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# The Airlifter Volume XXI

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## *The Airlifter*

Newsletter of the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association

*Promoting and preserving the troop carrier/tactical airlift heritage*

April 15, 2013

Volume XXI



### **Finances**

Our current bank balance is \$7,529.40. Expenditures since our last newsletter include \$16.17 to Walmart for two containers to store Association paraphernalia such as shirts and caps and \$35.59 to the US Postal Service for postage. We deposited \$570.00 into our account on 2/21/2013, which included dues and payment for caps. We have three checks in the amount of \$85.00 for caps and dues to deposit. This brings our total cash on hand to \$7,614.40.

As we were finishing up this issue, the editor received the sad news of the passing of Col. Charles "Hop" Hopingardner, a tactical airlift veteran whose career goes back to the 1940s. Hop was the ops officer and commander of the 774th TAS at Clark in 69-72, and served at Twelfth Air Force Headquarters at Bergstrom AFB, TX. He retired in the Austin area and was living there when he passed away.

### **New Officers and Board Members**

Our election is now over and our new officers assume their positions effective April 1. Since the slate of officers and board members was for those who are elected to two year terms, only half of the previous leadership was up for reelection. Our new officers and board members are Bill Kehler, who is replacing Ralph Bemis as vice-president; Ralph is now our treasurer. Don Hessenflow and Tom Wark, who were previously alternate board members, moved up to board member. At present, we don't have any alternates. Our By-Laws calls for a total of twelve board members, including four officers. A list of current officers and board members is posted on the web site at [www.troopcarrier.org/contacts.html](http://www.troopcarrier.org/contacts.html).

### **By-Laws**

Since we have some new officers and board members, it is a good time to remind everyone to review the By-Laws, which are posted on the Association web site, [www.troopcarrier.org](http://www.troopcarrier.org). Because they are in a PDF file, the easiest way to access them is to go to the main page, then click on the "About the

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Association" link at the bottom of the page and open the file. You can also access Board Meeting minutes and the Articles of Incorporation from the same page.

### Col. Don Strobaugh

Although he has been a member since right after the Association was formed, our newest Life Member is Colonel Don Strobaugh, USAF (Ret), who is also one of our most interesting and experienced members. As far as I know, I have never met him – if I did, it was most likely during Operation NICKEL GRASS, the airlift to Israel during the Yom Kipper War when he was in charge of the MAC mobility team at Lod Airport, but we have been acquainted through letter and Email for many years. Don's career in airlift goes back to the 1950s when he became a combat control officer after switching from the Army, where he had been an enlisted radio operator. He was assigned to the 2nd Aerial Port Squadron, then transferred to Evreux, France and the 5th Aerial Port Squadron. While he was at Sewart, he and some other CCT members started experimenting with high altitude free-fall parachuting and he took the experience with him to France.



FIGURE 1 CAPT. DONALD STROBAUGHT WITH 5TH APS

By November 1964, Captain Strobaugh was commander of Detachment one, 5th Aerial Port Squadron at Wiesbaden, Germany. He was nearing the end of a four-year tour that had started out at Evreux. He was attending the German airborne school at Schnogau when he got a phone call telling him to return to Wiesbaden immediately. He flew to Evreux where he was briefed on a Top Secret mission to the Belgian Congo to rescue hostages being held by rebels in Stanleyville. His role was to brief Belgian commandos on the use of the PRC-47 radio. He selected SSgt Robert J. Diaz, a radio repairman from the Evreux CCT, to go with him. At Ascension Island, he and Diaz conducted radio training and also taught the Belgians how to exit from the C-130, from which few had jumped before. The two combat controllers were told that they would not jump with the Belgians due to possible political ramifications.

Captain Strobaugh was assigned to accompany Chalk 9 as the jump master. He was still under orders not to jump. Chalk 9 was one of three airplanes that were to either drop their troops as reinforcements if

necessary, or land them if not. The assault force secured the airfield so the three airplanes landed. Once they got on the ground, the Belgian commander asked him to handle the radios due to the language difficulties, which was made worse because the C-130 crews were taking fire and the pilots were talking fast. The two combat controllers were instructed to remain in Stanleyville when the rescue force carried out another rescue at the town of Paulis. Don kept a log of his activities, including how he felt about the carnage inflicted by the Congolese soldiers on the rebels. In his opinion, one was as bad as the other.

When he left Germany in January 1965, Don went to Norton AFB, California where Military Airlift Command was setting up a C-141 wing. Three years later, now a major, he received an assignment to the 2nd Aerial Port Group at Tan Son Nhut as commander of the combat control section, which put him in command of all combat controllers in South Vietnam. His tour was cut short due to the death of his wife, but he nevertheless participated in the dramatic airlift operations of the Tet Offensive. He went to

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Khe Sanh to supervise the installation of the GPES equipment across the runway. He recorded in his log that not an egg was broken in a crate that aerial port had placed on the pallet for the aerial port team!



FIGURE 2 C-130B ATTEMPTING EMERGENCY LANDING AT A LOI

On April 26, Major Strobaugh flew into A Loi, an airfield in the A Shau Valley, with two combat controllers and Lt. Col. Richard F. Button, a C-130 pilot who was mission commander, to control airdrops. Although the weather in the valley was dismal, the Army bumped the GCA equipment that would have allowed blind drops. Without it, the crews had to drop below the clouds to find the drop zone.

