

The Airlifter Volume XIII



The Airlifter

Newsletter of the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association

Promoting and preserving troop carrier/tactical airlift heritage

November 14, 2010

Volume XIII

Association Finances

As of July 31 Association finances stood at \$7,130.51. Since that time we have taken in \$4,578.00. Expenditures have been \$5494.28, leaving a current balance of \$6,214.23. Expenditures include \$98.00 for postage and printing, \$29.00 for domain renewal and \$432.99 for a reconditioned projector purchased from Fry's Electronics. The remainder is for convention expenses, which includes \$641.19 paid to Expression Designs of San Antonio for convention T-shirts which are covered by reunion revenue and TCTAA golf shirts which are in our inventory for sale to members. Our balance includes a disputed charge of \$300.00 made by the limo company we used for the air show. Their representative had assured me that the quoted price of \$300.00 was for the round trip, but upon checking our bank statement we discovered that they had charged \$300.00 for the trip up and again for the trip back. I've talked to the owner and he indicated he would refund it, but it hasn't shown up on our account yet. The \$6,214.23 is what we actually have in the bank as of today's date. The projector is an asset that will be available for presentations at future events. We decided to buy it because the Galveston Convention Bureau informed us at the last minute that theirs would not be available. We checked on renting and discovered that the daily rental rate was \$150.00 and decided to check other options.

Convention Report



TOM STALVEY AND STEVE PRIVETTE

a fantastic time and enjoyed the time we spent getting to know one another. Unfortunately, Carl and Vonna Wyrick were unable to attend due to personal issues. We also got word on the same day that Jim Esbeck also had some issues arise and was going to be unable to attend the convention.

On Saturday, October 16 four convention members and three spouses boarded the cruise ship Carnival Ecstasy at the Galveston cruise terminal for five days on the Gulf of Mexico, with stops at Progreso and Cozumel, Mexico. The weather was absolutely fantastic – you could not have asked for better. Temperatures were mild, winds were light and humidity was low. The seas were light, so light that it was difficult to tell we were even on a ship at sea! Ace and Mary Bowman, Steve and Linda Privette, Sam and Ronda McGowan and Tom Stalvey all had

We returned to Galveston early on Thursday morning and were joined at the Victorian Hotel by Jim and Ruth Elmer, Ken and Patricia Abbott, Bobby Gassiott and his wife (who's name is a

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BOBBY AND ACES'S PRESENTATION

member. Mike is a retired loadmaster and is heavily involved with a number of organizations, including the Airlift/Tanker Association and the Professional Loadmasters Association. After Mike's presentation we car-pooled to the Lone Star Flight Museum. While the museum suffered a considerable amount of damage during Hurricane Ike and has yet to fully recover, the front building is open and they still have a good collection of World War II vintage aircraft.

victim of my CRS at the moment), Dean Robnett, Al Clime, Dennis Ybarra, Mike Welch and Stony Burk. The food served by Benno's of Galveston was outstanding, as always. On Friday morning we had our members meeting. Due to the small number present, we decided not to have a separate board meeting. The minutes are below. After lunch we were treated to an excellent presentation by member Mike Welch of Boeing, about the Boeing C-130 Avionics Modification Program. We were glad to have Mike there for the presentation and are especially glad to have him as a



After touring the museum, we made the trip to Texas City and the Bay Street Park, the location of the 1st Aero Squadron memorial and the birthplace of the United States Air Force. While some of us had been there before, many had not and everyone seemed to feel something special at being on hallowed ground. We had a short service during which we thought about those we have lost. For several of us the time was particularly poignant due to the recent death of Ron Downs, who passed away a few days before and who had been with us in Galveston the last time we were there in 2006.

We returned to the hotel where we had our banquet that evening, once again a bountiful feast of outstanding food prepared by Benno's team. Benno himself was not with us this year due to having had recent surgery. After the banquet we were entertained by Bobby Gassio and Ace Bowman's stories of their experiences in early Vietnam operations on Mule Train/Sawbuck II in C-123s. Bobby will have to write out an account explaining the Chicken Airdrop Method.



show we boarded the bus and returned to the hotel. Steve Privette brought in some fantastic barbecue from Grand Prize Barbecue in Texas City.

The next morning we boarded a bus for Ellington Field and the Wings Over Houston Air Show. We were disappointed that there were no C-130s on static display. Stony and I were also miffed that the C-17 that was there was not open to the public. I have since learned that it was not open due to a safety issue since the airplane was part of the air show and there is a 2-hour brake cooling limit after a short-field landing. Everyone eventually ended up in our Prime View seating where we had a great view of the events as they unfolded in front us. After the

After we returned to the hotel, the entire group assembled one more time for the barbecue and some last minute socializing before leaving the next morning. Ace and several others voiced their opinion that while we were disappointed that the turnout hadn't been larger, at the same

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time those who were there had a better opportunity to get to know everyone who was there. Those who were there had a great time. We really missed those who weren't!

