cargo compartment in the vicinity of the left wheel well. The cargo compartment had effectively been turned into a blast furnace by the heat from the ruptured bleed air line and the metal of the fire extinguishers were too hot to touch. Shaub picked up one anyway and put out the fire; his hands were badly burned in the process. McAleece, the other loadmaster, had also been wounded. Without hydraulic power, the landing gear had to be cranked down by hand, and in spite of their wounds and Charlie Shaub's badly burned hands, the two loadmasters managed to crank the landing gear down and the airplane

landed safely. Captain Caldwell and SSgt Shaub were later awarded the Air Force Cross. Charlie Shaub was honored by the Air Force Sergeants Association with the William H. Pitzenbarger Award, an award that had been set up in honor of a pararescueman who had died in Vietnam earlier in the war (and who was recently awarded the Medal of Honor.)

The first US drops over An Loc had not gone well, and that evening the 374th wing commander, Col. Andrew Iosue, and the senior Stan/Eval pilots discussed what to do. Maj. Ed Brya and Maj. Robert Highley came up with a new tactic that called for the crews to make their approach at treetop altitude at high speed and to pop-up to 600 feet for the drop at two minutes out. Col. Iosue had previously commanded the 21st Tactical Control Group and he arranged for the C-130 crews to communicate directly with the FACs working over An Loc as they made their run-in. The next day the three officers went out in one of two C-130s to try the new tactics. Although both airplanes took hits, the damage was light and both airplanes dropped, although the loads were not recovered, possibly due to a map error. No drops were flown the following day, but on April 18 they resumed.

As Captain Don "Doc" Jensen's crew was on approach to the drop zone, they began taking hits that set the right wing on fire and knocked out two engines, as well as all communications. Loadmasters and TCTAA members Ralph Bemis and Charlie Armistead jettisoned the load and Jensen began looking for a place to put the airplane down. He spotted a clearing and crash-landed in hostile territory. By a fluke that makes them one of the luckiest crews in tactical airlift history, the C-130 went down right in front of an Army helicopter gunship formation. The Army pilots strafed North Vietnamese troops that were in the area and landed to pick-up the crew, all of whom had survived with minor injuries.

After three days of drops over An Loc, the score for the 374th was one airplane lost and one nearly lost while several others were badly damaged, and recovery of the loads had been negligible. On the night of April 19/20 two drops were made, but only two bundles recovered. Attempts were made using GRADS, a ground-radar guided system that had been used to control M-121 and Blu-82 bomb drops, but the South Vietnamese lacked the high-altitude rigging materials to rig the bundles for high-altitude drops and few loads were recovered. The crews returned to conventional Container Delivery System drops, but missions were flown at night. In spite of lack of experience in night drops, the crews managed to put most of their loads into friendly hands and for the first couple of nights, they encountered little opposition. But then the North Vietnamese turned to barrage techniques and on the night of 25 April several airplanes were hit and a second C-130 was shot down, with the loss of all aboard.

Planners back in the US had come up with a plan for a massive 10-plane drop formation using heavy close air support, but Col. Iosue and the FACs working over An Loc thought it was suicidal and the plan was discarded. An attempt at day drops on April 27 again resulted in severe battle damage from ground fire and the C-130 crews returned to night drops. Ground fire around the besieged city had increased and on the night of May 3 a third C-130 was lost, although it wasn't certain that it was shot down. The airplane was seen to go into some trees and explode. A total of 38 airplanes had been hit by ground fire over An Loc, with 26 of them on night drops. After the loss of the third airplane, conventional CDS missions were halted.

On May 4 the C-130 crews returned to GRADS drops, but the lack of proper rigging caused about a third of the loads to be lost. In an attempt at improving drop accuracy, the Air Force sent veteran airmen Major Myles Rohrlick and TSgt John Limbach (a TCTAA life member) to

Vietnam to solve the problem. They discovered that the reefing lines being used were too short, but a shortage of the electrical squibs used in the rigging meant that drop accuracy would continue to be a problem. By this time US Army Quartermaster riggers had become involved and the airlift rigging team came up with a new solution. Most of the materials being delivered could be dropped using high velocity methods, so the riggers came up with a method that used extraction parachutes as stabilization parachutes instead of conventional parachutes. The loads were packed in cardboard cushioning material to soft the impact, and the new method allowed the badly needed ammunition and rations to be delivered.

