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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*

September 30, 2013

Volume XXII

### Finances

Our current bank balance is \$7,144.40. We paid a \$500 deposit to the Hilton Doubletree Suites in Tucson which dropped us to \$6,944.40. Two \$100.00 deposits brought us to our current level. We have \$150.00 in dues checks to deposit which gives us a total of \$7,294.40 in our treasury. We are planning to add the ability to accept credit card payments for dues and convention registrations through PayPal to our account in the near future. (Note – We will have to add a small charge to transactions to cover PayPal's service fee.)

### Maj. General James I. "Bagger" Baginski

We are always saddened to learn of the passing of a beloved airlifter. The latest is Maj. General James I. Baginski, who was commonly known as "Bagger," who passed away Sunday,



September 22 after a long illness. While many knew him because of his later years in various staff positions as a general officer and leadership in the Airlift/Tanker Association, his earlier history in troop carrier is even more notable.

The Baltimore, Maryland native's military service began after he graduated from the University of Maryland in 1954 and was

commissioned through ROTC. Upon completion of pilot training in 1955, he went to the 314<sup>th</sup> TCW at Sewart Air Force Base, Tennessee to fly C-119s with the 61<sup>st</sup> TCS. Three years later he transferred to the 483<sup>rd</sup> TCW at Ashiya Air Base, Japan, which was in the process of transitioning into the new C-130A. Part of the transition included the transfer of the wing's 21<sup>st</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron, which was responsible for support of CIA clandestine activities, from Tachikawa to Naha AB, Okinawa. The Bagger transferred to Naha to join the 21<sup>st</sup> and became the squadron's current operations officer, which put him right in the middle of the squadron's mission of providing airplanes for CIA use. The late Brig. General Harry Aderholt had a lot to say about 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Baginski in his autobiography. Aderholt's office at Kadena provided Naha-based C-130s to the CIA to support operations involving the insertion and supply of Tibetan agents in their native country.

In June 1962 Bagger returned to Sewart where he was assigned to the 314<sup>th</sup> training office.

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## The Airlifter Volume XXI

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Two years later he entered the Command and Staff College. Upon graduation and obtaining a masters degree from George Washington University, he went to Tactical Air Command Headquarters as an operations staff officer. During that time the Air Force decided to assign experienced troop carrier officers to U.S. Army and Marine divisions in South Vietnam as tactical airlift liaison officers. Baginski was assigned to the Army's 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division at An Khe as a TALO in August 1966. Upon completion of his tour, he was assigned to the Military Personnel Center at Randolph AFB, Texas in the Crew Control Branch. In 1970 he entered the National War College, then was assigned to the Military Airlift Command where he held several staff positions at the wing and command level. In May 1973 he returned to the troop carrier mission, which had been redesignated as tactical airlift, as commander of the renamed 374<sup>th</sup> TAW at CCK, Taiwan. (In May 1971 the 314<sup>th</sup> transferred back to the States and the CCK wing was given the designation of the wing that had just deactivated

at Naha.) A few months later the wing transferred to Clark AB, P.I. The U.S. was no longer playing an active role in the Vietnam War but had begun supporting the Cambodian government, particularly with airlift. In 1975 Colonel Baginski transferred to U Tapao, Thailand to command project *SCOOT-CE*, the resupply of Cambodia. When Cambodia fell, he moved to Saigon to direct the evacuation of Americans and selected Vietnamese from the city, then returned to command of the 374<sup>th</sup> TAW.

In September 1975 Bagger returned to MAC headquarters, where he held several staff positions over the next nine year. He was a major general and director of the Joint Development Agency at McDill when he retired in November 1984. He retired in Branchville, New Jersey but was living in the St. Louis area at the time of his death.

### 2014 Convention

The date and place for our 2014 Convention has been finalized. We'll be meeting at the Doubletree Suites at the airport at Tucson, Arizona starting on Wednesday, October 15, 2014 and continuing through Sunday, October 19. All meetings will be held at the hotel but we'll be visiting the Pima Air Museum, which has one of the best aircraft collections in the world, and the "airplane graveyard" at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base. An excursion is also planned to visit the air rescue unit on the base to tour a HC-130J. Room rates start out at \$99.00 for a suite (the hotel is a former Embassy Suites.) They provide free breakfast each morning. There'll be a reception at the hotel on Thursday evening and a banquet on Saturday. The registration fee is yet to be determined, but it should be around \$125-150.00 per person, which will include the reception and

banquet. We may have to charge additional for bus charter for the trips to the museum and graveyard (graveyard tours are only by bus), depending on the cost. Tucson is in a very scenic part of the country and there is a lot to see and do in the vicinity. The city is served by six airlines. Phoenix Sky Harbor is about 120 miles to the north, less than two hours away. Tucson is located on Interstate 10, which makes it convenient for those who want to drive in. Check the web site at [www.troopcarrier.org/convention.html](http://www.troopcarrier.org/convention.html) for additional information. Jim Esbeck, Bill Goodall and Mike Schmid, who all live in the Tucson area, are taking care of organization and planning. A lot of people have expressed an interest in attending who have not been to one of our events before. We're expecting a good turnout.

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# The Airlifter Volume XXI

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## TC/TAA Bookstore

There are quite a few books in print about the tactical airlift mission, as it is known today, and we have set up an online bookstore through Amazon.com where those who are interested can purchase them and at the same time make a small contribution to the Association. The URL is [www.troopcarrier.org/books.html](http://www.troopcarrier.org/books.html). Anything you

order will generate a small advertizing fee which will be credited to our bank account. If anyone knows of any books or anything tactical airlift-related that isn't listed, please let the webmaster know at [semcgowanjr@gmail.com](mailto:semcgowanjr@gmail.com). This is a great way to find some reading material or mementos and contribute to the organization.