Meeting Minutes

October 22, 2010 Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 0910 by Chairman Ace Bowman. Due to the number of members attending, the Board and Members meetings were combined. Board members Ace Bowman, Bobby Gassiott and Sam McGowan were present. Minutes of the last meeting were read by Sam McGowan and were approved as read. In the absence of Treasurer Ralph Bemis, Sam McGowan read the treasurer's report. The meeting was opened up for old business and Sam McGowan reported on the establishment of special memorial web pages for TSgt. Charles L. Shaub, Major Warren "Huey" Long and Col. Charles W. Howe, which were suggested at the 2008 meeting. During the discussion, Tom Stalvey suggested an airlift memorial page, which moved us into New Business. We discussed the amending of the By-Laws changing the membership terms from one year to two years and five years to six years to reflect our biannual conventions. A motion was made by Ace Bowman to amend the By-Laws and was seconded by Bobby Gassiott. The motion passed with none opposed.

Sam McGowan brought up the possibility of our joining with the Clark Field Cemetery Association in sponsoring legislation to have the cemetery become part of the US National Cemetery program. We decided that Ace Bowman, Sam McGowan and Tom Stalvey would pursue the matter for future action.

Due to several upcoming vacancies and the end of the terms for some officers, we appointed a nominating committee consisting of Dennis Ybarra, Tom Stalvey, Bobby Gassiott and Dean Robnett who will recommend a slate of officers and board members whose names will be placed on a ballot which will be mailed to members immediately after the first of the year. Those present decided to place names for all officer and board member slots on the ballot. The nominating committee will contact present officers and board members to determine their interest in continuing to serve.

We then turned to the selection of a site for our next convention/reunion. Several sites were suggested, including Little Rock; Dulles Airport; Warner-Robins, Georgia; Tucson, AZ and Branson, Missouri as possibilities. In view of there being at least three known events already scheduled for Dayton, Ohio in 2012, we decided it would not be considered for that year but should be held for a future date.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:10 AM.

My New Guinea Diary and the 6th TCS

A few weeks ago some of the officers were contacted by the publisher of a newly released book written by the late Maj. Ernest C. Ford, who went to New Guinea in September, 1942 with the 6th Troop Carrier Squadron. At the time of the deployment Ernie was a young Staff Sergeant

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pilot and the aircraft commander – they were called first pilots then – of an all-NCO crew. In fact, more than half of the squadron's pilots were NCOs, then later on when thirteen Australian pilots were transferred into the squadron, they were also NCOs. Unfortunately, Ernie passed away before the book was released and the initial run was made without a final edit because the publisher had no idea what kind of sales to expect. I have read the book, as have Ace and Hector. My personal opinion is that this is a book that should be read by all troop carrier/tactical airlift veterans and anyone who has an interest in World War II.

Author Ford answers a lot of questions that are not fully covered in other books. For instance, there were no navigators assigned to the squadron. A contingent of professional navigators, mostly reservists, joined the squadron at Hamilton Field for the overwater flight to Australia, the first made by a troop carrier squadron. Once they reached Australia, the navigators left and returned to the US to make future ferry flights. The book also answers questions as to how cargo loading and ejection was accomplished and who did it. Although Air Corps personnel were later trained to supervise cargo loading, the loads were brought to the airplane and loaded by Australian soldiers – diggers – who had been given a course on how to load the cargo and how to kick it out. Once the airplane was loaded, the loading team climbed aboard and flew with the crew to the drop zone – which was pointed out by the senior member of the loading team since the crews had no maps and no navigational aids. One of the loading team members assumed a position in front of the open cargo door with his back against the wall. As the other soldiers pushed the bundles in front of him, he kicked them out. No one was wearing a parachute. At the completion of the drop the loading team left the airplane and began a march to join their unit at the place where the cargo had been delivered.



6TH TCS - BULLY BEEF
EXPRESS

There are some truly remarkable features of troop carrier operations that are revealed in this book. For one thing, when the 6th TCS first arrived at Port Moresby, Japanese troops were only a few miles away. The airfield came under daily attack. Missions were scheduled so that the C-47s became airborne before the Japanese planes made their daily attack and returned after they left. Early missions were flown without fighter escort except for a single Royal Australian Air Force Whirraway, which was a T-6 trainer with a

couple of machineguns installed. The Whirraway's mission was not to protect the transports, but to keep an eye out for Japanese fighters. The C-47 pilots were briefed that if they saw the T-6 dive for the trees, they were to follow and begin evasive action at treetop altitudes. Thanks to the support provided by the troop carriers – which also included two squadrons based in Australia which flew up to Port Moresby for missions, then returned to Townsville – the Japanese lines were pushed further and further away from Moresby. Within just a few weeks, the Japanese lines had been pushed back from the front door of Moresby to more than sixty miles away.

