

The Airlifter Volume XIV



The Airlifter

Newsletter of the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association

Promoting and preserving troop carrier/tactical airlift heritage

April 12, 2011

Volume XIV

New Leadership

On April 1 we conducted our election of new officers and board members, the second full set of leaders since our organization was officially formed in 2006. We want to welcome our new leaders while thanking those who have served us in the past. Our new officers and board members are:

Chairman – George Dockery. While George is one our new members, he has a long association with the troop carrier and tactical airlift mission, dating back to the 1950s. He has served with the 21st, 61st and 817th troop carrier squadrons and the 314th Troop Carrier and Tactical Airlift Wings. George was a founding member of what is now the Airlift/Tanker Association. He lives in Centennial, Colorado

Vice-Chairman – Jim Elmer. Like George, Jim's association with the troop carrier and tactical airlift mission goes way back. He was a navigator with the 815th TCS at Tachikawa, the 776th TAS at CCK and the 32nd TAS at Little Rock. He lives in North Little Rock, Arkansas

President – Dennis Ybarra. Dennis went to Clark after serving in SAC and was initially assigned to the 29th TAS. He served with the 47th, 772nd 773rd and 774th tactical airlift squadrons at Clark and Dyess, where he retired. After retirement he moved to Roswell, NM where he was airport manager of the former Roswell Air Force Base after it became a civilian field. He makes his home in Roswell.

Vice-President – Mike Welch. Mike's association with the troop carrier/tactical airlift mission started out at Pope, where he was a loadmaster with the 3rd Aerial Port Squadron. He served with the 606th Air Commando/Special Ops. Squadron at Nakonphanom, Thailand flying night flare missions over Laos. After retiring from the USAF, he went to work for McDonnell-Douglas in the C-17 program. Mike is heavily involved with a number of military professional organizations and is an officer with the Airlift/Tanker Assoc. and the Professional Loadmaster Assoc. He lives in Hermosa Beach, CA.

Secretary – Sam McGowan. Served with the 35th and 779th Troop Carrier Squadrons and the 29th and 773rd Tactical Airlift Squadrons. He lives in Missouri City, TX.

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Treasurer – Tom Stalvey. Tom served with the 62nd TCS/TAS at Sewart and the 29th TAS at Clark, where he arrived just prior to the Tet Offensive. He saw heavy combat on airdrop missions over Khe Sanh and A Loi. He recently retired from Sun Bank Trust in Atlanta, GA where he was vice-president of property management. Tom lives in Marietta, GA.

Board Members

Alfred “Ace” Bowman – Ace is our outgoing Chairman. He served with the 6485th Operations Squadron and the 815th TCS at Tachikawa, 315th Air Division and the 314th Troop Carrier Wing. He went to Vietnam as a navigator with SAWBUCK II. Ace lives in Merced, CA.

Hector Leyva – Hector is our outgoing president. He served as a loadmaster with the 62nd TAS at Sewart and the 776th at CCK, and was heavily involved in airdrop operations over An Loc in 1972. Hector lives in San Antonio.

Jim Esbeck – A returning board member, Jim was a flight line mechanic and crew chief with the 463rd TCW at Langley and the 51st FIW (6315th Ops. Group) at Naha. He is retired from the Air Force Reserve and lives in Tucson, AZ.

Bobby Gassiott – A returning board member, Bobby started out as a navigator at Pope, and went to Vietnam as Carl Wyrick’s navigator on the Mule Train deployment. After serving as a Stan/Eval navigator at Pope, he went to Naha to the 21st TCS, then to 315th Stan/Eval at Tachikawa. After leaving the Air Force he joined the reserves and was employed as an Air Reserve Technician at Ellington Field, TX. He lives in Bastrop, TX.

Ralph Bemis – Our outgoing treasurer, Ralph started out as a loadmaster at Sewart, then went to Clark to the 29th TAS in early 1968. He spent his entire USAF career in C-130s at Dyess, CCK, Clark and Little Rock. He lives in Cabot, AR.

Andy Vaquera – A returning board member, Andy served in Vietnam as an air freight technician with the 8th Aerial Port Squadron. After leaving the Air Force, he joined the USAF reserve and became a loadmaster with the 433rd Tactical Airlift Wing at Kelly Field. Retired from the reserve, Andy lives in San Antonio.