## New Members

One of the major goals of our organization is to attract new members and we're gradually adding more. As of right now, we have a total of 160 active and inactive members (with an inactive member being one who is not current on dues) from all spectrums of the tactical airlift mission, including aerial port (aerial delivery, air freight, combat control and passenger service), communications, maintenance, and other support functions as well as aircrew. At the 2008 convention Carl Wyrick recommended that we set a goal for each member to recruit three new members before the next convention. Several members are working steadily to meet this goal. Earlier this year Carl, Bobby Gassiott and Mike Welch attended the C-123/Mule Train reunion in Branson, Missouri where they recruited several new members. One of the new members they recruited turns out to be perhaps our most experienced member as far as an all-around airlift background is concerned. Personally, I was overjoyed that they found him and that he elected to join. Howard "Bo" Bohannon was Major Bohannon when I knew him at Pope in 1964-66 when I was a brand new aircrew member and he

was the chief of the Stan/Eval flight for the 464<sup>th</sup> TCW. The reason I say he is perhaps our most experienced member is because his career, which ranged from 1943 to 1966, included three assignments as an aerial port officer in the United States, Europe and the Pacific as well as troop carrier pilot assignments. He was with the 3<sup>rd</sup> APS in the US, the 5<sup>th</sup> in Europe and the 6<sup>th</sup> in the Pacific and served in three wars and two expeditions. Bo lives in Scottsdale and is looking forward to attending our convention in Tucson next year. We just picked up John Dale, whose troop carrier career started in 1954 and continued to 1984. John started out enlisted then became a pilot and was commissioned. John is one of the original C-130 pilots and flew with the Four Horsemen. Our newest member and newest WW II Life Member is another original C-130 pilot and one of the Horsemen ACs, Jim Aiken, whose troop carrier career dates back to 1943. Lloyd Cooper and John Kays are our newest 10-year members.

Check [www.troopcarrier.org/members.html](http://www.troopcarrier.org/members.html) to see the up-to-date members list.

## Lackland Aircrew Training Break Room Plaque

Earlier this year the Alamo Chapter of the Professional Loadmasters Association in San Antonio contacted our president, Mike Welch, about helping sponsor a project they have undertaken to decorate a break room at the Aircrew Training Center at Lackland Air Force Base. Unfortunately, due to the tax status of the two organizations – the TC/TAA is a military veterans organization while the PLA is a professional organization that includes non-veterans – we are unable to make a direct contribution to their effort. However, the officers voted to purchase a plaque describing the purposes of our organization to place on the

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## The Airlifter Volume XXI

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wall. Although we as an organization cannot contribute directly, anyone who wishes to help them out can send a contribution to Andy Vaquera, 1506 Oak Cask, San Antonio, TX 78253. I'm sure the PLA will be very grateful for your help. (Note – aircraft maintenance training is at other bases, particularly Sheppard AFB, Texas.)

### Engineers, Crew Chiefs and Flight Line and Other Maintenance in Tactical Airlift



On September 28, 1912 U.S. Army Corp. Frank S. Scott had the rather dubious honor of being the first U.S. enlisted man to be killed in an aviation accident. At the time, Scott was serving as an airplane mechanic at

the U.S. Army flying school at College Park, Maryland. He had come by the assignment purely by accident. Originally an artilleryman, he transferred to the Signal Corps. After suffering a lengthy illness which rendered him incapable of carrying out his duties, he was reassigned to the new aviation section where his initial duties involved releasing hot air balloons. He transferred to the flight school when he showed an aptitude for mechanical work. Scott was on the flight because he had been pestering Lt. Lewis Rockwell, a pilot trainee, to take him for a ride. Originally, another officer was supposed to ride with Rockwell that day but was bumped because of his weight. Scott was still underweight due to the effects of his previous illness and was allowed to go along. Rockwell made one flight solo then landed to pick up Scott. As they were coming in to land, the engine suddenly quit and the airplane went into the ground. Scott was killed in the crash

and Rockwell died later that evening. In 1917 the Army decided to set up a flying field just east of St. Louis and named it in Scott's honor.



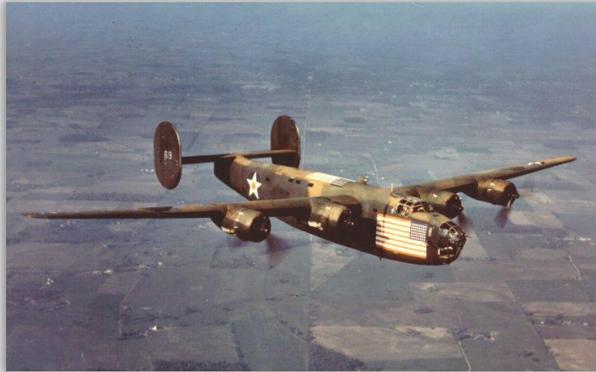
FIGURE 1 DOUGLAS C-47

When considering the role of aircraft mechanics in tactical airlift, it is important to remember that there is no Air Force career field called "crew chief." Crew chief is actually a title and is used to designate the senior member of any kind of crew, regardless of what kind. The Army and the Air Force that followed it have always officially referred to aircraft maintenance personnel as just that, mechanics (or they did until mechanics started calling themselves "maintainers".) Just when the Army first started referring to the mechanic responsible for a particular airplane as a crew chief is unclear, but it was either during or right after World War I. After the war, ground crew chiefs sometimes flew with their airplanes on cross-country flights to perform maintenance at enroute facilities.

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## The Airlifter Volume XXI

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**FIGURE 2 B-24 TRANSPORT**

It wasn't until the 1920s that the Army Air Service started operating transport airplanes. Because their flights involved cross-country flying, crew chiefs accompanied their airplane to take care of it at enroute stops. By 1941 when the Air Corps began purchasing large numbers of airline type aircraft for transport use, the transport aircrew had been established as two pilots, a crew chief and a radio operator. (Navigators were only used on overwater flights.) Throughout the war, crew chiefs were part of the flight crew in troop carrier squadrons. Their duties included supervising the loading of cargo, ejecting cargo inflight and hooking up glider tow ropes.

With the advent of multiengine airplanes, a need developed for a crewmember to be aboard the airplane to monitor the engines. The ill-fated Barling Bomber, which was so under-powered it couldn't gain enough altitude to clear the Appalachians, carried not one but two mechanics who were designated as "flight engineers" because their duties were to monitor and operate the huge airplane's six power plants. From then on, airplanes with more than two engines included an engineer as part of their crew. This practice continued until the late 1940s when the Air Force started purchasing multiengine jet bombers and the engineer position was eliminated from all aircrews except those assigned to transports. While aircrews for four-engine airplanes included an aerial or flight engineer, twin-engine airplane crews did not. On combat airplanes such as the A-20, B-25 and B-26, an enlisted gunner was assigned to the flight crew. In some squadrons the

gunner was a mechanic and worked on the airplane while it was on the ground.