The men of the 6th TCS and the 21st, 22nd and 33rd squadrons flew missions under conditions that would make the hair stand on end on modern airlifters, including those flying the sophisticated MC-130. They operated almost daily under low ceilings with visibilities of a mile or even less in mountainous terrain. Not only that, their drop zones – and airfields that were later captured – were often several miles inside enemy territory and within a few miles of Japanese airbases where some of the enemy's most capable fighter pilots were based. What is

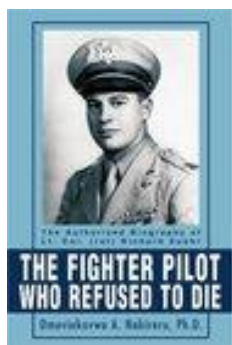
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even more remarkable is that S/Sgt. Ford flew for six months in an airplane with a broken attitude indicator! He flew strictly by needle, ball and airspeed under instrument conditions in some of the most rugged terrain in the world. Ernie picked the airplane up brand new at the Douglas factory in Mobile, Alabama. The ASI and autopilot were both written up, but due to the urgency of the deployment and the lack of parts, neither was ever replaced. He and his crew flew the same airplane until sometime in early 1943 when they got a new one that had been brought over by the 317th Troop Carrier Group.

Ernie Ford participated in some of the most dramatic operations in troop carrier history, including the reinforcement of the outpost at Wau, where he was next in line to takeoff when ground fire brought down a C-47 from another squadron. The pilot tried to climb and became an easy target instead of staying on the trees until he was away from the immediate vicinity of the field. He was also part of the formation that had just arrived at Wau a few days later when a formation of Japanese fighters appeared overhead. Fortunately, the P-39s that had been the primary fighter in New Guinea to that point had been supplemented by new twin-boom P-38s. Japanese air superiority was no more. He and most of the rest of the enlisted pilots were given battlefield commissions as second lieutenants in mid-1943. After a year in combat the 6th TCS was transferred back to Australia where it assumed responsibility for logistical operations into Port Moresby. By the end of his tour, Ford (who is not the famous Tennessee Ernie Ford, who was also an Army Air Forces veteran – he served as a B-29 bombardier) had accrued an astonishing 364 combat missions, the most flown by any World War II US airman, and had been awarded six DFCs. He was put in for a Silver Star and while it is shown as having been awarded in squadron records, he never received it and it was never post on his record. After his return home he was sent on a War Bond Tour.

Lt. Col. Richard “Dick” Suehr



I recently learned of this book while talking to long-time flight engineer Bill Collier, who is retired in Fayetteville, NC. Bill asked me if I knew that there was a book about Col. Suehr, who commanded the Air Weather Service detachment at Pope for many years until his retirement. Col. Suehr holds a special place in my memory. When I first arrived at Pope as a young airman right out of maintenance tech school in December, 1963 I spent a lot of time at the base service club. Col. Suehr was a regular fixture at the club.

Instead of going to the officers club each evening after he got off work, he'd go to the service club and spend the evening playing cards with the enlisted men. I knew him well. We were on a first-name basis – I called him Colonel and he called me Sam. Yet, even though I spent countless hours in his presence and knew that he had been a fighter pilot in World War II, not once

did he ever mention any of his experiences. It wasn't until after I left Pope and an article came out about him in AIRMAN magazine that I found out that he had been one of the first aces. It turns out that he was one of the first fighter pilots to see combat in World War II.

In January 1942 he left on a ship for the Philippines, but was diverted into Australia due to the Allied retreat into Bataan. He joined a squadron equipped with P-40s and was on the way to Darwin headed for Java when he lost an engine and made a force-landing in the Australian Outback. He was over jungle when he went down. It took him ten days to walk out. At one

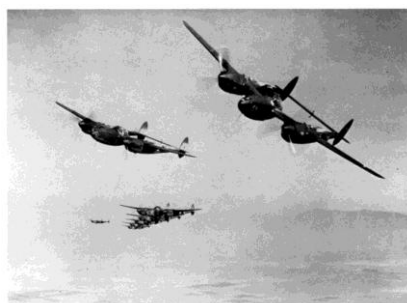
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point he swam a crocodile-infested lake. It was when he was about to make his third dive in an attempt at retrieving the survival equipment he had some lost when he spotted a large crocodile preparing to attack! Without the equipment, he continued his trek until he finally encountered



a railway. A few hours later a train stopped and picked him up and took him to the nearest town with a hospital where an Australian doctor was so convinced that he had gangrene that he told the staff not to feed him. It was only after senior Army Air Forces officers learned that one of their pilots was in a hospital that he was finally released and taken to another hospital for proper medical treatment. The “gangrene” was actually dye from his socks.

