



## The Airlifter

Newsletter of the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association

October 31, 2009

Volume X

As the old saying goes, “better late than never”, and that is as good a reason as any to justify the tardiness of this issue, which should have been published several months ago.

### **Finances**

Association finances are in good shape. As of September 30, our bank balance is \$6,844.51.

### ***Minutes of Little Rock Meeting***

#### ***The Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association Board Meeting***

*Jacksonville Museum of Military History*

*Jacksonville, AR*

*May 14-15, 2009*

#### ***The following Board members were present at the meeting:***

*Alfred Bowman - Chairman of the Board*

*Hector Leyva - President*

*Rodney Crawford - Vice President*

*Ralph Bemis - Treasurer*

*Andy Vaquera – Board Member (2008 Convention Chairman)*

*Bobby Gassiot - Board Member*

#### ***Old Business:***

***2008 Convention:*** *Andy Vaquera made a presentation to the Board on some of the highlights of the convention and also the associated cost, sponsorship/donations, and sale of Association merchandise. There was \$2700 in sponsorship/donations and \$1400 in merchandises sales which gave the Association an overall cost for the convention at about \$600.*

***Charlie Shaub’s MOH Upgrade Action:*** *The upgrade still has the full support of the Board. However, the Board did not have any information on the letter writing that Sam McGowan had done to the Congressman in*

order to review what action to take. Hector Leyva did report that he had discussed this action with a some people, at the General level and at the DFC Society, but he thinks that time is not on our side to work this on the military side since General Iosue is not in very good health.

**Treasurer Report:**

Ralph Bemis provided a Treasurer report which showed that as of May 14, 2009, the Association had \$7281.09.

**New Business**

**Elections and Clarification:** The Board agreed that the nomination and election could and would take place at our biannual convention. With the next convention taking place in 2010, IAW the By-Laws, a Nominating Committee needs to be identified to solicit nominees from the membership. It was also agreed that all Board members need to be more active in all activities in order to assure that the Association meets the 5 major purposes that are outlined within the Constitution and By-Laws.

**2010 Convention:** There is still a lot of work to be done with 2 major issues at the top of the list and those are where and when. The Board agreed that over the next 60 days a decision would be made with a July 16, 2009, deadline. The following criteria will be used in the location selection, either one with an air show or one that is known for entertainment. The following 4 places, but not limited to, are in the consideration process: Little Rock, Birmingham, Houston, and Branson, Missouri. The Board was also briefed by James Elmer from the 815<sup>th</sup> TCS/TAS Jennys on the plus and minus of having your reunion/convention planned and done by an outside organization that is in the business of doing that and how that could be viewed. Hector Leyva said that an organization that he belongs to has done that in the past and he feels that some of the headaches may go away but it is not a very cheap way to have a reunion or convention.

**2012 Convention:** The 2012 convention will be the subject of discussion at the 2010 convention at which time the where and when will be put to the membership. IAW the By-Laws, a Reunion Committee needs to be identified in order for them to have something to present to the membership.

**Membership Recruitment:** This is an action that all members have an inherited responsibility to always be doing their best to achieve, however, it is not always done. Here again, the By-Laws provides a Membership Committee to help in the recruitment process and the Board will identify and fulfill this requirement. As a matter of note, Jim Elmer became a member after his briefing.

**U. S. Flag Requirement:** Ralph Bemis identified this requirement and the Board agreed that action should be taken to purchase a flag set. The Board agreed that \$250.00 would be allocated for the flag and a floor stand.

**By-Laws Review:** The Board discussed what changes or additions may be needed and decided that more time would be allocated to the review process of the By-Laws since they have not been in use that long. Most of the Board members were comfortable with the By-Laws.

**The following items were brought up during the meeting and action is pending:**

- All Board members and officers need to be identified with an email address and telephone number on a separate document that will be provided to them. This will allow a more direct way in providing notification/information to the Board. This listing can be developed, provided, and maintained by Sam McGowan.

- Copyright of TCTAA logo: Ernie Gassiot will look into this and see what action can be taken.

- Website Requirement: Sam McGowan needs to give the Board some info as to how long we have it for and when it needs to be renewed.