There were actually two different military MOSs that were identified as engineers. Aerial engineers were assigned to four-engine airplanes such as the Boeing B-17, Consolidated B-24 and Douglas C-54. A new field called flight engineer was developed specifically for the Boeing B-29 on which the engineer not only monitored the engines; he had throttles at his panel to operate them. In fact, the first B-29 engineers were qualified pilots and commissioned officers. They were eventually replaced by men with engineering backgrounds and former B-17 and B-24 aerial engineers. Flight engineers were part of the crew on long-range aircraft such as the C-124.

An enlisted mechanic continued to be part of the tactical airlift flight crew in troop carrier squadrons after World War II and beyond. There doesn't seem to be a standard nomenclature for them. At various times they were referred to as flight engineers or flight mechanics on airplanes such as the C-119 and C-54. On some airplanes such as the C-47 and C-46 they continued to be referred to as crew chiefs. By the early 1950s flight engineers/flight mechanics in troop carrier squadrons carried the same Air Force specialty code as flight line mechanics, 43151, with an A prefix to indicate that they were assigned to aircrew duty. Some were engine mechanics. There was a flight engineer AFSC but it was reserved for men who had been "performance qualified." The only troop carrier squadrons that had flight engineers were C-124 squadrons in TAC and Far East Air Forces.

When Lockheed was designing the YC-130 for the Air Force, Tactical Air Command, the gaining command, stipulated that it wanted a seat in the cockpit for a third crewmember who would be an enlisted man with a mechanical background. The intent was not to have a crewmember specifically to assist the pilots but rather to have a trained mechanic on board to take care of the airplane when it was away from home station. Since he was going to be there, TAC rationalized that he might as well have a seat where he could help the pilots monitor the engine and other

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## The Airlifter Volume XXI

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systems instruments as had been the practice on the C-54 and C-119. In operational practice, a second mechanic flew as a scanner. Both the flight mechanic, as the enlisted crewmember was called, and the scanner were assigned to the airplane ground crew when they were not flying. The flight mechanic doubled as the crew chief and the scanner was his assistant.



**FIGURE 3 LOCKHEED C-130A**

Having the flight mechanic assigned to the flight line created problems due to crew rest issues. Sometime around 1960 flight mechanics were relieved of flight line duties and a crew chief was appointed to oversee the ground crew. Members of the ground crew continued to fly as scanners for awhile, however. In Martin Caidin's *The Long Arm of America* he tells about a trip he made from Sewart to Evreux, France with a crew bound for TDY in 1963 or 64. He flew over on a crew on which our own Ace Bowman was the navigator. The crew included both a scanner and a loadmaster. By 1965 all scanners had been grounded or upgraded to flight mechanic and loadmasters were assigned to flight crews and given scanner responsibilities.

With flight mechanics no longer assigned to the flight line and the removal of the scanners from crewmember flight status, ground crew

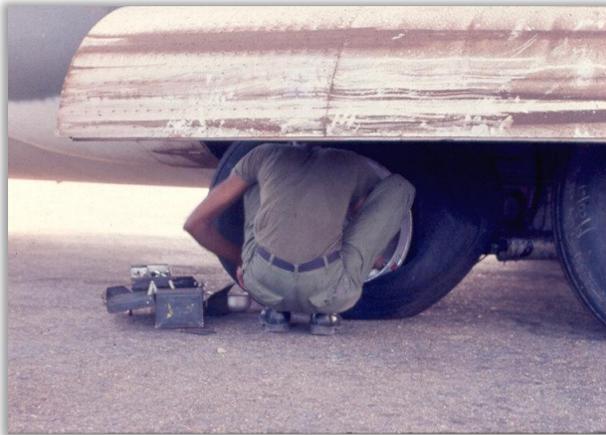
members were no longer part of the operational tactical airlift mission. However, at least two members of the ground crew, usually the crew chief and his assistant, were authorized to be assigned to non-crewmember flying status to accompany their airplane when it went TDY (usually missions of more than three days duration) to take care of it while it was on the ground and were authorized to draw hazardous duty pay. This was in keeping with Air Force policy for ground crewmembers of all large multiengine airplanes, including SAC bombers. In troop carrier squadrons, manning documents called for five men to be assigned to the C-130 ground crew. They included a crew chief, an assistant crew chief and three mechanics (often referred to as "third wipers.") According to the history of the 374<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Wing at Naha AB, Okinawa, either the crew chief or his assistant and one of the other three members of the ground crew accompanied their airplane when it went to Southeast Asia for "shuttles" of nine days duration.

Flight mechanics continued to carry the 431X1 and aircraft engine AFSCs until the summer of 1967 when the Air Force came out with a new AFSC for non-panel flight engineers and the title was changed from flight mechanic to flight engineer. Requirements remained the same as did their duties. A potential flight engineer had to be on his second enlistment and have previous experience as a flight line or engine mechanic. They remained responsible for performing maintenance such as changing starters and other components at enroute stops, including at forward airfields in Southeast Asia. This continued to be the norm until the Air Force revised the aircrew career fields in the 1970s and combined all aircrew positions into a new operations career field. (The change eventually led to a decline in maintenance experience among flight engineers.)

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## The Airlifter Volume XXI

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**FIGURE 4 C-130 FLIGHT ENGINEER FREDDIE BANKS CHANGING TIRE**

Aircraft maintenance started becoming specialized when the Army acquired combat aircraft. The first specialty was the armament specialist, whose role was to maintain the guns. Advances in aircraft design led to more specialized maintenance including electrics, avionics, hydraulics and power plants with specific training for specialists in each area. From right after the Korean War until sometime in the 1970s, maintenance in the Air Force was organized under AFM 66-1. AFM 66-1 was adopted in the early 1950s to solve problems that had arisen in World War II and Korea when squadron maintenance had been the rule, meaning that airplanes and mechanics, including specialists, were assigned to the same squadrons as the flight crews. Although there was some bouncing around, 66-1 called for flight line mechanics to be assigned to organizational maintenance squadrons that were separate from but identified with the flying squadrons and specialists to shops in field maintenance squadrons with all maintenance under the chief of maintenance. (Units that operated airplanes with complex avionics included A&E squadrons but this was not typical of tactical airlift units.) The shop system was seen as more efficient and required less personnel than assigning specialists to the squadrons. In the 1960s TAC advocated a return to squadron maintenance due to the requirement to deploy squadrons on extended TDY and mechanics were assigned to

the squadrons. However, the same problems that had led to the adoption of AFM 66-1 reappeared. In PACAF, airlift units went back and forth between squadron-assignment maintenance and OMS and FMS squadrons. Since the 1970s there have been several experiments regarding the assignment of maintenance personnel, with changes occurring basically at the whim of whoever is Chief of Staff.

