

The Airlifter Volume XXIII



The Airlifter

Newsletter of the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association

Promoting and preserving the troop carrier/tactical airlift heritage

February 11, 2014

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Finances

Our current bank balance is \$7,125 with one check to deposit. We paid the Alamo Chapter of the Professional Loadmaster Association \$150.00 for the plaque for the wall of the break room at the enlisted aircrew training center at Lackland, \$7.77 for postage and \$152.23 to Avahost Web Hosting services for our web site. Our most recent deposit was \$285.00 on 12/05, which included dues and two checks for caps.

Convention

It's February, which means we have barely eight months left until our 2014 Convention in Tucson, Arizona. Our convention planners, Jim Esbeck, Bill Goodall and Mike Schmid, all Tucson residents, have been doing a fantastic job of putting things together. Information on the convention is on our web site at www.troopcarrier.org/convention.html. Included is a link to a special page Hilton Hotels has set up for us to allow online registration at the hotel. Details on the convention and a link to the

convention information file, including registration forms, is linked to the page. Those without Internet access may contact Jim Esbeck, 1041 West Cool Drive, Tucson, AZ 85704-3401 by mail to request a copy of the packet.

Quite a few of our members who have attended previous events are making plans to come while we are expecting a lot of first-timers, particularly those from the West. We're expecting a turnout at least as large as our last one in Warner Robins, Georgia.

News Flash!

Just as we were preparing to publish this newsletter, CEO George Dockery finalized our guest speaker. George just announced that he contacted Dick Sell, of Scottsdale, Arizona to be our speaker and Dick has accepted the invitation. Originally a member of the 776th TCS at Pope, Dick transferred to the 779th when the 776th departed for the Pacific and began training as a pilot on the new C-130E(I) Skyhook airplanes. In the summer of 1966 he deployed to CCK as part of Project STRAY GOOSE. During his assignment with Detachment 1, 314th Troop Carrier Wing, Dick participated in the original C-130E(I) missions. At the completion of his tour at CCK, Dick resigned his commission and was employed by Delta Airlines. Dick has been given carte blanche to select a topic, but there's no doubt that his address will be of interest to those who attended the convention. (*Note – Our next newsletter will include an article about the early days of the Combat Talon mission, which was part of TAC troop carrier until 1971.*)

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By-Laws Changes

The TC/TAA is registered in Texas as a not-for-profit organization, and is thus governed by a set of by-laws and administered by officers and board members elected by the membership. (We do not have an “executive board” per se.) Our by-laws are available on the web site at www.troopcarrier.org/Troop%Carrier%Bylaws.pdf and are accessible from the About the Association page at www.troopcarrier.org/about.html. Please take the time to review them. If anyone would like to suggest changes, please forward your recommendations to President Mike Welch at michael.m.welch@boeing.com for presentation at the members meeting in October.

Election of Officers and Board Members

Our by-laws provide for staggered election terms for our officers and board members with the Chairman, President, Secretary and certain board members elected for three years and the Vice-Chairman, Vice-President, Treasurer and other board members elected for two. The two-year election was held this past spring and the three-year election is due at the present time (by April 1.) Our chairman, George Dockery, President Mike Welch, Secretary Sam McGowan and board members Hector Leyva, Bobby

Gassiott and Jim Esbeck are all up for reelection. As it stands now, George, Mike and myself (Sam McGowan) have all stated that we are willing to serve for another term. Mike will be contacting Hector, Bobby and Jim to see if they wish to continue. If anyone would like to run for a place as an officer or board member, please contact Mike Welch. We will be sending out ballots later this month.

Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Memorial at the USAF Museum

There has been some discussion among the membership about having a future convention in Dayton, Ohio during which we would place a memorial to troop carriers/tactical airlifters who have lost their lives in America’s wars. While there are memorials at Air Force bases to individual crews, most of whom died in accidents, no single memorial has ever been erected anywhere to the thousands who died in World War II, Korea, Vietnam. (To the best of my knowledge, there have been no combat losses since 1972.) Exactly how many tactical airlifters died in World War II and Korea is unknown but 229 crewmembers and around a dozen support personnel died in Southeast Asia. (This number does not include the crew and passengers of a C-130E from the 314th TAW that crashed at CCK after taking off from Cam Ranh Bay.) The USAF Museum web page shows the memorials and benches that have been placed in the Memorial Garden over the years,

mostly by reunion groups. There are a handful of memorials placed by individual troop carrier/tactical airlift units as well as benches. The most recent is a bench placed by veterans of the 463rd TCW/TAW.