With the aerial delivery problem finally solved, the American C-130 crews were able to keep the South Vietnamese troops and their American advisors at An Loc in the battle, and the Communist effort was eventually defeated.

TCTAA Member Charlie Armistead was one of the crewmembers involved in the An Loc drops. Following is an excerpt from an Email from Charlie:

As of me and An Loc- I buried a lot- didn't think about it for years! I do remember when the scuttle bug came down that we were going to do some CE airdrops to besieged forces at An Loc- Charlie (Shaub) was the first person I went to. I was a young guy Sgt just over 2 years in the service - had done a lot of airdrops (for a youngster) but NEVER shot at (what a bitch). Charlie told me to rely on my training and I should be OK- then he asked if he was on the list. That I didn't know. I was on the flt line with Hector and others trying to construct a plan to use C-123 extraction line to rig the 6 knife gates. (15Apr72) Hector and (I can't remember who his other LM was) were on the lead ship, Jimmy Hillhouse and I were #2 ship and Charlie and Dave #3. We were approaching the drop zone, going through the time warnings -removing the restraint chains and about 6 in. of a 10K chain got lodged between 2 skid boards-we nosed up-down and all around making every attempt to free the chain so we could complete the drop, but to no avail. Our aircraft pulled out of formation and #3 ship(Charlie S's) took our place in the formation--the rest is history! We landed - I went to the club-Then Mike Price came and told me I was on another drop over An Loc tomorrow-I said bull shit and called Det 1, talked to a Col. said that there was a lot of LM's @ TSN that hasn't done that gig yet. He said OK- I was off the mission. After numerous beers, I started thinking about how I would feel if something happened to that crew like it happened to Charlie's. I decided that I couldn't live with myself and called the Col. @ Det 1 said I would fly the mission-He asked me if I was sure-I said not really but put me back on the mission- he said OK. The next morning (16Apr72) I was lead ship with Col Iosue, Maj Brya etc. we took a FEW hits but successfully completed the drop. We landed- then I was approached by Ralph B. he wanted me to fly with him over An Loc the next day-- I told him he was F--King crazy!!!! To make a long story short-after a lot of convincing-I said OK. We showed up To Det 1 the next morning only to hang around all day because our forces didn't have control of the Soccer field. They released us-Ralph and I went to the club and then downtown Saigon (Nuff Said! HA!) Showed up the next morning briefed by Bob K. Sh-t in our pants and then did the deed! So I was on the first 3 days of drops but actually only 2 times across the DZ (only because of the chain)!

The situation at An Loc had barely stabilized before the men of the 374th Tactical Airlift Wing became embroiled in another tense situation at Kontum, a city in Vietnam's Central Highlands. On 26 April a 50th TAS crew, commanded by Lt. Col. Reed C. Mulkey, who was a maintenance officer with the 374th wing, was attempting to takeoff from Kontum when their airplane was struck by shrapnel as a rocket impacted just in front of the airplane. Flying shrapnel caused fuel leaks, shot out an engine and flattened four tires. The crew parked the airplane and took shelter. Later in the day they caught a ride home to Tan Son Nhut. Maintenance personnel from the 374th returned to Kontum later to inspect the damage. The three-man team of

mechanics worked to repair the ruptured fuel tank, even though enemy rockets again struck



the airfield while they worked, damaging another C-130 that had just landed and setting fire to a Vietnamese C-123 parked alongside the stricken airplane they were working on. As a maintenance officer, Lt. Col. Mulkey took a personal interest in the repair process.

At dusk on the 30th, an eleven-man maintenance team arrived at Kontum from Tan Son Nhut to change the damaged engine and replace all four main gear tires. Using flashlights, they worked through the night, despite intermittent shelling. By midday the job

was done. As they worked, they watched a VNAF C-123 just barely get off the ground as it was bracketed by incoming rocket fire. Soon afterwards, another C-130 arrived from Saigon with Col. Mulkey and his crew aboard. Incoming rockets put more holes in his airplane as well as in the one that had just brought them in to retrieve the already-damaged craft. However, both airplanes got off safely, despite the fact that Mulkey's airplane had received new hits in the fuel tanks. During the takeoff roll the crew lost an engine on the previously undamaged side, yet they became airborne and landed again at Plieku, where the airplane underwent extensive repairs along with another C-130 (which lost several feet of wing in a collision with a helicopter a few days later).