As it turned out, while he was on his trek his entire squadron was wiped out during a Japanese attack on Darwin. Dick was reassigned to a new squadron flying P-39s, and in May, 1942 moved up to Port Moresby for combat. Even though the Japanese Zeros out-classed the P-39s, the rugged little airplanes were equally as capable at low altitudes and Dick managed to



down at least two Zeros. He shot down the fifth airplane with which he was credited in a P-38 while at the end of his first tour. He returned to the US and was eventually assigned to Selfridge Field, Michigan as a combat tactics instructor working with the all-black 332nd Fighter Group. After the 332nd departed for overseas, he was transferred to Godman Field, Kentucky to train an initial cadre of black B-25 pilots. Although he had gotten married and started a family, he grew tired of instructor duty and applied to go back overseas. After initial training on Mindanao, he moved up to Leyte and went into combat in P-38s. On his eleventh mission his wingtip

struck the water and he went into the sea and was believed dead. His family was notified that he had been KIA. He had actually survived the crash and managed to reach a deserted island, where he managed to signal Filipino fishermen. After spending several weeks with guerrillas, he eventually rejoined his squadron. After the war he became a weather officer and spent his last years at Pope, where he was a fixture on the base.

I have to admit that while Col. Suehr's story is exciting, the book leaves a bit to be desired. The author is a Nigerian and there are some difficulties with grammar. There is also a lot of what I consider superfluous information that really adds nothing to the story. Still, I'd recommend it to anyone who knew the colonel.

One Family



During the years since I became interested in troop carrier/tactical airlift history, I have become more and more convinced that we are all part of one family. In some cases it's an extended family while in other cases it's close. I was made aware of this at the first troop carrier homecoming in 2005, and was made more aware at our recent convention. Although the attendance was small, we had men there who had served in all of the tactical commands and a number of individual squadrons were represented. By my recollection and our records, the

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following squadrons were represented: 3rd, 4th and 5th Aerial Port, 17th, 18th, 21st, 29th, 32nd, 35th, 41st, 47th, 61st, 62nd, 68th, 346th, 347th, 606th (Air Commando), 772nd, 773rd, 774th, 776th, 777th, 778th, 779th and 815th. The 6485th Operations Squadron was also represented. A number of missions were represented – for instance, there were five people present who had participated in C-123 and C-130 flare missions. We also had people who flew FACT SHEET and JILLI leaflet missions, COMMANDO VAULT C-130 bomb missions, MULE TRAIN/SAWBUCK II. Our present chairman, Ace Bowman, was involved with HEAVY CHAIN. We had pilots, navigators, engineers, loadmasters and crew chiefs whose military experience dates back to the 1950s and continued into the 1990s and who had flown a variety of airplanes, including C-54s, C-118s, C-119s, C-123s and C-130s.



It is because of this that our organization is so important. No other organization is dedicated to the troop carrier mission and its legacy through the years. There are individual unit reunion groups and professional organizations but none focus on the troop carrier/tactical airlift mission, and none are devoted to the family as a whole. This is unfortunate because the tree is ignored in favor of individual branches – and in some cases, twigs. While peacetime military

experiences, particularly for those who only served for the minimum required time, is often associated with a particular squadron, from 1966 into the 1970s in Vietnam, experiences are corporate. My personal Southeast Asia experience involved TDY from Pope, where we operated as a squadron, and PCS to Naha and Clark where individual crews from each squadron were assigned to operating locations in Vietnam and Thailand. I spent a couple of months at Ubon, Thailand on the flare mission where there was no squadron identity – crews from all four squadrons at Naha as well as the 815th at Tachikawa participated. Some loadmasters were from the 7th APS. All five squadrons operated together at Cam Ranh Bay. When I went to Clark in 1969 we operated under a similar arrangement, at a forward location first at Tan Son Nhut, then at Cam Ranh Bay with four other squadrons, all from Clark. At Cam Rhan we shared quarters on Herky Hill with crews first from the CCK wing, then with Naha and Tachi crews. We had different barracks on Herky Hill but they were adjacent to each other and we ate together in the same chow hall and socialized together in the clubs and on the barracks balconys. Bull sessions often included people from both of whichever wings were operating out of Cam Ranh at the time. Each day there might be a BOOKIE C-123, along with an IGLOO, SPARE and TERRY C-130 following each other into a forward airfield. Since the C-123s operated out of Phan Rang while the C-130s were at Cam Ranh and Tan Son Nhut, there was no off-duty socializing between people flying the two types, but in many cases crewmembers from each had known each other on previous assignments in the States, or would upon returning Stateside. The same can be said of the Caribous.