Considering the importance of a memorial, it is my opinion that the Association should plan to raise funds for the construction and placement of a memorial rather than a bench. The cost of a memorial would be in the neighborhood of \$15,000. Ideally, if the membership votes to do it, we should plan to have our next convention (2016) in Dayton and place the memorial at that time. Another option would be to plan to place it in 2018, but the problem with that is that none of us are getting any younger and many might not be able to attend due to health issues. Needless to say, such a project will involve a lot of work to raise the funds. In addition to individual contributions, we should solicit contributions

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from other airlift-related associations as well as corporate contributions. There is one thing for certain – our brothers who have died in the line of

duty deserve to be memorialized and if we don't do it, no one else will.

The following is the first in a series about the various troop carrier groups and wings. The 374th is first because its squadrons were the first to see combat in World War II.

The 374th Troop Carrier Wing



In early 1942 the US Army reorganized as it geared up to fight the Axis powers. The reorganization included the establishment of the US Army Air Forces as the organization responsible for recruiting and training of personnel and the procurement of aircraft and other equipment for the air combat forces that would be deploying to the overseas theaters. The Army Air Forces staff, officially known as the Air Staff, established four combat missions – fighter, bomber, reconnaissance and troop carrier – which would be under theater command. The troop carrier mission was the redesignation of what had formerly been the air transport mission. The order that later established the Air Transport Command specifically stated that the new ATC would not include operations assigned to troop carrier units. A number of air transport groups and squadrons had been authorized in 1941; they were redesignated as troop carrier.

At the time of the reorganization, Army air transport squadrons were already engaged in what we would now call "tactical airlift" operations in the Southwest Pacific Area of Operations. In February 1942 the 21st Transport Squadron activated in Australia to provide aircraft and personnel for transport operations within the theater. Personnel were either casualties or men whose assigned combat units were short of airplanes. The airplanes were an assortment of military and civilian transports then in Australia; some had come out of the Dutch East Indies. A

second squadron, the 22nd Transport Squadron, activated a few weeks later when additional transports arrived in the theater. A few months later in July the AAF changed the designation of the former transport squadrons to "troop carrier."



FIGURE 1 C-47 DROPPING TROOPS

The 374th Troop Carrier Group wasn't activated until November 1942 when Major General George C. Kenney, General Douglas MacArthur's chief of staff for air and the commander of Fifth Air Force, decided that a group was needed to command the two veteran troop carrier squadrons and two new ones, the 6th and 33rd, that had just arrived from the United States. The 21st and 22nd had been involved in combat operations in New Guinea for several months already and the two new squadrons joined them in operations that would earn the first Outstanding Unit Award ever given to a troop carrier unit. Over the next thirty years, the 374th would become one of the (and possibly the) most decorated units in US Air Force history.

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The 374th operated a menagerie of airplanes, including former civilian airliners and war-weary Boeing B-17s, some of which had come out of the Philippines. The group's four squadrons equipped with C-47s that formerly belonged to the 317th TCG when the new group arrived. Although the 54th Troop Carrier Wing, of which the 374th was a part, conducted a few airborne operations, particularly the seizure of the Japanese-held airfield at Nadzab, the 374th was primarily involved in the resupply of Australian and American ground units operating initially along the rugged Kokoda Track across the Owen Stanley Mountains then throughout New Guinea and the Southwest Pacific islands as the war moved north to the Philippines. Crews picked up their loads at Port Moresby and either dropped them from the air or landed on one of the small airstrips in the mountains. In early 1943 374th crews airlifted Australian troops into the airstrip at Wau and prevented it from being overrun by Japanese troops advancing southward out of Buna. The Wau operation, which included operations in heavy tropical thunderstorms, was conducted in conjunction with an attack on Wau that was supported largely by air transport. The 374th crews developed tactics that became part of the tactical airlift mission as it has existed ever since. (There were references to operations in New Guinea in the old Multi-command Manual 55-130 that was the "bible" of troop carrier operations in the 60s and 70s.) The Papuan Campaign is recognized by Air Force historians as the first time in history that a military campaign was decided by air transport.