By afternoon, the ceiling had lifted

slightly and the C-130s started breaking out of the clouds further down the valley. The crew

commanded by Major Lilburn Stowe of the 772nd Tactical Airlift Squadron encountered heavy ground fire, that severely damaged the airplane. (The pilots were from the 772nd but the rest of the crew was from the 29th. Their pilots had gone DNIF that morning.) Major Stowe attempted to crash land the airplane – the photograph above is an actual photograph of the stricken airplane. According to Army personnel who witnessed the crash, Maj. Stowe pulled up to avoid troops who were in the field gathering airdrop bundles and struck a treeline. Maj. Strobaugh drove to the crash site where an Army lieutenant "ordered" him to stay away, but he ignored the junior officer and proceeded to search the area for survivors. He was awarded the Airman's Medal for his heroic actions.



Major Strobaugh's assignment with 2nd Aerial Port Group was cut short due to the death of his wife, and he returned to Norton so he could care for his family. He was soon promoted again, which meant that his days with combat control were over. Air Force policy did not allow any slots for officers in combat control above the rank of major. Combat control was an aerial port function and CCT officers carried air transportation officer AFSCs. Even though he was out of combat control, he continued his love for parachuting with sports parachute teams. By October 1973, he was a full colonel on the staff of 21st Air Force at McGuire. When President Richard Nixon ordered an airlift of ammunition to Israel during the Yom Kipper War, Col. Strobaugh went to Lod Airport at Tel Aviv to command the ALCE operation. While he was there, he made friends with Israeli paratroopers and added their wings to his collection of military parachutist's wings. When he retired from the Air

Force, he retired to Mesa, Arizona where he lives today. We in the TC/TAA are honored to have him as a Life Member.

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Flying Quartermasters  
Bundles for Burma Boys  
Quartermaster Training Service Journal  
24 November 1944

(From the archives of the U.S. Army Quartermaster Museum, Fort Lee, Virginia)

The plane's nosing over now. You're heading down towards the jungle. As the plane circles lower, your eyes keep searching the unbroken green of the jungle trees and growth for a little white spot, the cleared area.



FIGURE 3 QUARtermasters LOADING 5-GALLON JERRY CANS ON C-47

Suddenly, you see it -- a tiny little patch in the solid field of forest. You're heading toward it and you stand ready by the open door. Then as the C-47 swoops over the clearing you push out the loaded chutes.

Down they go--little white and colored dots sailing straight for the target. You see the first two or three hit. They were the heavier ones. A generator, parts for a truck motor, and an Army field range were contained in those bundles.

Looking back you hold your breath as you watch the

wicker basket chutes settle. Wrapped separately in cotton, and surrounded by rice husks are delicate medical supplies and instruments, urgently needed by the jungle fighters below. Then the packs sit down nicely and you're sure they're OK. That's because you also know that all those bundles were packed tenderly and expertly by men who really know their jobs.

Now the cargo ship heads for home and another haul and you settle back to take it easy 'til the next flight.



FIGURE 4 C-47 DROPPING PACK HOWITZER

This trip is just part of the everyday experience you would have as a member of the CBI flying Quartermasters, self-styled "Bundles for Burma Boys." (Recently, the CBI has been divided into the China and Burma-India theaters) These QM's are members of a colored battalion on QM truck drivers, retrained in Northeast India to prepare and supply entirely by air men and installations in country inaccessible to all standard land supply routes.

The battalion has been, and still is, the basic organization conducting air dropping activity for the Services of Supply in Northeast India.

FROM PLASMA TO HOWITZERS Theirs is no routine supply job. In addition to supplying the standard cargoes of clothing and ammunition, they've been called upon to drop delicate medical supplies and instruments, bulky and heavy operating tables, blood plasma, fresh meats and vegetables, tons of highly sensitive wet gun cotton, dynamite, nitrostarch, and TNT. Along with food they've parachuted typewriters, radios and radio parts, motors, lights, generators, field ranges,

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rifles, machine guns, mail, tank and truck parts. They also packed and "pushed over the side" the first 75mm pack howitzers known to have been parachuted down in the theater--and all with an extremely low percentage of losses and in some cases no losses at all!

**TRANSITION OF A TRUCK DRIVER** But when these "parachute-packing poppas" landed in India late in 1943, they didn't know a rip-cord from a chute rope. They were truck drivers and good ones, trained at Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi. And truck driving was the job they thought they'd do. But the exigencies of war make strange demands and soon after their arrival their CO, Lt. Colonel Abbot E. Dodge, was notified as to the nature of their new assignment. Preparations had to be made accordingly.

Training was largely a matter of experience. What information was available on air-dropping and related supply activities was crammed into a ten-day instruction period, within 30 days of debarkation the unit was packed off to drop supplies in the Northeast India sector.

**TRIAL AND ERROR** In the early days of operation everything was done by trial and error. Practically no manufactured equipment was available. What they used they improvised, experimented with, tested and improved.