Alternate Board Members

Don Hessenflow – Don started out at Pope AFB, NC as a public information officer with the 464th Troop Carrier Wing in 1964. Retired from the Air Force, he makes his home in San Antonio.

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Tom Wark – Tom was a loadmaster at Pope AFB, NC with the 778th Troop Carrier Squadron and participated in the DRAGON ROUGE/RED DRAGON and DRAGON NOIR/BLACK DRAGON hostage rescue mission in the Belgian Congo. A retired airline pilot, he now lives in Tavares, FL.

We are happy and excited about our new slate of officers and board members and are looking forward to a great future for our organization.

AWARDS AND DECORATIONS



In the

modern military it is possible to read a service member's background by the ribbons on their chest. This has not always been so. It might come as a surprise to many, but for the first century of US history military decorations were not considered appropriate for the "citizens army" that the Founding Fathers had prescribed as appropriate for the new nation's defense. A decoration called a Badge of Military Merit in the form of a purple heart was established by General George Washington but only three are known to have been awarded during the Revolution. A Certificate of Military Merit was established in 1847 during the Mexican War for private soldiers but no medal went with it until 1905.

In 1861 Iowa Senator James W. Grimes proposed the establishment of a medal for valor to General Winfield Scott, but the proposal was not approved. The Navy, however, established a Medal of Honor to be awarded to sailors and petty officers and President Abraham Lincoln approved it. After the Navy adopted their award, the Army followed suit and an Army Medal of Honor was approved in July, 1862. Initial criteria called for the medal to only be awarded to enlisted men, but officers were soon included. The Medal of Honor was the only decoration authorized by the US Army during the Civil War and for many years afterwards. Ironically, the Confederacy did not give awards for bravery to its soldiers. The only honor was for a soldier or officer to be mentioned in a dispatch by his superior. Several Medals of Honor were later rescinded, including some awarded to an entire company for reenlisting. Awards to

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civilian scouts during the Indian Wars – including William “Buffalo Bill” Cody – and to Dr. Mary Walker were also rescinded, but were reinstated by recent presidents.

It was during World War I that the US Army began authorizing decorations for individual actions of bravery. Criteria for award of the Medal of Honor was made more stringent and the Distinguished Service Cross and a medal called the Citation Star were authorized. In 1932 the Citation Star was replaced by the Silver Star. The first two of only three Medal of Honor awards for missions involving airlift were made to Lieutenants Harold Goettler and Erwin Bleckley for efforts to drop supplies to US soldiers who had been cutoff behind German lines during the Battle of the Argonne. No medal for wounds was authorized during World War I but men who were wounded were authorized to wear a chevron on their sleeve. In 1927 the Army first attempted to revive the Revolutionary Badge of Military Merit, but it was not until February 22, 1932, the 100th anniversary of George Washington’s birth, that the decoration was authorized. The design of the new award, which was in the form of a purple heart on a gold background, had been solicited by chief of staff General Douglas MacArthur. The award was authorized both for wounds and for military merit. World War I veterans who had been wounded were authorized to apply to have the medal awarded and many did. MacArthur himself received the first one.

In 1926 Congress authorized the Distinguished Flying Cross, with the first awards going to Air Corps personnel who had participated in the Pan American Goodwill Flight of 1926-1927. A medal had not yet been produced so the men received citations but no medal at the time. The first actual medal was presented to Charles Lindbergh for his historic solo trans-Atlantic solo flight. Initially, the award was authorized to be presented to civilian aviators and several, including Amelia Earhart, Wiley Post, Jacquelyn Cochran and Rosco Turner received the prestigious medal before the criteria was changed by an Executive Order. A special authorization was made for an award to Wilbur and Orville Wright for their flights at Kill Devil Hill. Jimmy Doolittle received two awards, both retroactive, for flights he made in the early 1920s.

When World War II broke out in December, 1941 the only military decorations that had been authorized were the Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross, Silver Star, DFC and Purple Heart. It is an interesting fact that while the Navy awarded no less than fifteen Medals of Honor for actions during the Pearl Harbor attacks, the Army made no awards prior to an action in the Philippines in February 1942. Several Air Corps officers were put in for the medal but were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross instead. The first Medal of Honor to go to an airman in World War II was awarded to Jimmy Doolittle immediately upon his return to Washington, DC from the raid on Tokyo. Doolittle did not believe he

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deserved the medal and protested until General Henry H. Arnold told him to shut up and accept it because President Franklin Roosevelt wanted to give it to him.