After the war, the 374th remained in the Pacific and replaced its C-47s with the four-engine Douglas C-54. The group was assigned to the Marinas for a time with Twentieth Air Force. In August 1948 the group was elevated to become the 374th Troop Carrier Wing. The following year it moved to Tachikawa Air Base, Japan, where it was stationed when North Korean forces crossed the 38th Parallel and invaded South Korea in June 1950. The 374th immediately went into action evacuating Americans from Seoul. When the United States decided to enter the conflict, the



374th went to work ferrying troops from the U.S. Eighth Army to the Pusan Peninsula. The wing reorganized, with the 21st TCS giving up its C-54s to the 6th and 22nd and reequipping with C-47s and multi-engine pilots that had been assembled from around the Pacific. Additional C-47s and crews were ferried from the US to join the squadron. For a time, the 374th included a squadron of C-46s that had also been assembled from around the Far East. They were later transferred into a new troop carrier group.

The 21st TCS became crucial to United Nations operations during the evacuation from the Chosen Reservoir (also sometimes spelled Chosin.) While larger C-54s operated into airfields behind the lines and twin-tailed C-119s that had come over from the US airdropped supplies to the retreating US soldiers and Marines, the C-47s landed on hastily prepared airstrips to deliver supplies and pick up wounded. The men of the 21st, who had started calling themselves the Kyushu Gypsies, saved the lives of hundreds of sick and wounded troops. C-54 crews operated into remote airfields all over Korea during the retreat picking up troops who had made their way to the evacuation airfields. The 21st operated primarily within the Korean Peninsula while the C-54s brought in supplies and troops from Japan and evacuated wounded. The squadron would eventually transfer to Korea and become a provisional troop carrier squadron.

In 1951 the Air Force decided to send the Air Proving Ground's Douglas C-124 to the Far East for operational testing under combat conditions. The single C-124 operated out of

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Tachikawa on missions into airfields in Korea. The test proved successful and two squadrons of the giant airplanes were assigned to the 374th. As the C-124s arrived in Japan, the 6th and 22nd C-54s transferred into the 21st. Because the C-124 crew included loadmasters, air freight personnel from 315th Air Division's air terminal group were given special training to qualify them as loadmasters and transferred into the two squadrons for aircrew duty. The C-124's larger payload capacity made them valuable to UN operations.

When the war ended in a truce, the 374th remained at Tachikawa. Meanwhile, the C-124 had become an object of military politics as certain high ranking officers in the Military Air Transport Service pressed for the assignment of all C-124s to it. The most vocal of the MATS officers was Lt. General William H. Tunner, the self-styled "airlift expert" whose military background included command of Air Transport Command operations in the China-India Theater during the last year of World War II and command of the Berlin Airlift. Tunner spent a few months on temporary duty in Japan as commander of Far East Air Force's Combat Cargo Command, which included the 374th, in the fall of 1950 and early 1951, then was with the Air Material Command and commander of United States Air Forces, Europe before becoming USAF deputy chief of staff for operations. As USAF DCSO, Tunner was able to have all C-124s in the Air Force transferred to MATS. The 6th and 22nd transferred into a new MATS 1503rd Air Transport Wing that activated at Tachikawa. However, although they had transferred to MATS, the two squadrons were still under the operational control of PACAF's 315th

Air Division. The transfer led to the deactivation of the 374th in 1958. The 6th and 22nd transferred to MATS and the 21st to the 483rd TCW.



The 374th was inactive for eight years. Meanwhile, 315th Air Division's troop carrier squadrons equipped with C-130s. The 483rd TCW at Ashiya AB, Japan received the C-130s in its three squadrons at Ashiya, Japan and Naha, Okinawa where the 21st TCS transferred. In 1960 the 483rd inactivated and the three squadrons reported directly to 315th Air Division headquarters. Ashiya closed and the 815th TCS transferred to Tachikawa while the 817th joined the 21st at Naha. Three years later the United States was becoming heavily involved in Southeast Asia and a fourth C-130 squadron transferred to Naha while TAC C-123s that had been TDY to 315th were PCSed. The 6315th Operations Group activated to command the three Naha squadrons. In late 1965 a fourth squadron, the 41st TCS, arrived at Naha. The assignment arrangement at Naha was convoluted, with the aircrews assigned to the 6315th Operations Group while their airplanes and maintenance personnel were assigned to the 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing, the host unit at Naha. In 1966 the Air Force decided that there should be a C-130 wing at Naha and the 374th Troop Carrier Wing reactivated on August 1, 1966 to replace the 6315th Ops Group. The airplanes and maintenance personnel transferred into the wing from the 51st FIW. The following year USAF changed the troop carrier designation to "tactical airlift."