Airlift efforts continued into Kontum as the enemy made every effort to halt the landings. In order to counteract the effects on communist anti-aircraft, night operations were necessary. Night landings were more difficult from an operational standpoint, but from the military view they were safer, as the NVA gunners were unable to distinguish individual aircraft in the darkness and the effectiveness of their fire was greatly reduced. On 17 May, 63-7798 – an old Pope bird and the sister ship to the airplane lost in France in 1965 – crashed on takeoff, evidently after being hit by rocket fire during a daylight operation. Because of the high intensity of enemy shelling – as severe as that at Khe Sanh in 1968 – bladder bird flights were discontinued in order to reduce ground time of C-130s delivering fuel. Instead, fuel was carried in the old portable bladders, which could be quickly rolled out of the rear of the airplane. On 22 May, a C-130 blew a tire on landing just after midnight. The next day, before it could be repaired and flown out, the airplane was destroyed by rocket fire. Thus ended the career of 62-1854, *The Quan Loi Queen*, which been badly damaged by rocket fire at Quan Loi three years before, but was returned to service.

In order to operate their C-130s into the 3,000-foot runway at night, the crews were required to use the utmost flying skill and precision. The field was surrounded by enemy troops, who did their best to prevent the transports from landing. To avoid ground fire, crews would come over Kontum at an altitude out of range of the enemy guns, then spiral down over the airfield to 3,000 feet. The pilots kept the landing lights off until just before touchdown. The runway was lit by portable lighting, but operations were very "dicey," in the words of the 374th commander, Col. (later General) Andrew Iosue. Yet, in spite of the adversities, there was not a single accident at Kontum.

On 25 May enemy forces penetrated the airfield, just before a C-130 landed and picked up Air Force personnel on the ground. Despite fire from three sides and several hits on the airplane, the crew made it off safely with all aboard. Fighting continued in the city as Vietnamese forces were temporarily supplied by US and Vietnamese Chinook helicopters while the 374th began preparing for airdrops. Prior to the battle for Kontum, the C-130s had made a series of airdrops at Ben Het, Dak Pek, and Mang Buk, where Vietnamese garrisons had been cut off by the communist drives. Airdrop operations were already in progress at An Loc. On the afternoon of

27 May, the first C-130 airdrop mission was flown to Kontum, dropping onto a drop zone that had been laid out southwest of the city. Four missions were flown the next day, followed by three on the 29th, five on the 30th, and seven on the 31st. All of these airdrops used radar-guided high-velocity drop methods. On 2 June, RVN troops recaptured much of the city, allowing the use of a bigger drop zone. By 7 June the situation at Kontum was such that C-130 landings were once again possible. Enemy resistance inside the city of Kontum came to an end on 10 June and by the end of the month the road from Pleiku to Kontum was reopened.

Note – Reed Mulkey passed away recently. He was retired in the vicinity of Albuquerque, NM.

WW II Troop Carrier Pilot

The following account came from Steve McDivitt, whose uncle, Randy Crecelius, was a C-47 pilot with the 374th Troop Carrier Wing in the Southwest Pacific in World War II. It's an interesting account of the life of a young airman who gave his life in the service of his country.



This is the "very short" version of the William Randall Crecelius story. I have about 200 pages of details written, much of it about Randy's youth and the Crecelius family. I expect to have about 250 pages when it is completed and I am finally able to put this to rest. I am not doing this for any commercial reason, just for documentation for the Crecelius family.