For the first few months of World War II, the majority of military actions were fought either in the air or on the sea, and even sea actions often involved airmen. Airmen and other personnel were initially awarded the Purple Heart for combat actions that did not warrant either a DFC or Silver Star. Since no decoration existed to recognize meritorious acts other than the Purple Heart, President Roosevelt authorized the Air Medal, a decoration to be presented for meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight, with a retroactive date of September 8, 1939. The medal was awarded for both individual acts such as shooting down an enemy aircraft or an attack on a heavily defended position. It could also be awarded for completing a specified number of combat missions or, in the case of transport crewmembers, a specified number of combat hours. Ironically, as the war progressed and more ground troops entered combat, the decorations presented to airmen and the ribbons they wore led the Army to establish the Bronze Star decoration for meritorious acts that did not involve flight, including administrative acts. The majority of Bronze Star awards in World War II were presented to men who had previously earned a Combat Infantryman's Badge. The Legion of Merit was also authorized in 1942.

The decorations established by the end of World War II remained the only combat awards authorized for military personnel through the end of the Vietnam, although the Air Force followed the Navy's example and established its own Air Force Cross to replace the Distinguished Service Cross. Originally proposed in 1947, the Air Force Cross wasn't authorized until 1960. Although it is commonly believed that decorations such as the Medal of Honor and Distinguished Service Cross/Air Force Cross are only authorized for specific acts of courage, there have been instances when they have been presented for cumulative actions and, in some cases, for special honor. For instance, Generals Douglas MacArthur and Jonathon Wainright were awarded the Medal of Honor for their role in the defense of the Philippines at the beginning of World War II. Brigadier General Kenneth Walker was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor when he failed to return from a mission in which he had disobeyed orders. General George Kenney said in his memoir that if Walker had returned, he was going to court martial him. The pilots of a C-54 that crashed in South Vietnam were both awarded the Air Force Cross, even though criteria for its awards stipulates that the action must be against an armed enemy. One of the four Medals of Honor presented to enlisted airmen in World War II went to a B-29 radio operator for fighting a fire caused by a white phosphorous flare or bomb that went off inside the airplane while he was attempting to launch it. Ace of aces Maj. Richard Bong's Medal of Honor was presented for his actions over a period of several weeks in which he was flying combat missions while serving as an instructor and not required to fly combat.

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Perhaps the most bizarre military award in US military aviation history was the Medal of Honor that went to S/Sgt. Maynard H. "Snuffy" Smith. To begin with, Smith had literally been led to the induction center in handcuffs. He had been ordered by a judge to either go to jail or into the Army because of his failure to pay child support. It was August 31, 1942 and the Army was no longer accepting volunteers, but received all new inductees through their local draft board. Somehow, Smith ended up in the Air Corps and volunteered for gunnery school, possibly because completion led automatically to sergeant's stripes. He went to England either as a replacement or was kicked off his crew, because he achieved a reputation for being so obnoxious that no one would fly with him. On May 1 he finally went out on his first mission as a replacement gunner on a crew that was nearing 25 missions. To his disgust, the engineer put him in the ball turret. The airplane took several hits from fighters and a fire broke out in the radio compartment. Smith emerged from his turret when it lost electrical power. Communications had been lost with the cockpit and the radio operator and waist gunners were preparing to bail out. For some reason, Smith decided not to jump. He later discovered that the tail gunner was wounded. He fought the fire with a fire extinguisher and claimed that he urinated on it when he ran out of agent. Meanwhile, the airplane was still flying and the pilot eventually managed to crash-land after reaching the English coast. In spite of his heroism, Smith continued to be a screw-up. He only flew four more missions before he was permanently grounded because no one wanted to fly with him. Smith was presented his medal by Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, who was on a visit to Smith's base in England and wanted to present some medals. When it came time for the presentation, Smith wasn't there. It turned out that he had been assigned to KP duty as punishment for showing up late and someone had to be sent to fetch him!



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Troop Carrier Special Operations

In 1968 the Air Force formally adopted the term “special operations” when it redesignated the fighter, helicopter and troop carrier units that had formerly borne the air commando designation as special operations units. Since that time special operations has generally been understood to apply to specially



trained squadrons and wings, whose mission was somehow “special” as opposed to conventional Air Force missions. In truth however, special operations have long been part of military aviation, dating back to 1942. Early troop carrier operations as performed by squadrons assigned to New Guinea and Burma would fall under the category of special operations in today’s military. At the same time, the troop carrier mission included special tasks throughout its

existence. Some were identified as special operations while some were special in that they were beyond the scope of ordinary troop carrier tasks.