For an air-dropping container a Chinese-American officer suggested the use of a bamboo "country" basket, not unlike a wicker clothes hamper. Natives were employed to construct the baskets and then they were covered with burlap (hessian cloth) and strengthened with rope ties to which the parachute was fastened. So well did this container work that today, in various sized and shapes, it is still the standard and most used container for packing supplies.

Recently, in addition to the country basket, standard British paratroop equipment, as well as that of our own Army, has been made available. It's being used from time to time to augment the basket pack for special or unusual operations.

**PACKING PROBLEMS** Packing in the standardized containers, however, isn't always the answer. Faced with the problem of dropping 55-gallon oil and gasoline drums, the truckers finally hit on the idea of lashing the drums together, padding them with sacks of rice husks as bumpers, and suspending them by multiple chutes.

Similarly, two wheeled ammunition carts were found to be too bulky to load and too large to drop through the plane door. Mechanics of the unit simply sliced the wagons into manageable sections, fitted them with bolts and braces for re-assembly by the receiving troops, and parachuted the carts over the side.

Sometimes the outfits get a little whimsical. When a Chinese or American unit wins a particularly tough fight, or when there's a feast day or a holiday, parachutes blossom out all over the fighting units. These packages of pleasure bear gifts of beef or live ducks, chicken or pork on the hoof, and sometimes even crates of fresh eggs.

**TURN-ABOUT** The unit's a classification officer's dream come true. Almost everybody in the battalion can, on a moment's notice, do the other fellow's job. There's a constant shifting of personnel within the organization so that men can "learn by doing" each of the specialized assignments in the outfit. The former truck drivers are virtually operating a sub-depot, handling rail and vehicle unloading, warehousing, procurement, stock records, special packing, ammunition storage, and parachute folding and reclamation.

Native labor is used only on the less technical and less skilled work. This training and experience has also made the "Bundles for Burma Boys" valuable as teachers. The unit has instructed U.S. Army officers in their air-dropping methods as well as officers and men of the British

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Army. Recently, an additional QM Truck Company, not part of the original battalion, has been trained and now furnishes the men who ride the cargo ships and "kick" the cargoes overboard.

**TWO-FIELD OPERATION** When the North Burma Campaign opened, this high flexibility of personnel made it possible to start the operation of another complete air-dropping station and sub-depot with men from the battalion. Accordingly two companies of the battalion moved to another strip location, and with the use of an additional squadron of Troop Carrier planes, the new field was instrumental in nearly doubling the tonnage dropped.

**CHUTE LOGISTICS** Packaging the bundles and loading the planes must always be done carefully but with the utmost speed. The expensive and highly vulnerable equipment of the Air Force Cargo Squadrons cannot be allowed to remain idle, or long exposed to enemy eyes on the ground. In order to "pay off," these planes must be in the air the maximum time possible. When a cargo ship glides in, the QM's are ready. Rarely do the ships have to wait unnecessarily for supply loads.

Operational problems have, of course, arisen. As the volume of dropping increased, so did the necessity for increasing the payload of each plane. Experimentation and modification resulted in improvements in containers and methods. This work is still constantly going on with the ultimate goal of more supply tonnage and less packing weight to each load- all to arrive on the target in first class and usable condition.

For reasons of security, figures on actual over-all tonnage dropped can't be given. According to Lt. Colonel Dodge, however, "supplies delivered have steadily increase over the period of the past nine months...and are listed in...four figures per month."

**COMMENT FROM THE TOP** But the real evidence of air supply's significance comes from a staff officer attached to the staff of the former commander of the CBI, General Stillwell. Says he, "Air supply has undoubtedly been one of the greatest single factors contributing to the success of the North Burma campaign to date. Conditions on lines of communication, particularly during the monsoon season, has resulted in almost total dependence upon air drops and landings for support of the entire force in forward areas. From a tactical standpoint, certain operations have been successfully accomplished, which without air supply, would have been difficult, if not impossible of achievement."

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### Bastogne

One of the most important troop carrier missions of World War II was the re-supply of the US 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, which found itself surrounded by German forces at the Belgian town of Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge. This 2007 US Army Military History Institute article describes the re-supply effort.

**Air Borne to the Airborne** December 26, 2007 By [Louise A. Arnold-Friend, U.S. Army Military History Institute](#)



#### **AIRBORNE TROOP CARRIER SHOULDER PATCH**

*The Airborne Troop Carrier Shoulder Patch was not a War Department approved insignia but was worn by local authority. It should be noted that Airborne Troop Carrier personnel participated in every major airborne operation conducted by the United States...*

On December 16, 1944, German troops launched the great strategic counter-offensive that came to be known as "the Battle of the Bulge." They swept through and around the dense Ardennes forest, across the formidable Schnee Eifel, and along key roadways north and south of that promontory, aiming towards the River Meuse and the heart of the Allied line advancing eastward. Among the Allied responses to this threat from the east, elements of the First Allied Airborne Army were rapidly brought forward to help halt the German advance. Included in that command's assets was the 101st Airborne Division, which was assigned to hold the tactically significant road convergence at Bastogne. Elements still based in Britain, the 17th (US) and 6th (British) Airborne Divisions, were ordered to move by air, thereby compounding the already tenuous Allied logistical problems created by the summer decision to move toward the German frontier along two axes.