While aerial engineers/crew chiefs and flight engineers/flight mechanics have been part of tactical airlift aircrews from the mission's beginning in early 1942, the aircraft maintenance role has generally been at rear area airfields. Squadrons in WW II included maintenance personnel but the crew chief and radio operator preflighted the airplane and performed maintenance when it was away from its home base. When the 6<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron deployed to New Guinea in October 1942, the squadron's mechanics and other support personnel followed by boat and didn't arrive for several months. In the interim, the crews maintained their own airplanes. New Guinea was where troop carriers operated from forward airfields hundreds of miles from their home bases in Australia where other than routine maintenance was performed. It wasn't until late 1942 after the war had moved further north that combat squadrons moved into New Guinea on a semi-permanent basis. During the Korean War, airlift squadrons were based in Japan until late in the war when the former 21<sup>st</sup> TCS (which had been redesignated as a provisional squadron) moved to Korea. As we shall see in the following article, while C-7 and C-123 squadrons were based in South Vietnam and Thailand during the Vietnam War, airlift C-130 squadrons were never based in Southeast Asia. (Rescue HC-130s were based in South Vietnam along with a couple of C-130E-I special operations airplanes and AC-130 gunships were based in Thailand.) Whenever an airplane went to Saigon, Cam Ranh Bay, Nha Trang or Tuy Hoa, the crew chief or his assistant and one of the other ground crew members went with it. According to the history of the 374<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Wing, the airplane and

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## The Airlifter Volume XXI

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members of its ground crew rotated to South Vietnam for nine days at a time. Maintenance specialists and additional flight line personnel were sent TDY for periods ranging from a few days to six months.

In addition to unit maintenance personnel, the Air Force Logistics Command established Rapid Aircraft Maintenance (RAM) teams made up of highly experienced military and civilian mechanics to deploy to Southeast Asia to recover and repair badly damaged aircraft. Personnel came from AFLC combat logistics support squadrons at one of five maintenance depots in the United States, depending on the type of aircraft to be recovered and/or repaired. Each RAM team consisted of eighteen men with experience in

depot-level aircraft maintenance and repair. RAM teams were credited with repairing 885 aircraft of all types and returning them to operational service. In addition, they prepared 88 for one-time flights, disassembled and crated 126 for shipment to repair stations and stripped 29 of parts after declaring them beyond repair. Tactical airlift aircraft repaired and returned to service include a C-130A that was badly damaged during a sapper attack on Da Nang in 1965, a C-130E that was shot up during a flight to An Hoa, a C-130E that was damaged by rockets at Quan Loi and a C-123 that was shot down near Binh Tuy. Four RAM civilians were killed and another was seriously wounded by enemy action.

### The Vietnam Airlift

The TC/TAA is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a wartime veterans organization and, with a few exceptions, the war in which most members served was the Vietnam War. Yet, until now The Airlifter has never featured an article describing the Vietnam airlift as a whole. In 1983 the Office of Air Force History published *Tactical Airlift* as part of its *United States Air Force in Southeast Asia* series. Authored by Col. Ray Bowers, who served as a navigator with the 314<sup>th</sup> TAW before his assignment to the OAFH, the 899 page volume provides an excellent overview of the role of tactical airlift during the Vietnam War.

Although 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division (Combat Cargo) transports were frequent visitors to Southeast Asia in the 1950s, for all practical purposes the Vietnam Airlift commenced on December 28, 1961 when a team of division officers arrived at Tan Son Nhut to develop a plan for introducing TAC C-123s to operations in South Vietnam. Three days later they formed the airlift branch of the Vietnamese Air Force/2<sup>nd</sup> Air Division (2<sup>nd</sup> ADVON) joint operations center to manage U.S. Air Force airlift operations in South Vietnam, particularly the Project MULE TRAIN C-123s which had arrived at Clark AB, Philippines from Pope a few days before. Four C-123s began airlift



FIGURE 5 C-130B LAPES DROP

operations the following day. For the next nine months airlift operations in South Vietnam were controlled directly under Military Assistance Command Vietnam through 2<sup>nd</sup> ADVON. In September 1962 Pacific Air Forces reformed the system. A new 6492<sup>nd</sup> Combat Cargo Group (Troop Carrier), Provisional was established at Tan Son Nhut along with the 6493<sup>rd</sup> Aerial Port Squadron, Provisional. Airlift officers and enlisted men from 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division went to Saigon to operate the combat group headquarters

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## The Airlifter Volume XXI

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**FIGURE 6 INDIVIDUAL UNKNOWN (MAY BE FROM 1<sup>ST</sup> MOB)**

until permanent personnel could arrive from the U.S. On December 8 the 315<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Group (Combat Cargo) and 8<sup>th</sup> Aerial Port Squadron activated under 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division to replace the two provisional units. Transport movement control detachments were set up at Tan Son Nhut, Da Nang and at Don Muang Airfield at Bangkok to control operations in Thailand. The arrangement was somewhat convoluted because the 315<sup>th</sup> TCG reported directly to 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division while supporting MACV through 2<sup>nd</sup> ADVON. Maintenance operations were at Clark and fell under Thirteenth Air Force. The airplanes, flight crews and maintenance personnel were on temporary duty from TAC's 464<sup>th</sup> TCW. The group also had some operational control over 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division C-130s and C-124s operating in Southeast Asia. (Although they had transferred to MATS in 1958, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> Troop Carrier Squadrons at Tachikawa remained under 315<sup>th</sup> AD operational control.) 315<sup>th</sup> set up seven scheduled flights from Clark to Tan Son Nhut each week. In addition, MATS operated 21 scheduled flights. In September CINCPAC proposed that MATS operate all flights between Clark and Tan Son Nhut but PACAF protested that the C-130s were needed for operations within Southeast Asia, including direct delivery of cargo to USAF tactical units at Da Nang and in Thailand. Procedures

were developed to schedule C-130s for trips within South Vietnam prior to departing for the return trip to Clark after making their deliveries.