Some of the events leading up to December 19, 1943 will always be unclear. I have Randy's flight records, official military records, military historical groups, other researcher's records, books referencing Randall's flight/military groups, websites and personal accounts by correspondence (phone, letter, email and in person) with friends & acquaintances of Randall during his military career. I have contacted over 200 people and many more organizations who have an interest in these events or served in the same area at the same time, or others who had also done some research. I have sent out hundreds of letters to groups and received a very large amount of material in return. The responses to my inquiries have been overwhelming. It should be noted that I frequently received conflicting information, but I have tried my best to verify the validity of all the communication I have received through the years.

My research quickly led from the military sites and research assistance facilities in the USA to Australia and New Guinea. I have received many documents and information from contacts in both countries including pictures. Those contacts have given our family a fascinating view of how this crash impacted so many others than just Crecelius family. One of the surprising facts that came from these contacts is that this crash has been a subject of study for many years and culminated in a memorial service at the crash site in 2003. I am convinced I have all the military records including Randy's flight records, training records, the crash investigation, my grandfather's communications with the Army about getting Randy returned after the war and on and on.....

Randy grew up on a farm northwest of Princeton Indiana. He graduated from Francisco High School (Francisco, Indiana) in 1936. He was the oldest of 4 children of Henry (my grandfather) and Maude Crecelius. He had two younger brothers, Jim and Bob and a daughter (my mother) Doris. Doris's husband was also a pilot in the AAC graduating in the class of 45A.

By all accounts, Randy was an outstanding young man would have most likely led a very successful life had he survived WWII. He left behind, in addition to his family, many friends and a girl friend (interestingly named Mary Christmas) from a nearby town in southern Indiana. She was a periodic visitor to my grandparents home for many years after Randy's passing. She and Randy would have surely married after the war, but she remained single for the rest of her life and passed away in 1976.

William Randall Crecelius - #0-888625 (2nd Lt) #15059246 (S/Sgt Pilot)

*9/26/40 WRC enlisted in Army at Evansville, IN at age of 21 10/ 12 yrs.
Blue eyes, brown hair, ruddy complexion, 5'11" tall*

*6/6/41 WRC completed Radio Operators-Mechanics Course, Barksdale,
Was also at Scott Field for some training during this period*

11-12/41 WRC in pre-flight training at Kelly Field, San Antonio, TX

12/ 15/41 WRC received orders for "Elementary Flying School" Cuero, TX to report

*12/ 19/41 Reported to Flight School (2 years later
was the crash on 12/19/43)*



12/20-2/24/42 Brayton Flying School, Cuero, TX

*4/29/42 WRC completed Basic Flight Training at
Curtis Field - Class 42F*

*WRC admitted to Advanced Pilot
Training - Curtis Field*

*5/42-6/42 Adv Twin-Engine training (42-F)
Ellington Field, Houston, TX
AT-9 & AT-17 airplanes*

6/23/42 WRC received War Dept order assigning Staff Sgt Pilot status.

6/24/42 WRC certificate to Staff Sgt Pilot effective 7/3, Randolph Field, Texas

6/26/42 WRC assigned to 10th TCG, General Mitchell Field, Cudahy (Fon Du Lac), Wi .

7/3/42 WRC graduated from Advanced training - Ellington Field, TX

Received Pilot Wings & promoted to grade of S/Sgt. Pilot

Transferred to General Mitchell Field, Cudahy (Fon Du Lac), WI

7/13/42 WRC sent to 10th Transport at Mitchell Field, WI.

8/1/42 WRC transferred to 63rd TCG at Selfridge Field, MI

10/14/42 WRC received Certificate for instrument flying.

10th Transport Group - Billy Mitchell Field, Milwaukee, WI

12/20/42 WRC promoted to Flight Officer from Sgt Pilot, Victorville, CA

4/14/43 WRC received orders to leave Victorville Army Flying School,

Victorville, CA – departed U.S.A.

Path to New Guinea included - Hawaii, Johnson Island, Christmas Island, New Caledonia, Brisbane,

Townsville, Port Moresby (April '43).

4/20/43 WRC transferred from 52nd TCS to 22nd TCS

April '43 Arrived in Port Moresby, New Guinea as replacement pilot

Assigned to 22nd TCS at Wards Strip.