Those logistical problems of reinforcing and re-supplying embattled troops and of resisting German attacks were hampered even more by foul weather. Allied units and their reinforcements quickly ran low on war-making and sustenance supplies. From December 18 to 22, the Ninth Air Force was able to mount only 1186 bombing sorties against the German "bulge" developing along Allied lines. Efforts at supply drops were hindered by poor communications, bad flying weather, and shortage of transport

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planes, many of which were moving troops from the United Kingdom. As personnel from the 101st Airborne fought to hold the key position at Bastogne it became surrounded, and the town's situation became critical. On December 22, General Patton requested that re-supply of the 101st "have first priority in all re-supply operations."

A break in the weather the next day allowed full air-based operations to proceed. Over the next five days, there were 8,608 sorties. At first light on December 23, two aircraft of the IX Troop Carrier Command dropped pathfinder teams over Bastogne, and from that time onward, re-supply drops over Bastogne were successful. A total of 260 aircraft dropped 334 tons of materiel by parachute. The most urgent need, artillery ammunition, could not be efficiently packed in parachute containers. Gliders left over from the invasions of Normandy and Holland were used for the ammunition, because they did not require the intricate container packing. Thirty-five gliders, carrying 103 tons of re-supply, were flown through heavy FLAK on December 27, alone. However, weather again intervened, curtailing all flying the following day. Only 536 sorties flew on December 29, and 538 the next day, but by then Patton's column from the south had relieved the 101st. At the end of December all further airborne re-supply to the division was canceled.

The success of the re-supply of Bastogne cannot be measured in numbers alone, but the numbers are telling: 1020.7 tons of supplies and equipment (including 4900 gallons of gasoline) were dropped to the 101st Airborne by parachute, and 92.4 tons (including 2975 gallons of gasoline) were landed by glider. The success rate of the drops was estimated at 94.06%. First Allied Airborne Army's official report of the operation concluded, "These operations clearly established that, despite unfavorable weather, aerial re-supply of units of division strength isolated in enemy territory within a reasonable distance of friendly lines, can be effectively accomplished." Logistically, strategically, and tactically, Allied air and land forces worked together to win the Battle of the Bulge.

### Our Membership

The charter of the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association and our By-Laws stipulate that it is for:

*Any and all persons who served on active or reserve duty in a troop carrier unit of the United States Army Air Forces or United States Air Force or a tactical airlift unit of the United States Air Force. This includes veterans of units identified as "combat cargo" and Service Command air transportation units, special operations transport units and units identified as "airlift" but with a combat airlift role.*

We decided to take a look at the demographics of our membership to see exactly what periods are represented and this is what we found:

- World War II Veterans – 8
- Veterans whose service started in 1940s – 5
- Veterans whose service started in 1950s – 44
- Veterans whose service started 1960-65 – 43
- Veterans whose service started 1965 and after – 29
- Veterans whose service is not recorded – 19
- Members now deceased – 4
- Inactive members – 23
- Berlin Airlift veterans - 2
- Korea Veterans – 4
- Vietnam Veterans – 123 (includes members who served in World War II and Korea)

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What these statistics show is that our membership is varied, but that all periods of the troop carrier mission are well represented. The earliest date of service for our members is 1942, while the latest recorded entry date is 1969. We have some newer members who started after that but for some reason their years of service are not recorded. We have veterans who served in World War II, the Berlin Airlift, Korea, The Cold War, Vietnam, the Congo, the Dominican Crisis, Quemoy/Matsu, Lebanon, the Gulf War and the more recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which is sometimes called the War on Terror. Some of our World War II veterans remained in service and were also involved in Korea and Vietnam. Many of our Vietnam Era veterans also remained in service and were involved in operations including Grenada, Panama, the Gulf War, Iraq and Afghanistan. In short, our membership is diverse in terms of period of service, but for many, there is a lot of overlapping of periods with no single group dominating. Unfortunately, many of our older members are unable to attend our events due to age and health issues, but they are nevertheless an important part of our membership and our heritage.

### 5<sup>th</sup> Communications Squadron



As a rule, one does not associate an Air Force communications squadron with the troop carrier mission. However, there was one squadron that was a part of the troop carrier mission throughout its service. The former Army Air Forces Airways and Communications System became part of MATS in 1946 then achieved command status itself in 1961 and became the Air Force Communications Service. There was a single squadron, however, that was never part of either the Airways and Communication Service or AFCS. For seventeen years, from January 1951 to July 1968, the 5<sup>th</sup> Communications Squadron was part of 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division and served as the communications link between the division headquarters at Tachikawa AB, Japan and its various units throughout the

Pacific.

5<sup>th</sup> Comm, as it was generally known throughout its existence, developed from a system put into place in the fall of 1950 by Col. Manuel Fernandez. Col. Fernandez was a communications specialist who went to Japan with Maj. Gen. William H. Tunner as part of the temporary staff that was being set up to control Far East Air Forces transport operations in support of the recently erupted war on the Korean Peninsula. Using Tunner's influence at MATS headquarters, to which the Airways and Communications Service reported, Fernandez managed to set up a network of communications stations at the three troop carrier bases in Japan and at bases served by Combat Cargo Support Units in Korea. (Combat Cargo Support Units were Air Force units that worked with Army aerial port personnel.)