While C-130s and C-124s were primarily involved in deliveries from Clark, 315<sup>th</sup> TCG C-123s were responsible for most airlift operations within South Vietnam and Thailand. The original MULE TRAIN squadron was supplemented by a second in Project SAWBUCK II. On January 2, 1963 MACV requested a third squadron, with a fourth to be held in reserve in the U.S. The third squadron arrived at Da Nang on April 17. The Air Force had decided earlier in the year to replace the TDY TAC personnel with permanently assigned personnel and the previous rotational squadrons received new designations as the 309<sup>th</sup>, 310<sup>th</sup> and 311<sup>th</sup>. For some reason, they were designated as air commando squadrons rather than troop carrier even though they were assigned to 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division and their mission was conventional troop carrier. Somebody at USAF headquarters recommended that the C-123s be transferred to the special air warfare force and the Secretary of Defense went along with it. A fourth squadron became the 19<sup>th</sup> ACS.

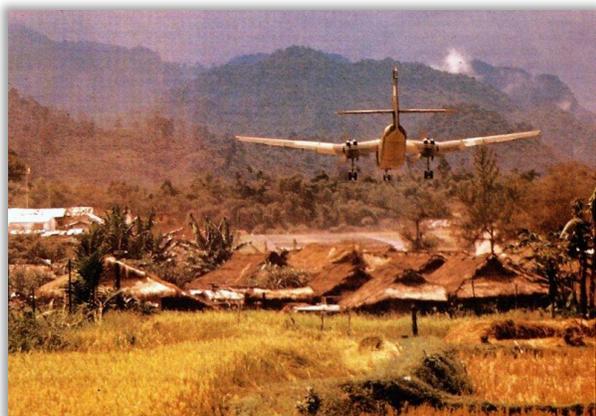
As the U.S. role in Southeast Asia increased, so did the demand on 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division. Additional airlift capability was provided by TAC rotational squadrons. Requests were made for the assignment of C-130 squadrons to duty in South Vietnam but 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division proposed that the need be met by assigning its C-130s to in-country stops and the temporary assignment of airplanes and crews to Tan Son Nhut on what came to be called "Southeast Asia trainer" missions. An airlift system was established within South Vietnam and Thailand, including aerial port detachments that were initially supported by 315<sup>th</sup> AD's 7<sup>th</sup> Aerial Port Squadron until the 8<sup>th</sup> APS activated at Tan Son Nhut and was staffed with permanently assigned personnel. Additional squadrons would be activated at Bangkok and at Cam Ranh and Da Nang in Vietnam. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Aerial Port Group moved from Japan to Saigon to command the Vietnam-based squadrons. An airlift command center activated at Tan Son Nhut to replace the transportation movement center (TMC) with

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## The Airlifter Volume XXI

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airlift command elements replacing transportation movement detachments in the field. Meanwhile, the Army had managed to slip its Dehavilland CV-2 Caribou into South Vietnam from Thailand under the pretense of testing them under combat conditions.



**FIGURE 7 CARIBOU LANDING ON SHORT STRIP**

The Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964 led to the immediate deployment of three TAC C-130 squadrons to the Pacific. The following April two additional TAC squadrons deployed when President Johnson commenced sustained bombing of North Vietnam. Another deployed to the Philippines later in the year. In December USAF decided to transfer a number of TAC squadrons to PACAF, including eight C-130 squadrons. Two wings, the 314<sup>th</sup> and 463<sup>rd</sup>, transferred to 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division to control them. They joined the 6315<sup>th</sup> Operations Group, which would be replaced by the 374<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Wing the following August when it reactivated at Naha. 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division established a permanent C-130 rotational unit at Tan Son Nhut in June 1965. By the end of the year, there were rotational detachments, called "shuttles," at Tan Son Nhut, Vung Tau, Nha Trang and Cam Ranh Bay with a total of 32 C-130s, all Bs and Es. The Nha Trang detachment moved to Cam Ranh in the spring of 1967. In addition, a detachment of C-130As was operating out of Da Nang on special operations missions. The C-130As were being used primarily for overwater flying from Okinawa due to their higher maintenance requirements. By the

following May the Vung Tau operation had been shut down and a new C-130A shuttle was operating out of Cam Ranh. The flare mission had moved to Ubon, Thailand.

The airlift system was designed to use the C-123s primarily for short field and airdrop work while the larger C-130s were used for both logistical and combat operations. On August 1, 1965 a message from 315<sup>th</sup> AD limited short-stop qualified C-130 pilots to "computed ground run distance plus 1,000 feet," or 3,500 feet. After 2<sup>nd</sup> Air Division advised the Air Force that it was going to "lose the airlift task to the Army," 315<sup>th</sup> deleted the 1,000-foot safety margin. However, a series of accidents involving C-130As due to prop reversal problems placed additional limitations on them that effectively restricted them to 4,000 feet, including dirt overruns.

In 1966 the question of in-country basing of C-130s was raised by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. Lt. Gen. William W. Momyer, who had just assumed command of the recently activated Seventh Air Force, proposed that a complete C-130 wing be assigned to South Vietnam. MACV commander General William Westmoreland was also in favor of the plan, as was Secretary McNamara. Plans were made to base four C-130 squadrons at Cam Ranh Bay, including full maintenance facilities. CINPAC, PACAF and 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division were opposed to the idea for a number of reasons, particularly the cost. They managed to convince the Air Staff, which in turn convinced the Joint Chiefs. McNamara changed his position when he realized how high the construction costs would be. The economic impact on South Vietnamese currency was also a deterrent.

In August 1966 the C-130 force, which consisted of no more than 44 airplanes at one time, hauled more cargo than the C-123s, Army Caribous and Vietnamese transport force (C-47s) combined. That same month the Army's Dehavilland CV2 Caribou force began transferring to the Army. The Army had decided several months earlier during the battle of the Ia Drang Valley that it no longer wanted the Caribous due

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## The Airlifter Volume XXI

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to their limited payload capacity. The Army chief of staff worked out a deal with the Air Force chief of staff to trade the Caribous to the Air Force in return for the air service's relinquishing of claims to future helicopter development. The C-130 had proven more capable than both the Caribou and the C-123 during the pitched battle, when the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division's helicopters were dependent on airlift of fuel. The smaller Caribous proved inadequate for the task but they were still needed for operations into very short fields.