Locations included: Wards - Dobodura – Guadagasal – Bulolo – Wau - Kila - 3Mile - 14Mile - Bena Bena – Celebob - Townsville - Amberly - Mascot – Archerfield – Celobob - Jackson – Garoka - 30Mile - Garbutt – Amberly – Pulpit – Goodenough I - Fall River – Bena Bena - Hood Point

9/28/43 WRC Commissioned 2nd Lt.

12/19/43 7:11a.m. left Garbutt Airport in Townsville.

Just north of Rockhampton, almost within sight of the town, the left engine burst into flames. Evidently tried to land on an open claypan area at Canal Creek rather than try to get to the airport. The left fuel tank exploded and tore off the wing. Eyewitness accounts of some local herders are available.

12/19/43 WRC (2:20) Final Flight time

Plane crashed “disintegrated” about 9:15a.m. 36 miles north of Rockhampton at Ross Moya Rd, Canal Creek area. Plane was U.S. Army C-47-A-DL, 43-30742 VH-CHR (Civil Registry) (Tail Markings) delivered to the 5th AAF on 11/27/43. This plane was delivered to the Army Air Corp on 10/7/43. After testing and servicing it was ferried across the Pacific to Australia and then to New Guinea. On 11/30 it was assigned to the 22nd TCS. The plane, with less than 200hrs, left New Guinea on 12/18 to ferry military personnel between coastal airfields as far south as Sydney. After remaining on the ground in Townsville during the night, it left for MacKay at 7:10a.m. the next day, 12/19/43, Rockhampton and points south. After landing at Mackay, where a few passengers were delivered and other taken aboard, it continued on the trip toward Rockhampton.

WRC burial #1 at 10:30 12/24/43 in the U.S.A.F. Military cemetery at Belgian Gardens, Townsville. Grave #359

WRC buried 2nd time 7/18/45 U.S.A.F. cemetery at Ipswich, Qld (Brisbane) – Manson Park. Grave #661

After the war he, along with 19,000 other Americans buried in Australian cemeteries during the war, were shipped back to the United States and their home towns.... like Princeton, Indiana. The ship “Goucher Victory” carrying the remains of all those exhumed from Ipswich Cemetery left Australia in late December '47. Randy finally arrived in Princeton on Tue, March 9, 1948. He was buried in the family plot in Warnock Cemetery on March 11, 1948, less than a mile from where Henry and Maude lived on Hart Street in Princeton. We decorate his grave each Memorial Day.

Let me know if you have any questions, comments or suggestions. Thanks for your interest.

Steve McDevitt (Nephew of Lt. William Randall Crecelius)

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Airlift Reorganization



Recently the Air Force reorganized its combat airlift forces. The active duty wing that had been at Pope so long was inactivated and an Air Force Reserve unit, the 440th Airlift Group, took its place. The most recent changes have been at Little Rock, where the 463rd Airlift Wing was replaced by the 19th Airlift Wing, and the 314th Airlift Wing became a training unit assigned to the Air Force Education and Training Command. The 317th Airlift Wing is still at Dyess AFB, Texas with two squadrons.

The lineage of the 19th Airlift Wing is truly historic, although it had not been associated with airlift until recently. Just prior to the outbreak of World War II in the Pacific the 19th transferred to Clark Field in the Philippines where two of its squadrons were caught on the ground while refueling and rearming when Japanese aircraft struck the field. All but three of the group's B-17s were destroyed. Fortunately, a few days previously two squadrons had been deployed to Del Monte Field on Mindanao and were spared. The men of the 19th fought in the Philippines for two weeks, then were ordered to withdraw to Darwin to rest and recuperate. The 19th fought from Australia until the fall of 1942 when General George Kenney decided the unit was worn out and sent them back to the US. During their time in Australia, the 19th B-17s often flew transport missions carrying cargo to Mindanao and returning with key American and Filipino personnel who had been ordered to Australia. After its return to the US, the 19th served as a training unit for B-17 crews until it was inactivated in the spring of 1944. The unit reactivated later in the year and became a B-29 unit, and deployed back to the Pacific. It remained with Strategic Air Command flew missions over Korea during the Korean War. After Korea it was equipped with B-52s, which it flew during the Vietnam War. It later became a refueling wing until its inactivation in early 2008. It reactivated at Little Rock in October 2008, replacing the 463rd.