On January 25, 1951, 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division activated to replace the Combat Cargo Command, which had been a provisional unit. The 5<sup>th</sup> Communications Squadron activated at Fuchu along with 315<sup>th</sup> to provide communications for the new division and its far-flung units, which were based not only in Japan, but throughout the Western Pacific. Maj. James Snead, who had formerly been the base communications officer at Ashiya, took command of the new squadron. Although most of the squadron's personnel were based in Japan, about a third served with detachments in Korea, where they were usually based along with detachments of the 6127<sup>th</sup> Air Terminal Group, which activated as part of 315<sup>th</sup> to operate the aerial ports when they transferred to the Air Force from the Army. 5<sup>th</sup> Comm personnel lived in tents in forward areas and were usually the last to leave whenever an airfield had to be abandoned when it was threatened by

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advancing Chinese and North Korean troops. All 5<sup>th</sup> Comm detachments were highly mobile, as were the air terminal detachments, and could quickly relocate into or out of an area.



5<sup>th</sup> Comm personnel performed a myriad of communication duties, in some cases including air traffic control. Their primary duty was to operate and maintain radio equipment that provided the communications link between airlift bases and destination airfields and 315<sup>th</sup> Headquarters in Japan. In addition to static stations, squadron personnel operated mobile radio jeeps and portable long range radio sets. The squadron included radio operators, radio maintenance personnel, teletype operators, telephone linemen and other communications personnel. The squadron was under-staffed and under-equipped, with personnel

sometimes having to purchase equipment with their own funds. Experienced personnel trained men in the field to operate the equipment.

After the Korean War ended in a truce, 5<sup>th</sup> Comm remained an integral part of 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division. Squadron detachments were based throughout the Pacific where the division's aerial port units were based (the 6127<sup>th</sup> Air Terminal Group had become the 2<sup>nd</sup> Aerial Port Group) and where the division had established Transportation Movement Centers (TMC) and Transportation Movement Detachments (TMD). (TMCs and TMDs are the forerunners of the 1960s-70s Airlift Command Centers and Airlift Command Elements.) When the 6315<sup>th</sup> Operations Group activated at Naha AB, Okinawa in 1963, 5<sup>th</sup> Comm personnel were assigned to the headquarters to operate and maintain communications equipment. When Tactical Air Command rotational squadrons began operating from Clark Air Base and Mactan in the Philippines, 5<sup>th</sup> Comm set up and operated communications facilities. 5<sup>th</sup> Comm personnel went on temporary duty to South Vietnam and Thailand to operate communications facilities for 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division units operating in Southeast Asia, including the 315<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Group, which was established to provide command and control of TAC rotational C-123 squadrons.

As US activities in the Pacific increased in conjunction with the escalating Vietnam War, additional communication units also arrived. On October 15, 1966, 834<sup>th</sup> Air Division activated in Saigon to control airlift operations in South Vietnam and the 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division detachments transferred into it. While 5<sup>th</sup> Comm still provided communication services for 315<sup>th</sup> operations in Thailand and elsewhere in the Pacific, its Vietnam operations were taken over by other units. In 1968, the Air Force reorganized its tactical forces. As part of the reorganization, the 5<sup>th</sup> Communications Squadron inactivated on July 15, 1968. Its personnel transferred to the local communications squadron on whatever base they had been assigned.

### A Mobility Icon

Although I had no idea who he was at the time, in the fall of 1965 I had my first brush with a burly, gruff, cigar-chomping major who wore the wings of an Air Force navigator on his left breast and still had a TAC patch on his right fatigue pocket even though he had been in Vietnam for several months. The name tag over

the TAC patch said his name was Cuomo. My crew had been sent to Vung Tau, South Vietnam from our TDY base at Mactan, an island in the Philippines, to move the men and equipment of an Australian infantry regiment that had just arrived by ship to Bien Hoa, where they would be operating with the U.S. Army 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne

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Regiment. Maj. Cuomo was there along with a TSgt Sims, who I have since learned was the Stan/Eval loadmaster for one of the C-123 squadrons at Tan Son Nhut. The loadmaster was Jim Sims, who I would get to know a few years later at Charleston, SC when we were in the same squadron.

It was hard to miss Maj. Cuomo. He was there on the ramp observing every loading operation. As it turned out, the movement went a lot faster than expected and after the second day, some of the other crews were pulled off of the move and sent to other tasks. Our crew, however, was kept on it. On the last day of the operation as we were preparing to return to Mactan, Maj. Cuomo came over to the airplane and talked to me for a few minutes. At the time, I had no idea who Maj. Cuomo was, but it turns out that he was considered to be the best of the best when it came to air mobility. I'm not sure where he had been before he went to Saigon to the 8<sup>th</sup> Aerial Port Squadron, although for some reason I think it was Sewart. His air transportation career dates back to the early 1940s.