One of the goals of our organization is promoting camaraderie among troop carrier/tactical airlift veterans. One of the best ways we can all do this is by spreading the word about our organization and encouraging others to join.

TCTAA Promotional Items



In 2006 when we had our first official convention as a group in San Antonio, Andy Vaquera and Hector Leyva had some T-shirts for the convention made up and golf shirts made up for sale to members. The golf shirts are great-

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looking shirts, available in either blue or black. We've had to raise the price to \$25.00 plus shipping and handling due to a wholesale price increase. Many members have purchased one or two at conventions or have ordered them by mail. Ordering information is on the web site at www.troopcarrier.org; click on the promotional items link. All proceeds go into our treasury. We are looking into increasing the line of available items.

Ace Bowman suggested having a patch made available which could be sewn onto the pocket of a blazer. Another possibility is the design and purchase of a TCTAA cap.

Let me illustrate what these items can do. A few weeks ago right after our convention I took my car into a local oil change place for an oil change and lube job. I was wearing my PACAF troop carrier cap, which Bob Ruffin had made up for our 2005 Homecoming. When I got out of the car and went to talk to the attendant, he asked "Are you Sam?" It turned out that he is a retired USAF flight engineer and is one of my Facebook friends! I had no idea we are neighbors.

Corporate Sponsorship

Because of our status as a wartime veteran's organization, all contributions to the TCTAA are fully tax-deductible. We received corporate sponsorship from two organizations for our recent convention. Del Papa Distributors of Galveston contributed four cases of Budweiser for our hospitality room while Triton Corporation of Houston contributed \$500.00. Corporate sponsorship allows charitable organizations to make a contribution to help the organization meet its goals. During our members meeting Tom Stalvey commented that he is going to ask his employer, a large banking company in Atlanta that is veteran-friendly, to make a contribution. Contributions above and beyond membership dues allow organizations to publish documents and books. They can also allow the establishment of scholarships. For example, young plebes and midshipmen at the nation's military academies and students on ROTC scholarships are required to pay for uniforms, computers and other items that can amount to more than their family is able to afford. As a recognized charitable organization, we can also make a difference in the lives of our members and others who are caught in natural disaster or who experience financial difficulties due to serious illness. If you think your employer would be willing to make a contribution, have them send a check to our treasurer.

Glider Legacy in the U.S. Air Force

By Charles L. Day, author,



Silent Ones WWII Invasion Glider Test & Experiment Clinton County Army Air Field Wilmington, Ohio

The Glider Branch engineering at Wright Field was responsible for glider designs, acceptance, flight tests, modifications and contracts for manufacturing gliders during WWII. At inception in February 1941, Major Frederick Dent, Jr. (soon to be Colonel) was appointed head of this branch by General Arnold. From the beginning, the Branch struggled amongst the powered aircraft enthusiasts at Wright Field, most whom

despised the gliders and wanted nothing to do with them. The Branch was not large and at first there

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were only five enlisted men attached to the Branch to do the grunt work. They only had soaring gliders to test as trainers.

As one of these enlisted men put it to me, we were so despised that when we would get a glider ready to go for a tow, one particular flight line officer would get on the loud speaker and yell, "*Get those bastards off my field!*"



As you can see in this 1943 photograph, Wright runways were not fully completed until middle of 1943. The field was being crowded with new aircraft plus the almost continuous modifications to new and old aircraft.

The Glider Branch opened its own private test and experiment field near Wilmington, Ohio approximately 35 miles from Wright Field.

BGen. Robert Cardenas photo

There was no real glider experience in the USAAC in the beginning and there were no military gliders. There was not even a glider design in the USAAC. Gliders had been deemed impractical for power plane pilot training in the early 1930's. Major Dent had to start from scratch. He had to find soaring gliders, create various glider specifications, bring engineers and enlisted men into the Glider Branch, co-ordinate Glider Branch activities with other Wright Field Branches, fly and oversee glider test flights, find potential manufacturers and approve contracts to those willing companies. Major Dent brought in Major Bruce Price as his assistant and as quickly as possible brought in soaring glider pilots, newly trained power pilots and civilian and military aeronautical engineers.

There were severe restrictions placed on glider design and manufacturers. The gliders could not use aluminum. It was reserved for power plane production. In order to not interfere with power plane production, no aircraft manufacturer currently involved in power plane production could be contracted to produce gliders. This rule was somewhat broken by contracts let to Ford Motor Company and to Cessna/Boeing. Otherwise, only small aircraft manufacturing companies and companies with metal and wood working experience had to be used.