On October 1, 1966 834<sup>th</sup> Air Division activated at Tan Son Nhut under Seventh Air



Force as the controlling agency for airlift in South Vietnam. The 315<sup>th</sup> Air Commando Wing transferred into it as did the 2<sup>nd</sup> Aerial Port Group, which had moved to Saigon to control the aerial port squadrons in Vietnam. The 483<sup>rd</sup> Troop Carrier Wing activated to command the Caribou squadrons (the Caribous had been redesignated as C-7As.) The 483<sup>rd</sup> would eventually command six C-7 squadrons. The airlift command center at Tan Son Nhut transferred to 834<sup>th</sup>. The C-130 wings remained with 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division along with the 6485<sup>th</sup> Operations Squadron, which operated air evacuation flights throughout the Pacific with C-118s, but the former 315<sup>th</sup> operating locations transferred to 834<sup>th</sup> and became detachments one and two, 834<sup>th</sup> Air Division, at Tan Son Nhut and Cam Ranh. By December 31, 1966 the C-130 force in South Vietnam consisted of 44 airplanes. The C-123 force stood at four squadrons plus the Project RANCH HAND UC-123s. (A fifth squadron that included C-123s, the 606<sup>th</sup> Air Commando Squadron, had activated earlier in the

year at Nakonphanom, Thailand but it operated outside of the airlift control system.) Most of the C-123s had moved to Phan Rang early in 1967.

Prior to 1965, the Vietnam Airlift was primarily in support of South Vietnamese troops. Even after U.S. ground combat troops were introduced, they were initially used primarily to protect "enclaves" around certain major U.S. installations with a single "roving brigade" operating in the Central Highlands. In early 1967 MACV launched Operation JUNCTION CITY into the contested War Zone C north of Saigon and the intensity of combat increased. Communist opposition was also increasing in northern I Corps, particularly in the northwest corner of the country which had been occupied by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division in Operations HASTINGS in the summer of 1966. The Battle of Dak To in late 1967 ushered in the most intense period of the Vietnam War. Additional troops were rushed to South Vietnam, including elements of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, who were moved by MAC transports in late 1967. The additional troops and rise in intensity of the war caused an increasing demand for airlift and a third C-130 operating location was opened at Tuy Hoa with ten C-130Es.

By January 4, 1968 the in-country C-130 force consisted of 72 airplanes, almost half of them C-130Bs from the 463<sup>rd</sup> TAW. The C-130 force reached its high point in February 1968 when a new detachment of TAC airplanes and crews began operating out of Nha Trang. On February 25 the C-130 force reached 96 airplanes, an increase of 24 airplanes since the beginning of the year. In January 1967 C-123s flew 8,251 sorties while C-130s flew 8,619. In January 1968 C-123 sorties dropped to 7,727 while C-130 sortie increased to 12,870. The most sorties by C-123s in a month was in May 1970 when they flew 9,470. The most C-130 sorties were 14,392 in May 1968. The higher number of C-130 sorties was partly due to their around-the-clock operations; C-123s operated primarily in daylight. Air Force Caribous frequently exceeded 15,000 sorties per month, with their high reached in March 1969 when they flew 16,327 sorties while flying 11,170 hours.

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## The Airlifter Volume XXI

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Cargo tonnages began increasing in March 1966 when C-130 operations in South Vietnam increased and reached their peak in March 1968. In April 1969 newly inaugurated President Richard Nixon directed MACV commander Gen. Creighton Abrams to reduce American combat casualties, which led to a decrease in U.S. ground operations. Nevertheless, tonnages remained high until May 1970 when they began dropping after the Cambodian Incursion and subsequent withdrawal of communist forces into Cambodia and Laos and the commencement of U.S. troop withdrawals. There were occasional spikes over the next two years due to events such as the Lam Son 719 operation in early 1971 and the communist Eastertide Offensive in 1972 but they never reached the 1966-1970 levels.

Troop withdrawals and a de-escalation of U.S. involvement in the war led to a reduction in the numbers of airlift squadrons in the Pacific. Aerial port detachments and operating locations declined from 42 in early 1969 to only seven by the end of 1971. Airlift squadrons were also reduced. USAF decided to retire the C-130As and Bs and move them to the reserves and to mothball most of the C-123s and C-7s. The 815<sup>th</sup> TAS at Tachikawa AB, Japan was the first to go. It inactivated on December 15, 1969. The 817<sup>th</sup> at Naha deactivated six months later in July 1970, as did the 309<sup>th</sup> at Phan Rang. The 459<sup>th</sup> TAS at Phu Cat had inactivated the previous month. The 29<sup>th</sup> at Clark deactivated in September 1970. The 41<sup>st</sup> at Naha deactivated on February 28, 1971 followed by the 35<sup>th</sup> on March 31. The 21<sup>st</sup> inactivated on May 31 but the designation transferred to CCK to replace the 346<sup>th</sup> TAS. The 19<sup>th</sup> TAS also deactivated that month and the

311<sup>th</sup> the following September. The 772<sup>nd</sup> at Clark deactivated on June 15. The 463<sup>rd</sup> wing and 773<sup>rd</sup> TAS inactivated on December 31 but the 774<sup>th</sup> transferred to the 405<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, where it remained for six months. The 315<sup>th</sup> TAW deactivated on March 31, 1972 but a few C-123s and the remaining Air Force Caribous went to the 310<sup>th</sup> TAS, which moved to Tan Son Nhut for a few months to aid South Vietnamese transport units as they transitioned into the two types. 834<sup>th</sup> Air Division deactivated in December 1971 and an airlift office activated as part of Seventh Air Force. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Aerial Port Group inactivated and its former squadrons transferred to the host unit at their base. The four squadrons of C-130Es at CCK remained active, but the 314<sup>th</sup> wing returned to the U.S. and the 374<sup>th</sup> replaced it. The Air Force had decided to keep the 374<sup>th</sup> TAW and 21<sup>st</sup> TAS designations in the Pacific because of their historical significance. As the U.S. role in Vietnam declined at the end of 1972, the 374<sup>th</sup> moved its operations from Saigon to U Tapao, Thailand.

The Vietnam Airlift was not without cost. A total of 122 transports were lost, including 52 C-130s, 50 C-123s and 20 C-7s. Combat losses included 31 C-130s, 18 C-123s and 8 C-7s. The remainder were operational. A total of 229 transport crewmembers lost their lives. There is no compilation of the numbers of aerial port, maintenance and support personnel lost in South Vietnam, but there were at least a dozen. (The Virtual Wall shows names but not career fields. Some Vietnam deaths were due to causes other than combat such as natural causes and vehicle accident.) The number doubles if those who were lost when a C-130 that had departed Cam Ranh for CCK crashed in Taiwan are added.