Lt. Col. Stephen L. Cuomo – he was promoted not long after I first saw him at Vung Tau – first became involved in the airlift world when he was flying in the China-Burma-India Area of Operations during World War II. The 315<sup>th</sup> AD AIRLIFTER article about him doesn't specify whether he was in the Air Transport Command or in one of the Tenth Air Force troop carrier or combat cargo squadrons. He is quoted as stating that his entire career was in combat cargo and mobility, so he was most likely in Tenth Air Force. After the war, he left the

military for civilian life but remained in the Reserves. In 1950 he was recalled to active duty for the Korean War. It's unclear if he served with 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division in the Korean Airlift or if his Korean service was Stateside. He quickly gained a reputation as an innovative airlifter. One of his projects was the development of a procedure for transporting partially dismantled fighters in C-124s. He was also involved in the development of LAPES for C-130s.

Maj. Cuomo went to Saigon in the summer of 1965 at the height of the US buildup of forces in the theater. At the time, the primary transport in South Vietnam was the C-123, but C-130s were entering the airlift system. He was assigned to the 8<sup>th</sup> Aerial Port Squadron as the head of the air freight mobility section. In August his section was assigned to remove classified electronic gear from a forward airfield that was completely surrounded by VC and was threatened to be overrun. He took a five-man team into the airfield to prepare the load for shipment by air and took it all out in C-130s. He commented that "The VC didn't think we'd be crazy enough to fly in and out more than once. When we made return trips, they weren't prepared to intercept us." He was cited by MACV commander General William Westmoreland and Second Air Division commander Lt. Gen. Joe Moore for the action. During his one year tour in Saigon, Lt. Col. Cuomo flew more than 150 combat missions. When he left Tan Son Nhut in the summer of 1966, he went to USAF Headquarters in the Pentagon to assume a role as the first officer responsible for the development of aerial port facilities and procedures.

### LAPES MISHAP

Life Member John Limbach recently posted the following on an Internet Forum in response to a question about a LAPES mishap at Pope in 1969:

*Well, I guess I have to own up to the fact that I was the loadmaster involved in that incident. At the time I was assigned to the*

*4419th Test Squadron, USAF Tactical Airlift Center at Pope. One of the neat things about that assignment was that our commander was a*

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BG (Joe Donovan) and the Wing CO was only an 0-6. And the General never let him forget it either.

The other good thing was that we had our own aircraft, 63-7768 that we stole from the 777th, since we didn't have any maintainers, you guys got to do that for us. And, oh yeah, since our big dog outranked yours, guess who had priority for maintenance and everything else?

But, back to the story. The date was March 7, 1969 and the mission was a routine test of the LAPES towplate that one of our engineers designed. The load was three twelve foot platforms linked together and pulled out all at once by a cluster of three 28-foot extraction parachutes, which were in turn pulled out by a 15-foot extraction parachute being towed behind the aircraft. The 15 footer was held in check by a mechanical device called the Towplate. The total extracted weight was 36,000 pounds. At the release point, about 50 feet in the air, the towplate was activated allowing the drogue parachute ( 15-foot) to pull out a G-12 deployment bag that had the three 28-footers packed inside. The 28-footers had vent lines installed that pulled the apex down toward the skirt for faster deployment. Once the chutes deployed, the load was released from the RH locks and began moving aft with great gusto. The aft CG shift caused the nose of the aircraft to rise, and if everything went just right he aircraft would be at a level attitude at a wheel height of five feet when the load came off the ramp. Sometimes it actually happened that way, but after three years flying on the LAPES test program I have way too many stories of when it didn't quite go as it should have. Material for a book if I could get Sam to write it. But, as usual I digress.

Back to the incident in question, but first a short tutorial on how the Towplate worked. The primary release for this particular version of towplate used the LH static line retriever to pull a slide aft thereby releasing the towlink and allowing all the action happen. There was a massive aluminum backup plate mounted

between the retriever motor and the FS245 bulkhead to strengthen the mounting.

The loadmaster's position during the drop was standing right underneath the retriever holding to two metal handles attached to two cables, which were in turn attached to the towplate. One was painted silver and the other painted Red. At the "Green Light" call, the CP hit the green light switch and since the LM being the diligent chap he was had already flipped the LAPES/CDS switch to the armed position, (Aha, so that's where that useless switch came from) the retriever started winding in and (in theory) released the towplate. At the same time, the LM pulled his silver handle from which which a cable ran all the way back the towplate on the ramp and was connected directly to the unlocking slide. So, either the LM or the CP would effect the release. Usually the LM since the retriever cable had a two turn break tie of 80-lb tape to overcome and by then the LM had already pulled his handle and started the extraction sequence. For some reason we never could convince our chief LAPES pilot and CO, Benny Fioritto of this. It got to the point we just disconnected the retriever cable and he still wouldn't believe we beat him to the release. But there's not enough room in one post for all the Fioritto stories, as some of you know. If you did all that and the load was still there, you threw down the silver handle and pulled on the red one which, in theory, jettisoned the drogue parachute. You could then close up and try to sort out what went wrong and try again if you felt lucky. We used the red handle a LOT.