Perhaps the first troop carrier operation that was specifically identified as “special” was the 54th Troop Carrier Wing special airdrop section, which flew B-17s in support of Australian teams operating in close proximity to the Japanese stronghold at Rabaul on the island of New Britain. Troop carrier squadrons in the Southwest Pacific operated older model B-17s that had been replaced in bombardment squadrons from the very beginning of their existence in February, 1942. The top turret, waist and tail guns were left intact on the B-17s and were used to strafe Japanese positions prior to and after drops. In early 1944 the Allies decided to bypass Rabaul, and leave its defenders to “wither on the vine” as they were cut off from all means of supply and were subject to frequent air attack. In order to provide a means of rescuing downed airmen, Australian teams were organized to conduct patrols into within 35 miles of Rabaul. The 54th TCW set up its special airdrop section to deliver supplies to the ground teams. World War II also saw other special operations by troop carrier units. In Europe troop carrier C-47s supplied partisans in the Balkans. Similar operations supplied guerrillas – including the Vietnamese led by the shadowy Ho Chi Minh – in Asia. Troop carrier crews resupplied Merrill’s Marauders as they marched across Burma to capture the airfield at Myitkyina. Troop carrier C-47s sometimes dropped flares to support ground forces and to illuminate targets for air attack. They also dropped leaflets. In the Philippines C-47s from the 317th Troop Carrier Wing dropped bombs on Japanese positions on Luzon!

The Korean War saw 315th Air Division troop carrier units again involved in special operations. The 374th Wing’s 21st Troop Carrier Squadron included a special flight commanded by Major Harry Aderholt whose

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mission was to conduct loudspeaker and leaflet missions over communist territory and to drop teams of Korean agents into North Korea. C-47 crews flew "Gypsy Beachcomber" missions supporting intelligence-gathering teams operating on islands off the coast of North Korea. Pilots landed loaded C-47s on strips of beaches bringing in team members and supplies. Airdrop mission supported weather observer/intelligence teams operating remote locations on mountaintops overlooking communist positions.

Some Cold War operations have yet to be completely declassified, but there were a number of special operations missions assigned to 315th Air Division squadrons and TAC squadrons in the US. One such mission was HALO, or high-altitude, low-opening parachute operations. Although little is known about specific HALO operations, the 817th TCS at Naha as well as individual crews in TAC squadrons were qualified for HALO operations. Sometime in 1963 the 35th TCS at Naha was assigned to work with the US Army's 7th Psychological Warfare Group on Okinawa on Project JILLI, which involved dropping propaganda leaflets aimed at communist North Korea. An Army paper relates that operations were conducted with C-47s until early 1965, although no explanation is given as to why the older transports were used since the 35th operated C-130As. The mission continued off and on through the 1960s. The 35th also supported Project FACT SHEET, a leaflet mission aimed at North Korea. FACT SHEET missions were assumed, by C-47s after they arrived at CCK in the GOOSE. The 35th picked up FRANTIC GOAT, a leaflet mission aimed at communist units in South Vietnam and Laos, by air commando squadrons.



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The 6315th Operations Group replaced it had other special operations missions, particularly the flare mission over the Ho Chi

and the 374th TCW which operations missions, particularly Minh Trail in Laos and North

Vietnam and COMMANDO LAVA, a special mission dropping chemical agents in Laos. The exact date of the assumption of the flare mission is not known, although in November 1964 Naha crews commenced operations over the Steel Tiger area in southern Laos. In April, 1965 missions started over North Vietnam. For a time crews included ground personnel who flew as flare kickers, but by the spring of 1966 crews were made up entirely of qualified aircrew members. The mission, which came to be known as BLIND BAT, continued until June, 1970. Two airplanes and crews were lost to enemy fire, both over Laos. COMMANDO LAVA was a special mission flown by crews from the 41st Troop Carrier Squadron in the

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summer of 1967. Additional loadmasters from the 7th Aerial Port Squadron accompanied the crews. The mission involved the dispersal of chemicals, actually soap, made by Calgon Corporation. Two explanations have been given for the use of the chemicals. One is that they were dispensed in hopes of accelerating the natural erosion of limestone and causing landslides while the other is that the soap would prevent mud holes from drying up and, hopefully, deny the North Vietnamese the use of roadways through the karst regions of Laos. The missions were flown during daylight at low altitude, and although no aircraft were shot down, several were damaged by ground fire and one received major battle damage.