**The meeting was adjourned at 1700 on May 14, 2009**

### **2010 Convention**

The board recommended at the 2008 convention in San Antonio that future conventions be held on a biannual basis and that is the guideline under which we have been operating. There was also a suggestion that we hold the next convention in conjunction with a large air show somewhere or at a place with some kind of military aviation attraction, and this has caused planning to be put on hold as the schedules for air shows are not announced until December of the preceding year. Some board members are leaning toward having the 2010 convention in Galveston in conjunction with the annual Wings Over Houston air show, which is held at Ellington Field in the late fall. This year's WOH event is scheduled for the weekend of October 31-November 1 so we expect the 2010 event to also be in late October or early November. The time and place is not written in stone and if someone would like to host an event in their area either in 2010 or at a future date, please contact Chairman Ace Bowman at [aceplace@clearwire.net](mailto:aceplace@clearwire.net) or President Hector Leyva at [hector145@msn.com](mailto:hector145@msn.com). (Note- we have learned that this year's Wings Over Houston is the same weekend as the Lone Star Biker Rally, an annual event that is held in Galveston every year and attracts tens of thousands. If WOH and the Lone Star Rally are scheduled for the same weekend in 2010, we will probably have to rethink our options as hotel rates in Galveston will be inflated that weekend. Since the Lone Star Flight Museum is also located in Galveston, it still presents an attraction that would be of interest to our members if we should decide to go there on a different date.)

### **Other Reunions/Events of Interest**

There are a number of airlift-related groups that are holding reunions or events that should be of interest to TCTAA members. If you know of any, please Email the dates and pertinent information to either [SEMcGowanJr@aol.com](mailto:SEMcGowanJr@aol.com) or [sammcgowan@troopcarrier.org](mailto:sammcgowan@troopcarrier.org) and we'll post them on the web site. The 815<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron (Flying Jennies) is going to meet in Little Rock in the spring. The 17<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron/Firebirds will be having their biannual reunion in Galveston in April and veterans of the C-130 flare mission are planning a reunion in St. Lucie, Florida in May (all of these events are in 2010.) The biannual Professional Loadmasters Association "Gathering of Loads" will be in San Antonio in September, 2010 – if you are a loadmaster and interested in the PLA Alamo Chapter, contact Andy Vaquera at [andyvaquera@sbcglobal.net](mailto:andyvaquera@sbcglobal.net) for details.

## **TCTAA Email Group**

We'd like to encourage all members to join the TCTAA Email group if you're not already a subscriber. To subscribe, just go to the web site at [www.troopcarrier.org/home.html](http://www.troopcarrier.org/home.html) and look for the Email group link. So far, we have about 25 subscribers.

Unfortunately, we've had to discontinue our guest book and Forum due to hackers.

## **Contribution to PLA 2010 Convention Fund**

A recommendation was made to the board that the Association serve as a sponsor for the Professional Loadmasters Association 2010 Convention, which is being held in San Antonio in September 2010. Andy Vaquera is the president of the Alamo Chapter of the PLA. After some discussion and consideration of the TCTAA's status as a wartime veteran's association as recognized by the Internal Revenue Service, Ace Bowman, our Chairman, decided it would probably be best at the present time for members to make contributions individually rather than through the Association. (While the PLA is made up primarily of veterans, it is not exclusively a veteran's organization. The IRS code defines a wartime veterans organization as an organization of which at least 90% of the membership is made up of veterans who have served in the military in wartime, defined by IRC 170 (c) (3). There are some gaps, specifically from a point in the mid-fifties to 1961 and from 1975 to 1990, which are not considered as "wartime." While a veterans organization has to be 75% veterans of the US military, a wartime veterans organization requires a membership of 90% "wartime veterans." The essential difference is in how contributions are recognized by the IRS – contributions to wartime veterans organizations are fully tax deductible while there are considerations as to what is deductible and what isn't to a veterans organizations.)

If you would like to make a contribution to the Alamo Chapter of the Professional Loadmaster Association 2010 Convention, contact Andy Vaguera at [andyvaquera@sbcglobal.net](mailto:andyvaquera@sbcglobal.net).

## **SPARE 617, C-130E 62-1787**



A particular item of interest for many of our members is that C-130E 62-1787 is slated to go to the USAF Museum. This is the airplane that Captain William Caldwell's crew was flying on the SPARE 617 mission over An Loc on April 15, 1972 when it was struck by ground fire that killed the flight engineer, TSgt. Jon Sander, and caused major damage to the airplane. Captain Caldwell and loadmaster SSgt. Charles L. Shaub

were both awarded the Air Force Cross for their actions that day. It is currently assigned to the Arkansas Air National Guard at Little Rock AFB, Arkansas. The date of the presentation is unknown, but we're hoping there will be enough advance notice for a contingent of TCTAA members to be present.

### **Four Horsemen Airplane**

If you were in C-130s in the old days, you know Bill Hatfield, who was one of the original C-130 pilots at Ardmore. If you don't know him personally, you've heard of him as he was the slot pilot for the legendary FOUR HORSEMEN aerial demonstration team that was part of the 774<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron at Ardmore AFB, OK and Sewart AFB, Tennessee. Bill and Jim Akins are the surviving members of the team, which consisted of the two of them along with Hubert "Gene" Chaney and David Moore. Other pilots flew with them in the right seat while the flight mechanic was whoever was assigned to whatever airplane they happened to be flying. As the fame of The Horsemen grew, Lockheed decided to make a film about them. Bill and John Dale flew the slot airplane for the film, C-130A 56-0473. Bill recently learned that 0473 now belongs to a fire-fighting company in California and plans are underway for a reunion between it and the crew.