Anyway, this incident occurred because of the way the static line retriever cable was configured. There was a pulley mounted at the aft end of the backup plate that changed the direction of retriever cable to forward and down. Another pulley was mounted on the floor just forward the first centerline tiedown ring. Running the cable through this pulley changed to direction aft, and the cable was run all the way out to the ramp hinge where it laid on the floor, eventually underneath the platform(s). The

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retriever cable wasn't long enough to reach the towplate so we had a short cable made up with a swage ball on each end. We then attached the one end of short cable to the towplate and the other to the end of the retriever cable using a standard barrel connector. The barrel connector was tied to a tiedown ring with (as I remember) two turns of 80-lb tape. This allowed the retriever to build up enough force by the time it overcame the break tie to jerk short cable and release the towplate.

So, we deploy the drogue and start down from 600 feet with me standing blithely underneath the retriever backup plate with towplate mechanical release cables in my hand. Descending through 50 feet and passing the release panels, the CP calls "Green Light" hits the jump light switch. The retriever starts to reel in and I pull the silver handle releasing the towplate. The load starts to move aft and just as it does, the 80-lb tie breaks allowing the barrel connector to jump up in the air just as the platform arrives. The aft end of one of the platform roller pads catches on the end of the barrel connector momentarily applying the entire extraction force of 60,000+ lbs to the static line retriever cable, back through the two pulleys causing 100,000 lbs or so of force to be applied the retriever mounting hardware and the FS245 bulkhead just long enough to pull it all apart and down onto my head. Think of a carpenter driving a 16d nail, with me being the nail and you get the picture. The last thing I remember was seeing the load start to move, and then I took a short nap.

My boss, CMSgt Jesse Goddard, was looking at me when it happened and is absolutely convince that I'm dead, so he steps over me and runs up to the cockpit yelling in Fioritto's ear, "Limbach's dead". Fioritto heads back to Pope (from Sicily DZ) at Warp 9 while I'm sleeping blissfully on the cabin floor with a big pile of assorted metal bits on top of me.

First thing I remember is waking up pissed off because I can't see anything and my other boss, MSgt Dave Purdy, is yelling at

somebody and keeps waking me up. Eventually I figure out that he's trying to open a first aid kit, so I yell at him to give the damn thing to me and I'll open. Anything to get some peace and quiet. Was a pretty neat trick since I'm flat on my back and can't see anything because blood has pooled up in my eye sockets from the head wound. You know how much head wound bleeds, right? Holy Jeez I couldn't believe all that blood came out of me. Looked like somebody took fire hose and shot red paint all over me.

So, we get on the ground in front of base ops and somebody helps me walk down the crew entrance door and over to the ambulance. Off we whiz the Pope clinic where the Flt Surgeon X-rays my head and pretty much loses interest once he figures out the skull isn't fractured. So he tells his Sgt. to stitch me up using thus an such a method, being a good Sgt and not being one to lose a training opportunity, the Sgt goes and gets Amn Fobnocker and is going to let him get some OJT on my head. The Sgt says, "OK, watch me" and he puts a few stitches in by way of demonstration. "OK, you try it", and Amn F. goes at it. "Great" says the Sgt, "Keep it up and I'll be back in a minute". And off he goes. Amn F. is stitching merrily along when after 15 minutes or so, the Sgt comes back, takes a look and say, "No, no that's not the way I showed you. Pull out those last 20 or so stitches and do them over". So, out they come and over he starts. I am beginning to not be amused by now. At any rate, when he finishes and gets the seal of approval, the stitch count stands at 56.

They put a bandage on my head, have me sign the 1042 as DNIF and turn me loose. I walk back to our office up on hill and the boss tells me to go home and not come back until I feel OK. So naturally I go straight to the stag bar at the NCO club for a couple of stiff drinks before I jump in my truck and drive the 13 miles home.

Long story, but you did ask and it won't be long before I forget it, since I'm starting to forget a lot of stuff.

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*A couple postscripts:*

*1. In those days my then-wife did medical transcribing in the radiology department at Womack Army Hospital at FT. Bragg where the Flt Surgeon sent my X-ray to be read by one of the radiologists. She was halfway through typing his notes before it dawned on her that it was me. Of course nobody thought to notify her. By that time I was already home and working on my next drink.*

*2. I got a call the next morning saying for me to go over to the Flt Surgeon's office and sign off DNIF as fit to fly. Not to come back to work, but get off DNIF. Turns out if you were in an incident/accident and were DNIF longer than 48 hours it escalated into some kind of big deal. Our general decided that the LAPES program couldn't stand that kind of scrutiny so told the FS to sign me back to duty. Which he did. I screwed around for about three weeks until I was bored stiff and then went back to flying*

*LAPES tests. The program went on for another two years and eventually got more predictable and less exciting. Well, it was still exciting but not terrifying near as often as it had been in the early days.*

*3. Oh yeah, the fix for the problem was easy. We made a long cable that ran all the way from FS245 to the towplate and connected it to the retriever cable FORWARD of the load so there was nothing for the platform to catch on the way out. Problem solved. At least that one was. We had lots more problems in the next two year of testing. Damaged equipment and airplanes a lot, but never injured anyone else so I was the only human casualty of the LAPES test program.*

*I have a picture of the front of the aircraft after all that crap ripped out. Not sure whether I have it on the computer, but if I find it, I'll put it up here.*

*Strange stuff, but you just couldn't make this shit up!*

### Problems With the VA

This past week, I was contacted by another person that I knew in the military whose claim for VA medical benefits related to exposure to herbicides in South Vietnam was denied because he can't "prove" that he physically set foot in-country. This particular individual was in maintenance at Pope and all of his Vietnam service was on TAC rotations to Kadena and Mactan, and from there to Southeast Asia. I wrote a "buddy letter" for him to give to the VA so we'll see what happens.