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After its reactivation, the 374th was one of three C-130 wings assigned to 315th Air Division. Its primary responsibility was to provide airplanes and crews for airlift operations in South Vietnam and for the C-130 forward air controller/flare mission that operated out of Ubon, Thailand. The 374th was also responsible for a number of special operations missions including leaflet drops and insertions of agents using HALO techniques. Many 374th missions were classified. A major 374th mission was support of HIGH GEAR, a special weapons mission at Kadena. The 374th's four squadrons were already heavily involved in combat operations in South Vietnam and over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and North Vietnam when the wing reactivated. Those missions continued as the Vietnam War moved into its most intense phase in the summer of 1967, a phase that continued through the spring of 1969 when President Richard Nixon instructed his commanders to reduce American casualties. 374th flight crews were involved in the most dramatic missions of the war, including the resupply of Khe Sanh, airdrops in the A Shau Valley and the evacuation of the camp at Kham Duc. According to the 374th history, three wing pilots were recommended for the Air Force Cross; Lt. Colonels Daryl Cole, John Delmore and Franklin Montgomery. All of the recommendations were downgraded to Silver Stars but Lt. Col. Cole was awarded the 1968 MacKay Trophy for his harrowing flight into and out of Kham Duc in a battle-damaged airplane. The 374th added

additional unit awards to its collection from World War II and Korea, including a Presidential Unit Citation.

As troop withdrawals from South Vietnam accelerated, the Air Force reduced its units in the Pacific, including airlift units. The 374th was operating the C-130A, the original model of the venerable airlifter, and USAF decided to phase them out of active service. The 815th TAS at Tachikawa, which had become part of the 374th when 315th Air Division inactivated, was the first to go when it inactivated in December 1969. The 817th deactivated in June 1970, followed by the 41st in February 1971. By that time the 374th had ceased shuttle operations in South Vietnam. (The last C-130A shuttle mission was on December 31, 1970.) The wing deactivated on May 31, 1971. However, USAF had decided to maintain the 374th designation in the Pacific due to its historicity and it transferred immediately to Ching Chuan Kang Air Base, Taiwan where the 314th TAW also deactivated the same day. The 21st TAS designation also transferred to CCK.



By 1972 the 374th Tactical Airlift Wing was the only C-130 wing still active in PACAF.¹ The new 374th remained active in the Vietnam War, and again saw heavy combat during the siege of An Loc in the spring of 1972. The only Air Force Cross ever awarded to an enlisted airlifter was awarded to loadmaster SSgt Charles L. Shaub for his actions during a mission to An Loc. (The

¹ The 463rd inactivated on December 31, 1971 but the 774th TAS remained active until the following June.

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transfer of the 374th to CCK has caused considerable confusion among airlift veterans who have been part of the unit since that time. The Naha-based wing ceased operations in South Vietnam on December 31, 1970 after over four years of providing aircrews and airplanes for combat. The new wing at CCK included the same squadrons that had previously served with the 314th TCW/TAW except for the 21st TAS designation, which transferred from Naha to replace the 346th designation that had been with the 314th since early 1969. There is no real continuity between the Naha and CCK wings.)

After the Vietnam War, the 374th remained active in the Pacific and is still active to the

present day. In November 1973 the 374th left CCK and transferred to Clark AB, Philippines although one squadron, the 345th TAS, transferred to Kadena. A year and a half later the 374th became part of Military Airlift Command. It remained at Clark until October 1989 when it transferred to Yokota AB, Japan. In April 1992 the 374th transferred back to PACAF and became the host unit at Yokota. None of the wing's previous squadrons are still part of the wing. MAC transferred the 6th to McGuire and the 21st and 22nd to Travis and out of the tactical airlift mission. The 36th Airlift Squadron is the current 374th's only combat airlift squadron.

MATS' Tactical Airlifters



There is a common misconception among veterans of the Military Airlift Command that "tactical airlift" is the airdropping of cargo and personnel. Such, however, is not the case. The word "tactical" in the military lexicon refers to operations that are in direct support of troops on the battlefield. Veterans of the mission are well aware that tactical airlift operations are more likely to involve the movement of men and equipment into forward areas and resupply of troops than it is to involve airdrop. Although MAC aircrews were given tactical training, the MAC mission was not tactical in nature. However, there was one MAC squadron assigned to tactical operations in Southeast Asia, the 22nd Military Airlift Squadron.