Another Naha mission falls into the category of covert rather than special operations since it involved what would ordinarily be considered troop and cargo operations. The mission that came to be known as E Flight actually dates back to the early 1950s when the USAF began supplying C-119s to the French for operations in Indochina. The USAF-supplied airplanes were flown by civilian crews employed by Civil Air Transport, an airline that had been started in China in the 1940s by Claire Chennault. The “baling” of Air Force aircraft to the Central Intelligence Agency continued in the 1950s. In 1958 the CIA decided it wanted access to C-130s and a crew from Sewart commanded by 1/Lt. Billie B. Milles was sent to Colorado Springs, CO to fly a series of missions dropping Tibetan guerrillas who had been recruited for insurgency work in the high mountain kingdom of Tibet, which had been occupied by Chinese troops in 1953. Civilian crews employed by CAT had been recruited to fly the Air Force airplanes, which would be provided by the 21st Troop Carrier Squadron, which was already involved in covert operations with older types. A common saying in the 483rd TCW when someone went off on classified mission was to say “oh, we’ve been off with E Flight.” In the early 1960s the CIA expanded its C-130 work into Laos, where the Laotian Civil War had ended, but where North Vietnamese troops still occupied much of the country. In 1961 President John F. Kennedy authorized the establishment of a special flight in the 21st TCS at Naha to provide C-130s to a special office at Kadena then under the command of Maj. Harry Aderholt. It was called E Flight and included maintenance personnel as well as aircrew. E Flight continued supplying C-130s for CIA use until the 21st transferred to CCK in 1971. The E Flight mission went along with it.

In early 1969 the 463rd Tactical Airlift Wing at Clark was given a special operations mission even though by that time the Air Force had redesignated the air commando squadrons as such. In March 463rd crews began dropping 10,000 pound M-121 bombs in South Vietnam, ostensibly to create instant helicopter landing zones, in Project COMMANDO VAULT. The huge bombs were already in use in South Vietnam; they were being dropped by US Army CH-54 Flying Crane helicopters. There are reports that 10,000 pound bombs had been dropped from C-130s previously; TCTAA members Al Clime and Tom Stalvey dropped one somewhere in the vicinity of Khe Sanh in early 1968. COMMANDO VAULT missions

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continued throughout the period of US involvement in Southeast Asia, with the mission transferring to the 374th TAW at CCK when the 463rd inactivated.

Another special operations mission flown by 463rd crews – and possibly by crews from Naha as well – was COMMANDO SCARF, a special project involving the delivery of tiny bomblets along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. According to USAF historical sources, the bomblets were originally dropped by F-4s, but the high cost of the project led to the decision to switch to C-130s. Sometime in the early summer of 1979 crews from the 463rd went to Udorn, Thailand for several weeks TDY to make the drops. Charlie Kent, a Stan/Eval loadmaster for 7th Aerial Port at Naha says he flew similar missions during his tour at Naha in 1964-67, so the 463rd operation may not have been the first time C-130s were used. The purpose of the tiny bomblets wasn't to do damage, but to make noise. Designed to look like small pieces of gravel, they were supposed to detonate when a truck wheel rolled over them and the sound of the explosion would be detected by special electronic listening devices that had been delivered by USAF special operations helicopters.

The C-123s of the 315th Troop Carrier Wing were also involved in special operations. The C-123 squadrons bore the air commando designation until 1968, when they were redesignated as tactical airlift, but they were part of 315th Air Division, then 834th, and functioned as part of the Vietnam airlift system. The 310th Air Commando Squadron, in particular, was assigned to work with Special Forces and some of its crews flew missions for the joint Studies and Observations Group, a classified organization in Saigon that had been set up to support cross-border operations in Laos and, occasionally, North Vietnam. 315th wing C-123s were also involved with Project BANISH BEACH, a project that also came to include C-130s from all three of 315th Air Division's troop carrier wings. BANISH BEACH started with C-123s dropping contaminated fuel on the Hobo Woods north of Saigon in an attempt to set fires. Oddly enough, the heat from the fires rose into the humid atmosphere and developed into tropical thunderstorms which put the fires out! The fire-bombing missions continued into 1968, using C-123s and C-130s.