### **The Bamboo Fleet**

In December 1941 Japan attacked US forces in Hawaii and the Philippines, precipitating America's entry into World War II. Close to 100,000 American and Filipino troops were on the island of Luzon, but the attack on Pearl Harbor so demoralized the US Navy that it was reluctant to risk its remaining forces to attempt to protect ships bringing reinforcements and

supplies to the Philippines. Consequently, the US forces in the islands were left to fend for themselves as best they could until the inevitable finally occurred. Japan expected to conquer the island of Luzon in just a few weeks and was not prepared for the fierce defense put up by the defenders, who were not aware that they had been abandoned by their government. Although their situation was desperate – Col. Harold George, commander of V Interceptor Command, had told the pilots of the 34<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Group three days before the attacks that their mission wasn't suicidal, but that it was close – the men on Luzon were not completely cut-off from the outside. Ships that had been on their way to Luzon at the outbreak of war had been diverted to Cebu and even though Japanese troops had landed at Davao on Mindanao, US forces held most of the island including a number of airstrips on the Del Monte Pineapple Plantation. A meager air transport force in Australia had been given responsibility for resupplying the Philippines and was making frequent flights into Mindanao.

On Christmas Day General Douglas MacArthur declared Manila an open city and the last US troops left the city and moved onto the island of Bataan. Although the headquarters of the Far East Air Force had been ordered to move to Australia, two pursuit groups equipped with some twenty-six fighters remained and were ordered to airfields on Bataan. There were considerably more pilots and mechanics in the islands than there were combat airplanes. Although there had been no air transport units in the Philippines at the outbreak of the war, two units were formed from the civilian air charter companies operating in the islands. The larger twin-engine transports were sent to Australia but about half a dozen smaller single-engine airplanes remained in the islands under the loose command of Major William "Jitters" Bradford, a former civilian pilot who had joined the Army as an engineering officer in 1940 before the outbreak of war. The squadron consisted initially of a Beechcraft Staggerwing, a Stinson bi-plane that had formerly been used as a trainer by the Philippines Air Force, an Army O-1 observation plane and a two-place Bellanca. It was later augmented with a single-engine Grumman flying boat that had crashed in the water and was resurrected by naval personnel under the supervision of Captain (later General) Joe Moore. Bradford and his men dodged Japanese fighters and ships to bring in badly needed medical supplies and rations from Cebu and Mindanao and evacuated men that had been identified by the military as crucial personnel. The collection of civilian airplanes was nicknamed The Bamboo Fleet by the airmen on Bataan.



The first mission of the Bamboo Fleet was authorized by Col. George when Major Bradford suggested he be allowed to fly the Bellanca to Cebu. George gave permission and "Jitter Bill" came back with a load of quinine, plasma and food which he stuffed in his shirt and every nook and cranny on the airplane. He went back for a second load and after that the Bamboo Fleet airplanes were going out nearly every day on foraging missions looking for rations and supplies. They were evidently sometimes joined by the fighter

pilots in the P-35s. The mixed-bag of aircraft were also sometimes used to airdrop supplies to guerrilla units operating in the hills on Luzon. The pilots flew as low as they possibly could to camouflage themselves and avoid detection by the hordes of Japanese aircraft that ruled the skies. Bradford told one observer that he never flew any higher than 25 feet above the wave tops.

The Bamboo Fleet airplanes continued operating even after the fall of Bataan. Their numbers had dwindled due to accident and mechanical failure, but none were lost to enemy action. Their last mission was to Corregidor, when Bradford picked up three men that General MacArthur's headquarters wanted flown out of the island before it fell. One was a Japanese-American intelligence agent who had been operating in Manila, the second was also a Japanese-American civilian who had worked underground for US intelligence and the third was a Chinese general who had been caught on Luzon. The official history of the Army Air Forces reported that the Bellanca was destroyed in a crash, but this is a cover story. Bradford and a Philippines Air Line civilian pilot went into Corregidor with Bradford flying the Bellanca and the

PAL pilot the Stinson. Neither had landed on the very short strip before and both airplanes suffered some damage. But the damage was repaired and the two airplanes departed and flew back to Panay. Bradford brought the two agents and the Chinese general out in the Bellanca and the PAL pilot came out with five passengers. The eight men were picked up by the legendary Major Paul I. "Pappy" Gunn who had come to Mindanao on a special mission under the command of Brigadier General Ralph Royce, and who remained behind when the rest of the force departed to pick up the VIPs in his B-25. The fate of the pilots of the Bamboo Fleet is unclear. Lt. Col. Edwin Dyess, commander of the 21<sup>st</sup> Pursuit Squadron, reported after his escape from a POW camp on Mindanao that Bradford made it to Mindanao, but was captured. Very little was known about them outside of the men who were on Bataan, but to them they were heroes.