### Disaster at Dak To

From 1965 to 1971 tactical airlifters flew literally thousands of sorties into forward airfields all over South Vietnam. From late 1967 to May 1970 when the communists withdrew into Cambodia and Laos, crews were subjected to so many mortar and rocket attacks that soldiers and Marines started referring to them as "mortar

magnets." Yet, surprisingly, 99.9% of the time, the incoming rockets and mortars did little, if any, damage to airplanes or crewmembers. In fact, of the 31 C-130s lost in combat, only eleven were on the ground and only four of those were lost at a forward airfield. Two of those four were lost within a few minutes at Dak To, an airfield in the

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## The Airlifter Volume XXI

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Central Highlands, on the morning of November 15, 1967.



**FIGURE 8 SMOKE FROM BURNING C-130S**

To this point in the war, enemy opposition to airlift operations had been fairly light. In fact, during the eighteen months that the author was at Naha in 1966-67, we did not lose a single airplane to enemy action. (One was lost on the ground at Da Nang about the time I rotated.) Things changed suddenly at Dak To. In early November the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Regiment moved into the region around Dak To where a major battle had been fought several months earlier. A major C-130 airlift was mounted to resupply the paratroopers, with twenty sorties scheduled each day. The airfield was congested, particularly with helicopters, and there was constant artillery firing. At the time, 834<sup>th</sup> Air Division was between commanders. Maj. General William G. Moore had returned to the States and the vice-commander, Brig. Gen. Hugh Wild, whose previous experience had been in MATS, was acting commander until Maj. General Burl MacLaughlin arrived. On November 8, Gen. Wild notified MACV that Dak To was an accident waiting to happen. He failed to foresee that it was going to be enemy action rather an accident that ushered in the most intense period of the war.

The Airlift Command Center in Saigon was paying so little attention to the dangers of enemy fire that they were scheduling as many as five C-130s into Dak To at a time. Even after mortars

fell on the airfield on November 12, the ALCC continued scheduling airplanes so that several would be on the ground at a time. On the morning of November 15, three C-130s, all E-models, had just landed and shut down engines when mortar rounds began pouring onto the airfield. A fourth crew had just landed; they took off immediately. An estimated ten rounds struck the aircraft parking ramp and hit all three of the parked C-130s, setting fires that eventually destroyed two of them. The attack was not confined to the cargo ramp. Rounds impacted all over the base, setting fire to a fuel dump and detonating ammunition in a nearby ammo dump. Some 17,000 gallons of fuel and 266,000 rounds of ammunition were destroyed, along with the two C-130Es.

According to an article later published in the 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division newspaper *The Airlifter*, Sgt. Joe Mack, the engineer on the crew of the third C-130, looked at his pilot, Captain Joseph Glenn, and said "we ought to move that airplane." Glenn said in the article that he wasn't enthusiastic about the idea, but reluctantly agreed. The rest of the crew remained wherever they had taken shelter. They stood up and ran to the airplane. Mack started the GTC and then they fired up the engines on the badly damaged airplane – it had several holes from shrapnel and was leaking fuel. It was the leaking fuel that prompted Mack to suggest that they move it. He saw that it was slowly running toward the two burning wrecks and could ignite at any time. They backed the airplane and taxied it out of danger then ran back to their shelter. Five hours after the attack started and after making impromptu repairs, Glenn and his crew took off in their damaged airplane and flew it to Cam Ranh. The airplane had suffered major damage, including a damaged windshield. Mack took one of the heavy tech orders from the airplane G-file and placed it where it would brace the windshield. A few weeks later U.S. Air Force chief of staff General John P. McConnell awarded Silver Stars to Glenn and Mack and DFCs to all of the crew.

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## The Airlifter Volume XXI

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**FIGURE 9 USAFCS GEN. J.P. MCCONNELL CONGRATULATES SGT. JOE MACK**

The attack on Dak To was the beginning of a new phase of the Vietnam War as the communists began a campaign to interrupt airlift operations. Fourteen years before during the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, North Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap had made French transports the primary

targets for his artillery. He was well aware that airlift was crucial to Military Assistance Command, Vietnam operations in the later war. Fortunately for airlifters, he was hampered because of the lack of artillery in the vicinity of the forward fields. The communists were forced to use portable weapons rather than large caliber artillery due to logistical issues. In 1968 they started using the 122 millimeter rocket, a weapon that the Soviets had developed during World War II as a barrage weapon. In-coming artillery became common whenever airlift aircraft were on the ground at a forward field. Yet, amazingly, although some airplanes took hits from shrapnel and at least one crewmember was killed, few transports were destroyed. Even at Khe Sanh, where the airfield was in range of North Vietnamese heavy artillery across the DMZ and in Laos, only one transport was destroyed by shelling. A C-123 was damaged then later destroyed before it could be repaired and flown out. Another C-130 was lost after it was stranded at Tonle Cham in early 1969. The fourth C-130 to be lost to ground attack at a forward field was at Kontum, which is only a few miles from Dak To, in 1972.

### More Problems with the VA

Subscribers to the Air Force Times may have seen columnist Robert F. Dorr's recent column in which I was quoted in reference to problems 374<sup>th</sup> TAW C-130 maintenance veteran Ben Sager has been having satisfying the Veterans Administration that he is indeed a Vietnam veteran and entitled to compensation and medical care for his Type II diabetes. Let me elaborate on Ben's situation. I first learned about Ben when his wife Becky made a post on the Internet C-130 site about how he was having trouble proving to the VA that he was entitled to benefits. She stated that he was basing his claim on having spent sixty days TDY to Ubon, Thailand on the C-130 flare mission. I responded to her post by telling her to forget about Thailand and find evidence that he was TDY to Cam Ranh Bay as he was a flight line

mechanic in the 374<sup>th</sup> at Naha\*, which operated out of Cam Ranh Bay during his tour. I don't pay a lot of attention to the C-130 forum but Becky eventually got in touch with me and things seem to be moving along. It turns out that Ben arrived at Naha in late 1966 while I was still there and since I am recognized by the VA as having served in Vietnam (I reenlisted at Cam Ranh in July 1967 and it's on my DD 214), I was able to write a letter on Ben's behalf.