Eleven companies were asked to submit glider designs and only four of them responded. The glider designs were to be eight and fifteen passenger including pilots. Of these eight proposed designs, only five were delivered to Wright Field. One failed stress testing and two were deemed not satisfactory for military use. A part of this unsatisfactory status for those two designs was created because General Arnold had expressed a desire for an airborne Jeep with wings that could hold two men and guns, fly behind enemy lines, land, shed its wings and drive off into combat. The materials used for building these gliders were the same as used since the Wright Brothers flew their first powered glider; wood, plywood, steel tube and fabric.

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Some claim that WACO Aircraft Company of Troy, Ohio won the design competition for the USAAC military gliders. It is true that WACO won the competition but the reason was more by default than anything else because the others did not meet design study requirements or failed structural load tests.



USAAF photo, C.L. Day collection. First XCG-4 glider at CCAAF, Wilmington, Ohio. Circa June 1942. Willys, flat grill Jeep. Col. Fred R. Dent, Jr. on hood. Sgt. Elwyn Gardner, driver. Lt. Col. Bruce Price, sunglasses. "Others look familiar" link.

The fuselage of the second XCG-4 WACO glider was wide enough and long enough that it could carry the newly designed ¼ ton truck; General Arnold's flying Jeep! Other slight modifications to the design changed the production designation to CG-4A.

The unique design of the XCG-4 was that the cockpit hinged at the top and could be raised so the entire height and width of the cargo section was accessible to load the Jeep (1/4 Ton truck), ¼ Ton trailer, 75mm howitzer, 57mm anti-tank gun, Clarkaire bulldozer, or other bulky large cargo. As well, there was a troop door on each side at the rear and an "escape" hatch at the half-way point in the cargo section on each side.



The British were already building the Horsa glider which could carry the total gross weight of the CG-4A as cargo. They were working on the Hamilcar glider design which could carry a small tank. Col Dent realizing the necessity for a larger glider visited England and brought a set of Horsa plans back to Wright Field. The Horsa had to be loaded from the side using long, steep loading ramps, the same way as was a C-47 or a C-46. To make battlefield unloading of the Horsa faster, provision was made to blow the tail off. The Hamilcar nose/cockpit hinged to the side for loading and unloading. The USAAF had adapted this same idea that cargo had to be loaded from the front or side of the aircraft.

(Imperial War Museum photograph)

Apparently this idea had something to do with aircraft structural engineering beliefs concerning fuselage strength.

Mr. Jack Laister grew up in Wyandotte, MI and built his first glider along with his buddy, and later soaring altitude record setter, Emerson Mehlhose. Laister had set up a glider manufacturing business in St. Louis, MO. His experience building soaring gliders enabled Laister to obtain an Army contract for soaring gliders.

Laister delivered his XTG-4 stress test article to Colonel Dent at Wright Field December 2, 1941. After Colonel Dent verified Laister's security clearance, he showed Laister the Horsa prints and asked if he could build the glider. Laister replied that he could do a better design that could carry much more weight. The Army specified the aircraft be front loading.

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Driving back to St. Louis, Laister vividly recalled landing his soaring gliders in tall weeds and envisioned not being able to open the front loading doors after landing because of nose damage or obstructions. In addition to front loading doors, he added rear loading doors to his XCG-10 design. Flight tests were successful and proved the design capable of carrying more weight using the same wings on a longer, wider fuselage. The USAAF conceded and the XCG-10A was built with only rear loading doors. An added feature was a loading ramp which dropped down when the clamshell doors were opened. The ramp was part of the fuselage, locked in place when the doors

closed. This 105 foot wingspan glider was capable of 32,000 lb loaded gross weight and could carry a 155mm howitzer.

Lew Stowe was a civilian Glider Branch engineer during WWII and stayed with the Glider Branch at Wright Field after 1945. Stowe was much impressed with the XCG-10A loading ramp design as well as the wing design of the XCG-14 glider designed by Michael Stroukoff.



Stowe felt there was a need for an aircraft that could quickly deliver combat equipment behind or near enemy lines without landing. This wing gave the XCG-14A glider low, slow flight ability and Stowe had an idea for a new rear door system for aerial delivery.

Design studies were instituted and wind tunnel test models were built. These studies were for the XCG-18 and XCG-20 gliders. Stowe devised a two part door system, split horizontally, which allowed the aft fuselage area to be wide open to discharge equipment. The upper part of the door hinged up inside the fuselage and the lower part



hinged down forming the loading ramp.

The original hatred of the Glider Branch reared its head again. The Structures Branch and the Aeronautical Branch were deeply involved in moving into the jet age. Their responses went like this: the designs were the "dirtiest they had seen in a while", "The separation on the rear surfaces will be terrible", "You will never be able to open those doors in flight", "Have you any wild-ass guess how we will reinforce that door frame?"

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Boeing Co. photograph, C-17.