### **Medal of Honor**

Vietnam airlift veterans are familiar with the story of C-123 pilot Lt. Col. Joe M. Jackson, who was awarded the Medal of Honor for landing under fire to pick up members of a stranded Airlift Mission Control Team that had been left on the ground when the camp at Kham Duc was evacuated. It is commonly asserted that Jackson is the only person to have been awarded the Medal of Honor for an airlift

mission, but in reality he was actually the third. Two US Army Air Service officers, Lieutenants Harold E. Goettler and Erwin R. Bleckley were awarded the prestigious medal for a mission on October 6, 1918 a few weeks before the signing of the Armistice that ended The Great War.

Members of the 50<sup>th</sup> Aero Squadron, pilot Goettler and observer Bleckley volunteered to attempt to locate the "Lost Battalion," the US Army 308<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion of the 77<sup>th</sup> Division, which was surrounded by strong German forces and cut-off from all resupply and reinforcement for six days during the Argonne Offensive. The two airmen loaded their De Havilland DH-4 with medical supplies, chocolate and cigarettes and went out in search of the battalion, who were occupying a ravine near Charlevoux. The commander, Major Charles S. Whittlesey, who would also be awarded the Medal of Honor, sent out carrier pigeons with word of their plight. One pigeon, which bore the name Cher Ami (Dear Friend), reached friendly forces and brought word of the battalion's plight. With no means of delivering supplies to the starving men overland, the 50<sup>th</sup> Aero Squadron was asked to send out a volunteer mission. Goettler and Bleckley located the position and managed to drop their load of supplies, but their airplane received considerable ground fire and suffered damage.

The two airmen returned to their field at Remicourt Aerodrome, where they worked with the ground crew to repair the damage in anticipation of a second mission. Their commander warned the two airmen that the second mission would be even more dangerous than the first

since the Germans would be expecting them. Bleckley reportedly responded that they would find the battalion again and make the delivery or die trying. Goettler took the cumbersome biplane in over the position occupied by the besieged infantrymen right down on the tops of the trees, so low that they were in range of rock-throwing infantrymen. But it wasn't a rock that brought them down. A single bullet struck the intrepid pilot in the head, and probably killed him instantly. The airplane crashed inside Allied lines and observer Bleckley was thrown from the wreckage by the impact. He was taken to a hospital but died of internal injuries. Four years later, in 1922, the two airmen were honored with the award of the Medal of Honor, only four of which were awarded to members of the Air Service.

Frenchmen took note of the men's heroism. On October 7, 2009 special ceremonies were held at Remicourt Aerodrome where a plaque honoring the two men was unveiled.

### **Return of Remains**

Due to a concentrated effort by the US Army's grave registrations division, remains of US servicemen are being found, identified and returned to the United States for proper burial. The most recent interment of interest to troop carrier/tactical airlifters was the interment of remains that had been recently identified as being those of members of a C-130 flareship crew from the 41<sup>st</sup> Tactical Airlift Squadron at Naha AB, Okinawa who were lost on an airplane that was shot down near the border between Laos and South Vietnam on May 22, 1968. Some of the remains from this crew had previously been identified but the remains of loadmaster John Q. Adams and Thomas Kneble were recently identified and buried with military honors. There is some question as to why Kneble was onboard the airplane that night as he was not an aircrew member and was actually an instrument technician. He may have been onboard to service the recently installed Night Observation Device or may have just been along for the ride.

### **Det 1, 314<sup>th</sup> TCW/TAW Recently Honored**

Detachment 1, 314<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Wing was recently honored with the Presidential Unit Citation at a ceremony at the Stray Goose Reunion at Ft. Walton Beach, Florida. USAF Chief of Staff General Norton Swartz, a former C-130 pilot, presented the award, which was obtained through the efforts of Dick Sell, a pilot who deployed to CCK Air Base, ROC in 1966 with the Stray Goose detachment which operated the C-130E-(I) "Combat Talon" on classified special operations missions in Southeast Asia. Although the MACV Special Operations Group had been awarded a Presidential Unit Citation for the period September 1, 1966 to March 15, 1968, Detachment 1, 314<sup>th</sup> TCW/TAW had been left off of the order, perhaps due to the unit's unique status as a TDY unit to Vietnam during that time period. Det. 1 included pilots, navigators, flight engineers, loadmasters, radio operators, maintenance and operations personnel who had been specially qualified in the modified C-130E. All personnel who were members of the unit during that time frame are eligible to have the award added to their personnel records and wear the ribbon.