Transports were also used for other projects. The history of tactical airlift missions in Southeast Asia relates that transports were used to drop tear gas on communist positions. There were special missions involving only one or two airplanes. In the spring of 1966 a pair of TAC C-130s from Sewart flew perhaps the most daring mission of the entire war, a mission known as CAROLINA MOON. After months of testing at Eglin, the two crews departed for Da Nang in May, 1966 carrying ten special weapons that had been developed to mass-focus the power of conventional explosions in a single direction. The weapons were seen as a possible means of destroying the bridge that spanned the gorge known as The Dragons Jaw near the town of Than Hoa. A loadmaster who was involved in the tests told me recently that the weapons

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looked like “hot tubs” and were dropped using a slotted extraction parachute for stabilization. Two missions were flown, one by each crew. The first mission at the end of May was successful in that the crew dropped their weapons and made it back to Da Nang safely. Photographs taken the next morning showed the bridge still standing to the other crew went out that evening for a second attempt. They were never heard from again.

It is possible, even probable, that troop carrier and tactical airlift crews flew other special operations missions that have never been revealed. One source told me about classified missions flown in Europe at night at low-level after weeks of training in the Smoky Mountains. There are also whispers of secret missions flown to an undisclosed Asian country carrying indigenous personnel into short, dirt runways in another undisclosed country at night, with the crews carrying no identification, not even dog tags.

South East Asia (SEA)

Personal account by Ralph T. Bemis II

On 16 April 1972 I had just arrived at TSN from Utapao, Thailand where I had administrated a couple of no-notice check rides to some guys from CCK. Upon arrival at TSN that afternoon I ran into my buddy Charlie Armistead on the ramp going into the Air Division building. Charlie looked all worn out so I asked him what he'd been up to. He told me that he'd just got in from a CDS drop at AnLok and got shot up! Up until this time I hadn't been briefed on what was going on up there. Upon entering the Air Division I was asked if there was any chance that I'd take and fly one of the CDS drops the next day. I asked who all they had and was told nobody yet for the three crews that they were trying to put together. I looked at Charlie and said, how about it Charlie? He looked at me and said Ralph I really don't want to go back up there but I guess I'll go there with you. Needless to say we left there and went to the NCO club and got primed for the mission. On 17 April 1972 we showed up and went to the bomb dump and got our aircraft ready for the mission, then took an emergency crew rest while waiting to get the green light to go. At around 1400 hours that day after we had been given all the intel briefings on the drop site they canceled the mission for the day because of very hostile fire. We went ahead and downloaded the CDS and headed for the club to get prepared for the mission the next day. On 18 April 1972 me and Charlie got to the Air Division and went to the bomb dump again and got our plane ready for the mission. Sometime around 1000 hours I believe is when we took off single ship for the drop. Two other aircraft were to takeoff after we had completed our airdrop and were on our way back with better intel for them. Sometime around 1200 hours as we were skimming over the trees and listening to the crew up stairs is when I started wondering what the H— we had got ourselves into. There were 4 crew positions up there calling out gun positions from different areas at the same time. If I remember right our load had been ready to drop for about 20 minutes. As we were coming in closer we felt the aircraft start to pitch up so we could get to drop altitude. As we were gaining altitude we started taking 50 Cal slugs through the aircraft floor and through the CDS bundles of ammo then we got hit in the right wing between number 3 & 4 engines and aircraft went wing high on right side. At this time we were unable to see how bad the damage was to the wing. I could see flames out of the window forward of the right wheel well and called it out to the crew. At the same time me and Charlie saw that we had some bundles of ammo smoking. At this time I believe that Charlie's headset had went out along with the pilots and engineers. I called out that the load was smoking and that me and Charlie were jettisoning the load. I believe that before the static line retriever did its job that Charlie had done cut the gate and let it fly. After the load left the aircraft we surveyed the damage and I gave the jettisoned cargo report to pilot. Then we went back and closed up the aircraft doors and ramp. To this day I can't remember if we brought the static lines from the chutes back into the aircraft or just closed the door down on them. Me and Charlie got the word from Maj. Pratt that it looked bad and for us to go ahead and jump. Flames were coming down right side of aircraft and the left paratroop door was jammed up tight. As me and Charlie were watching the flames on the right wing we watched the right flap depart the aircraft. Charlie looked at me shrugged his shoulders and said what the f— else could happen! After relaying this fine piece of info to the pilot we started forward of the wheel well area, fuel was coming down the sides of the wheel well wall into the aircraft. We just got forward of the wheel well when the right main gear tires blew a hole in it. We saw and heard the oxygen bottle aft of wheel well blow at about the same time. I called the dam-