The Aeronautical Branch would not even allow Stowe wind tunnel time to test the air flow of the models. Eventually Stowe was allowed wind tunnel time and the instrument reading confirmed Stowe's calculations. The wind tunnel engineers were certain the instruments had failed so they changed them and ran the tests again. Of course, the results were the same as the first test. The G-18 glider became the C-122. The G-20 glider became the C-123, followed by the C-130 and C-141 and today, the C-17.



All of these aircraft owe their rear loading door system design to Jack Laister, Lew Stowe and the Glider Branch.

Boeing Company photo tour of the Boeing C-17 factory honoring Jack Laister. August 8, 2006.

Information for this article garnered from research for *Silent Ones WWII Invasion Glider Test & Experiment Clinton County Army Air Field Wilmington Ohio* and from Captain Burt Rishel who worked under Lew Stowe in the Glider Branch during the Design Studies for the XCG-18 and XCG-20.



The previous very interesting article sheds a lot of light on the development of troop carrier aircraft. There is another airplane that is not mentioned, however, because it was not an evolution of the glider. The Budd RB-1 Conestoga, designated by the Army as the C-93, is another player. The C-93, which was made of stainless steel, was developed and manufactured by the Budd Company of Pittsburgh, PA, a leader in the use of stainless steel to manufacture railroad cars and truck bodies. The Army ordered 600 of them and the Navy 200, but when aluminum production increased, the Army cancelled its order and the Navy reduced

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its order to 25. They never saw operational service and were declared surplus at the end of the war. Several were purchased by National Skyway Freight Corporation, which later changed its name to Flying Tiger. The last surviving fuselage is on display at the Pima Air Museum in Tucson.

The Air Commandos



ORDE WINGATE

In view of the proceeding article on gliders, it is appropriate to relate the story of the air commando groups of World War II. I am fortunate to have the August, 1944 issue of *The National Geographic Magazine*, with two feature articles, one by General Henry H. Arnold about the aerial invasion of Burma and the other about gliders. Some literature about special operations implies that “air commando” was the designation given to a special unit authorized by General Arnold. In reality the term “air commando” was coined to describe a

joint force made up of British troops whose role would be to conduct operations deep into enemy-held territory using air transportation. The British already had developed commando forces to land from the sea; the new concept was for them to carry out similar operations using air transportation. British Brigadier Orde Wingate asked for US air support for a planned operation into Burma in 1944 after conducting a long-range patrol in Burma in 1943 in which his troops walked in. Wingate’s “Chindits” managed to penetrate 200 miles into Japanese territory, but were forced to withdraw with heavy losses. In August 1943 Prime Minister Winston Churchill took Wingate with him to the Quebec Conference where he convinced President Franklin Roosevelt to provide the air support to move his men in and out of Burma.



COCHRAN

Immediately after returning from Quebec, General Henry H. Arnold picked Lt. Colonel Philip Cochran and John R. Allison to determine how to support Wingate’s “Special Force.” Cochran had served in North Africa as a P-40 squadron commander and was involved in the first US Army “special operation” when a platoon of paratroopers was dropped from C-47s to blow up a railroad bridge. Although he was a fighter pilot, Cochran led the mission because he had tried to bomb the bridge and was supposed to be familiar



ALLISON

with the location but he ended up dropping the troops on the wrong side of the bridge! Allison had served with Claire Chennault in China as a squadron commander in the 23rd Fighter Group. Cochran was initially reluctant – he wanted to go “where there is some fighting” – but Arnold explained what the mission would be and he agreed. They departed immediately for London to meet with Wingate and other British officers. They settled on a new organization equipped with transports and gliders, along with light liaison aircraft to evacuate wounded. They also wanted a section each of fighters and medium bombers. The sections were later redesignated as squadrons, with the

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troop carrier section becoming the 319th TCS. The new group was designated as the 5318th Air Unit. As soon as they returned to the US they sent out a call for volunteers and began training at Eglin Field, Florida with further training to be conducted in India.



OBJECTIVE BURMA

to tow the gliders while TCC C-47s brought in reinforcements. Additional troop carrier aircraft and crews from the 64th Troop Carrier Group were sent TDY to India from Italy for the operation. The operation began on March 5. At the last minute reconnaissance photographs revealed that one of the sites was unusable due to the presence of trees that had been placed