I also did something else – I wrote a letter to the Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Congressman Jeff Miller of Florida, in which I described the situation that so many veterans are having and suggested that the VA establish a special policy for men who were assigned to C-130 units and other organizations that performed frequent TDY in South Vietnam. While Vietnam service has no bearing on most service-connected disabilities, the following are considered "presumptive" to exposure to herbicides used in South Vietnam. Exposure to herbicides IS NOT considered presumptive for veterans whose service was in Thailand or other locations where herbicide use wasn't widespread.

#### [AL Amyloidosis](#)

A rare disease caused when an abnormal protein, amyloid, enters tissues or organs

#### [Chronic B-cell Leukemias](#)

A type of cancer which affects white blood cells

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### Chloracne (or similar acneform disease)

A skin condition that occurs soon after exposure to chemicals and looks like common forms of acne seen in teenagers. Under VA's rating regulations, it must be at least 10 percent disabling within one year of exposure to herbicides.

### Diabetes Mellitus Type 2

A disease characterized by high blood sugar levels resulting from the body's inability to respond properly to the hormone insulin

### Hodgkin's Disease

A malignant lymphoma (cancer) characterized by progressive enlargement of the lymph nodes, liver, and spleen, and by progressive anemia

### Ischemic Heart Disease

A disease characterized by a reduced supply of blood to the heart, that leads to chest pain

### Multiple Myeloma

A cancer of plasma cells, a type of white blood cell in bone marrow

### Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma

A group of cancers that affect the lymph glands and other lymphatic tissue

### Parkinson's Disease

A progressive disorder of the nervous system that affects muscle movement

### Peripheral Neuropathy, Acute and Subacute

A nervous system condition that causes numbness, tingling, and motor weakness. Currently, it must be at least 10 percent disabling within one year of herbicide exposure and resolve within two years. VA proposed on Aug. 10, 2012, to replace "acute and subacute" with "early-onset" and eliminate the requirement that symptoms resolve within two years.

### Porphyria Cutanea Tarda

A disorder characterized by liver dysfunction and by thinning and blistering of the skin in sun-exposed areas. Under VA's rating regulations, it must be at least 10 percent disabling within one year of exposure to herbicides.

### Prostate Cancer

Cancer of the prostate; one of the most common cancers among men

### Respiratory Cancers (includes lung cancer)

Cancers of the lung, larynx, trachea, and bronchus

### Soft Tissue Sarcomas (other than osteosarcoma, chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma, or mesothelioma)

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A group of different types of cancers in body tissues such as muscle, fat, blood and lymph vessels, and connective tissues

The problem is that the military did not record temporary duty service on an individual's service records. If a member has them, orders for temporary duty to a specific APO will suffice but the problem is that C-130 flight crewmembers and others were issued blanket orders that were not Vietnam-specific. Even decorations may not suffice unless they stipulate that the individual was on the ground in South Vietnam. This is because missions were often flown out of Thailand (although this is not generally true of transport crewmembers because the South Vietnam and Thailand airlift operations were separate.) What I have proposed to the Congressman is that the VA set a policy under which persons in certain career fields are presumed to have served in South Vietnam. The career fields would include all aircrew positions, flight line mechanics and certain maintenance specialist fields (there were some fields in which personnel may not have served in South Vietnam because major maintenance and inspections were accomplished at the airplane's home base out of country.) Personnel in other fields may have to show orders since not everyone assigned to a C-130 wing was subject to TDY to one of the operating locations in South Vietnam.

I would like to see all of our members contact the Committee on Veterans Affairs:

House Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
335 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

### *Phone*

Office: (202) 225-3527  
Fax: (202) 225-5486

In addition, we should all contact our individual Congressmen. Some of us are fortunate in that we are able to supply proof of South Vietnam service (in my case, it's on a DD214 because I reenlisted at Cam Ranh) but many of our fellow veterans are not.

### **2014 Convention**

Jim Esbeck and Bill Goodall, two of our members who live in Tucson, are putting together a package for our next convention/members meeting, which is planned for sometime in 2014 in the Tucson area. At present, no date has been set. As soon as the date is decided, we'll let the membership know ASAP.

### **Newsletter Contributions**

We are always eager to have contributions from our membership for inclusion in the newsletter. Personal accounts, historical accounts, anything that's related to our purposes and would be of interest to the membership are encouraged and solicited! Email the editor at [sammcgowan@troopcarrier.org](mailto:sammcgowan@troopcarrier.org) or [semcgowanjr@gmail.com](mailto:semcgowanjr@gmail.com) or submit by mail to The Airlifter, 3727 Hill Family Lane, Missouri City, TX 77459

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