age out to them and then I heard the pilot ask me what I thought? I remember telling him that I thought it was time to set this baby down some where. The next thing I remember hearing from him was hold on back there and good luck! After that I remember a somewhat rough landing and stuff going everywhere. I was stationed on the left side of the aircraft and Charlie was on the right side. When the aircraft came to a stop I was up at station 245 with the CDS buffer stop and everything else laying on top of me. I then remember dead silence for a few seconds then movement. I called out for Charlie to help me and not to leave me. His response was I'm here and don't you f— worry I'm not leaving you! Then he started to pull stuff off of me. Maj. Kirkpatric came back and was helping Charlie till Maj. Pratt came in and told them to get on the choppers that had spotted us going down. Maj. Pratt and 3 Army guys finished digging me out and carried me to the other Chopper that came in. From there it was off to the 3rd Field Hospital and 5 months of hospitals and rehab for me. Laying in the Field Hospital they moved my broken elbow and the poor nurses heard some very bad words come out of my mouth, which I apologized for saying. That's also when Charlie found that he had a bullet hole in him. Charlie Armistead was the is the only guy I know of that went AWOL from Med Evac to get back to the mission. This is one guy that I'm proud to call "Brother"

Editors note:

Retired MSGT Ralph T. Bemis II "Bullwinkle" finished out his career as a C-130 Instructor, Asst. NCOIC/DOV Loadmaster. He logged over 9,000 hours on the B, E, & H models with right at 1,200 hours of combat time. The C-130E "Bullwinkle" was on that faithful day was 63-7775 assigned to the 374th Tactical Airlift Wing. Despite being shot down, the pilot was able to "land" in a swamp near Lan Khe, South Vietnam. The aircraft was a total loss.

Press Release, cont. from page 14

teamwork and situational awareness. "It was a pleasure to help my fellow comrades in a time of need and have a great outcome, with everyone safely on the ground, able to fly another mission in support of our great country. It was a great day for the 315th Airlift Wing, Washington Center and Trans North Aviation" says McGuyver.

Operation Christmas Drop, cont. from page 4

plate and donate, ensuring neighboring islands experience a wonderful holiday and building a rapport with those who have less. Long before the C-130s soared into the skies to execute Operation Christmas Drop, Airmen and volunteers came together for several packs to prepare each box to be dropped. The packs took place on Nov. 21 and Dec. 5 this year with more than 100 Airmen, civilians, contractors and other volunteers helping out. During the four days of Operation Christmas Drop, C-130s will fly 12 sorties, offloading more than 12 tons of cargo to at least 51 islands covering a geographic area more than 1.8 million square miles. "I am proud to be a part of the 58th year of Christmas drops," said Capt. Ryan Finlayson, 36th Airlift Squadron lead operations planner for Operation Christmas Drop. "Christmas drops have been going on since 1952, which was well before I was born. I hope it continues long after I'm gone. I am honored to carry on such a long-lasting tradition." Operation Christmas Drop is a non-profit organization powered by Team Andersen volunteers and the local community that have to date dropped over 800,000 pounds of goods throughout the islands since Operation Christmas Drop inception. "The greatest thing about Operation Christmas Drop is how easily it affects lives for the better," Captain Bell said. "It's great that we can exercise our global reach and help almost 35,000 people throughout the Pacific every year."

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The preceding article appeared in a recent issue of the Professional Loadmaster Assoc. newsletter *The Loader* and is used by permission. The following photographs were taken by one of the Army helicopter pilots involved in their rescue. TCTAA board member Ralph Bemis and member Charlie Armistead were the loadmasters on the mission; Bob Kirkpatrick was the navigator. Honorary member John DesLauriers was one of the helicopter crewmembers.



Special Notice – Effective April 1, all members whose dues are not current are switched to inactive status and removed from the mailing list. Newsletters will continue to be available on the web site at www.troopcarrier.org.