It turns out that Ben actually has documented proof that he served at Cam Ranh as a member of an airplane ground crew. The Sagers were able to obtain copies of Ben's personnel records, which include copies of his APRs. The first one covers the period from July 1966 when he enlisted to July 1967 and the second covers the

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## The Airlifter Volume XXI

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period from July 1967 to his return to the States (to Langley) in May 1968. While the first APR doesn't contain anything that would help his case, the second states that he served sixty days at Ubon on a ground crew and that he participated in six shuttles; however instead of stating that they were at Cam Ranh Bay, the reporting official, his crew chief, stated that they were "in Southeast Asia." His personnel record credits him with 128 days in Southeast Asia. Since he was at Ubon for sixty, he was obviously somewhere else for 68 days. Considering that the 374<sup>th</sup> history, of which the Sagers have excerpts, state that the wing gave up the Bangkok Shuttle in August 1967, the other 68 days were obviously at Cam Ranh since that was the only other rotation the 374<sup>th</sup> had. At this point, the VA has yet to make a determination in his case.

Ben Sager's case is far from unique. In fact, very few Vietnam C-130 flight crew and flight line maintenance personnel have documented proof that they set foot in South Vietnam. Most seem to think that because they were awarded the Vietnam Service and Vietnam Campaign Medals and drew combat pay at some point that this is proof of their service. They may think that but the VA says otherwise. All three medals were awarded to men who served in Thailand and you could draw combat pay for overflying the country on the way to Bangkok. In fact, citations for combat decorations are not considered to be proof unless

it states that the individual was present on the ground in South Vietnam at some point during the mission. The VA position is that aircrews based in Thailand flew missions over South Vietnam but didn't land. Orders are not proof either because those who were most subject to TDY were given blanket orders that covered areas besides Vietnam. (I have a set of blanket orders from Clark that authorizes travel to South Vietnam and Okinawa.) Individuals who were not covered by blanket orders were given specific orders stating the APO and they will suffice, if they have a copy. Travel vouchers are also accepted – but ditto on having a copy.

Incidentally, I heard a segment on National Public Radio recently about the VA and the mountainous backlog of claims it is trying to work through and learned something interesting. It appears that the LESS documentation you submit with a claim, the better off you are. VA claims clerks are encouraged to spend as little time on a claim as possible, and additional paperwork will cause them to push a claim to the back of their pile. Be concise with what you submit.

*\* Claims for exposure to herbicides in Thailand are decided on a case by case basis and the claimant has to prove that they were exposed. Exposure to herbicides in South Vietnam is presumptive because so much was used there. All a veteran who served in South Vietnam has to do is show that they served there; exposure is presumptive.*

### Sleep Apnea

While we are on the subject of disabilities, let's think for a moment about the disease or condition known as sleep apnea. This is of special concern to me because I was recently diagnosed with it. Let me start off by saying that no one had ever heard of sleep apnea until the mid-60s when it was first recognized as a medical condition. Even then, few were aware of it. I had never heard of it myself until around 1998 when my wife learned that a friend had it. After she found out that sleep apnea is long pauses in breathing while sleeping, sometimes accompanied by momentary

wakefulness, she decided I have it. I thought she was being overdramatic. Yes, I snore and have since at least the 1960s but I don't have the other conditions that are generally associated with the problem, at least not all of the time. I had a hard time going to sleep before I left home station for a shuttle in Vietnam and I could fall asleep at the drop of a hat in the airplane, but I attributed the first to excitement and apprehension over the possibility of failing to hear the alarm and the second to the heat. As time went on, I heard about others who had it. In fact, our former

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## The Airlifter Volume XXI

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President Dennis Ybarra apparently died from it. His widow told me that his death in May 2011 was due to respiratory problems and that he was found with his CPAP machine mask off of his face. When I started going to the VA for treatment for my Type II diabetes, I mentioned to my primary care physician that my wife thought I had sleep apnea and he sent a referral to the sleep clinic at the VA hospital in Houston. It took almost a year but they finally called me in to my local clinic and gave me a monitor to wear. I took it back and didn't hear anything for months. Finally, I got a letter that I was scheduled for an overnight stay at the DeBaakey hospital for a sleep study.

Now let me say something: It is commonly believed that sleep apnea is caused by being overweight. When I got to the clinic, there were eight of us there and only one besides me was overweight. Some were skinny as rails. One guy told me that his condition is so bad that he can no longer drive because he falls asleep.. When I finally got to my room, the technician told me that I was going to sleep that night with a CPAP machine. I asked her about the results of my previous tests with a monitor and she said that they had determined that I do have sleep apnea and the night's test was to see if the machine made any improvement. When I left the next morning,

she told me that someone would contact me in about eight weeks about having a machine brought to my home. It was actually less than a month. In early September a lady from a local medical supply company contracted by the VA brought the machine out and I have slept with it ever since. I can't honestly say that I feel any better but at least my wife says I no longer snore.

It is somewhat controversial, but the VA recognizes sleep apnea as a compensable condition if it occurs in service. (This may change due to the number of claims the VA is getting from recent veterans.) The catch for us older veterans is that no one knew about the condition when most of us were in the service and we didn't know to go to the flight surgeon about it – and if we had, we most likely would have been kicked off of flying status. I personally believe that if I have it now – and the VA says I do – I had it when I was in service. Regardless of whether it is compensable by the VA or not, it apparently is a serious condition, as Dennis' death proves. Not only can it cause a person to stop breathing and pass away, it can cause extreme fatigue which can also be dangerous. Snoring and long pauses in breathing during sleep are the most common symptoms. If you have them, it would be a good idea to talk to your doctor.

### **Election of Officers and Board Members**

It's that time again; the end of the year is rapidly approaching and right after the first of the year we're going to have to have another election. Our by-laws are set up so that officers and board members served either two or three year terms so the terms will be staggered. Those on two-year terms were elected earlier this year. It will soon be time to either reelect those who are on three-year terms, which includes the chairman, president, secretary and three board members. Sometime in the near future a nominating committee is going to have to be appointed to contact the current officials to see if they want to continue and if they don't, to nominate someone to take their place. If you are willing to serve, contact our president, Mike Welch, at [michael.m.welch@boeing.com](mailto:michael.m.welch@boeing.com) or by phone at 562-537-2022.