BURMA AIR EVAC

across the field, so all of the gliders were scheduled to go into the other, BROADWAY. Col. Allison flew one of the first gliders. He remained in combat for three weeks, then flew an abandoned C-47 back to Imphal. (He had never flown a C-47 before and had to call the tower to find out how to lower the landing gear!) The 5318th tow planes' performance was less than expected. A number of gliders were cut loose prematurely, some over enemy territory, due to excessive fuel consumption. Nearly all of the gliders that landed on the designated LZ were damaged beyond repair because the field was found to have been rutted during logging operations. Nevertheless, enough men and equipment were landed to begin construction on a landing strip and within 24 hours troop carrier C-47s were landing with reinforcements. A second LZ was established the following day. While the operation was ongoing, the 5318th was redesignated as the 1st Air Commando Group. Wingate's second expedition was less than successful. Although the British troops caused some disruption in the enemy's rear, they failed to accomplish their objectives. He became a casualty himself when the B-25 that was carrying him back to Imphal from BROADWAY crashed. Initial Japanese opposition was light, but counterattacks were soon aimed at the British troops. The Special Force was unable to cut the Bhamo-Myitkyina Road, which delayed Allied success in Burma by several months. A factor that hindered the operation's success was that Japanese troops mounted a strong attack on British positions just east of Imphal, the Indian region where the British supply bases and the American troop

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carrier and air commando bases were located. The Special Force remained in Burma for about six weeks, but started withdrawing at the end of April.



Ironically, although the Special Force achieved only limited success, another operation not supported by the 1st Air Commando Group achieved a major success during the same time frame. Before Wingate began his aerial invasion of Burma, an American provisional unit, the 5307th Composite Unit, moved into Burma on foot using pack mules to carry their supplies. Identified by the Army as GALAHAD and made up of volunteers who had fought in Guadalcanal and New Guinea, the group became famous under the name of their commander, Brigadier General

Frank Merrill. No other US military group in history has achieved the fame of Merrill's Marauders. Supported by Tenth Air Force C-47s from the 1st and 2nd Troop Carrier Squadrons, the Marauders marched more than 800 miles into Burma. Pilots from the 71st Liaison Squadron, most of whom were enlisted, evacuated casualties using Stinson L-5s. After four months of marching and harassing Japanese positions, the exhausted and demoralized Marauders received an order from General Joseph Stillwell to march another 65 miles and capture the airfield at Myitkyina (pronounced Mitch-kina.) In spite of exhaustion, disease and low morale, they captured the airfield and opened up the way into China as C-47s began landing with reinforcements and supplies.

As far as the 1st Air Commando Group goes, it's only operation as a group was support of the British Special Force. Wingate's death signaled the end of his Special Force. The force suffered such high casualty rates while in Burma due to disease and enemy action that the Chindit units were placed back into training. They eventually became paratroop units. With its purpose for existence gone, the group became part of Tenth Air Force and its squadrons worked under their respective commands. The 319th Troop Carrier Squadron joined X Troop Carrier Command. Col. Allison had a message waiting for him when he arrived at Imphal to return immediately to Washington, DC to report to Arnold on glider operations. He was then placed in charge of organizing three new air commando groups but only two actually activated. He deployed to the Philippines in some capacity with the 3rd ACG but when he got there he was reassigned the Fifth Air Force staff. Col. Cochran also left India immediately after the Burma operation. After reporting to Arnold, he left for a new assignment in England with the First Allied Airborne Army.

Two other air commando groups were formed and sent overseas. The 2nd ACG also served in the China-Burma-India area of operations, but did not begin operations until November. Its 317th TCS also joined X TCC. The 3rd ACG was assigned to Fifth Air Force in the Philippines where its 318th TCS became part of the 54th Troop Carrier Wing. All three air commando groups were deactivated at the end of the war. In 1962 the designation of the 1st Air Commando Group was resurrected and given to the Air Force advisory unit that had activated at Hurlburt Field, Florida the previous year as the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron.

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Election of Officers

At the recent board and members meeting in Galveston a nominating committee was selected. Between now and January they will be making nominations for the eight board member and four officer positions. Several of the current board members have decided to step down while the president, vice-president and treasurer do not wish to seek reelection to another term. The nominating committee, which is made up of Dennis Ybarra, Dean Robnett, Tom Stalvey and Bobby Gassiott, will be selecting nominees for each position. (They are free and encouraged to nominate other members of the nominating committee.) In early January we will be sending ballots by mail to all members to either vote for the nominees or write in their own choices. Members will then mail their ballots to our out-going chairman, Ace Bowman, who will count the votes. The new officers and board members will then be announced to the membership and will take office effective April 1. All current board members and officers who wish to remain on the board are encouraged to do so. We cannot think them enough for the contributions they have made.

Happy Holidays!

With November half-way gone, we are now entering the holiday season. Thanksgiving, a time when we all give thanks for the blessings we have received during the year, is next week. We can all be thankful for the freedoms we have, freedoms that have been purchased by the blood of patriots and protected by rights bestowed by amendments to our Constitution adopted by the Founders. We will also be celebrating Christmas - our Jewish friends will celebrate Hanukkah – then after that the coming of the New Year. Consequently, this will be our last news letter this year. So let me say Happy Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah and Happy New Year to one and to all!