The Military Air Transport Service was established in 1948 to provide air transport for

Department of Defense agencies and had no combat mission. (The former ATC commander Gen. Lawrence Kuter added a phrase "deployment of troops" to the proposed MATS mission statement and the new Secretary of the Air Force let it stand.) However, after the United States became involved in Southeast Asia, two MATS/MAC squadrons, the 6th and 22nd Troop Carrier Squadrons, flew tactical airlift missions in Southeast Asia from their home base at Tachikawa AB, Japan. The two squadrons both operated the Douglas C-124 Globemaster II and had originally been assigned to Far East Air Forces' 374th Troop Carrier Wing. When all C-124s transferred to MATS in 1958, the two squadrons were part of the transfer. However, although their crews sewed the MATS basketball on their flight suits, they retained their troop carrier identity and remained under the operational control of 315th Air Division, where they were used primarily for airlift of "outsize cargo," meaning cargo too large for lift by C-130.

In 1964 the 6th TCS left Japan and transferred to Hickam AFB, Hawaii but the 22nd remained at Tachikawa to supplement 315th Air Division's C-130s and C-123s by airlifting large items such as bulldozers, generators, fuel trucks, tanks, etc. When 315th Air Division moved Army and Marine ground combat units from Okinawa

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to Vietnam, 22nd C-124s moved outsize cargo. Once U.S. ground troops entered combat in South Vietnam, 22nd's C-124s continued supporting them. While other MATS aircraft were restricted to larger airports, 22nd C-124s were frequently seen at forward airfields with runways long enough to accommodate them. The C-124s were not assigned to shuttle duty in Southeast Asia as 315th's C-130s were, but individual crews were sent in country for short periods to maintain an outsize airlift capability. Undoubtedly the most noteworthy C-124 mission was the airlift of bulldozers into the CIDG camp at Kham Duc on May 10, 1968 when the 196th Infantry Regiment was airlifted into the camp to bolster the camp's defenses in anticipation of an attack by strong

communist forces. The above photograph is of that mission. One bulldozer proved crucial two days later when it was used to remove the wreckage of a CH-47 that was shot down and crashed on the runway when the camp was evacuated under fire.

315th Air Division inactivated in the spring of 1969 and the 22nd inactivated along with it (it would reactivate at Travis as a C-5 squadron in 1972.) To meet the need for outsize cargo airlift, four former MAC C-124s and experienced crews transferred to Clark and were assigned to the 463rd Tactical Airlift Wing's 20th Operations Squadron.

Troop Carriers in the CBI



In the appendix to his history of the tactical airlift mission in Southeast Asia, USAF historian Col. Ray Bowers lists the historic theater airlifts from World War II through Vietnam. He lists the China-Burma-India theater airlift as 1.75 million tons, an amount equal to the Berlin Airlift. (This figure does not include 650,000 tons carried by Air Transport Command.) Bowers also states that only 40% of the total tonnage was carried to China; the other 60% was delivered to Allied troops in Burma by aircraft assigned to Tenth Air Force and the Eastern Air Command Troop Carrier Command.

Although it wasn't until February 1943 that troop carrier squadrons were assigned to the CBI, air transport missions actually started in the spring of 1942 when Army C-47s and contract DC-3s began operations into Burma and China. Prior to December 1, 1942 when the 1st Ferrying Group transferred to Air Transport Command, all transports in the CBI were under Tenth Air Force command. Except for the 1st Ferrying Group's airplanes and personnel, the transports seem to have been assigned directly to Tenth Air Force headquarters.

The first Army transports to arrive in India came over with Project AQUILA commanded by Col. Caleb Haynes. When they got there, the project's B-17s were reassigned to a bomber squadron Maj. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton had brought from Java and the pilots, most of whom were older officers, were assigned to fly the transports on missions into Burma and China. Col. Haynes, Col. Robert L. Scott and Col. William D. "Don" Old flew C-47 missions until July when Claire Chennault's American Volunteer Group was brought into the Army. At that time Haynes and Scott were reassigned to Chennault's China Air Task Force, with Haynes in command of the bomber command and Scott in command of the 23rd Fighter Group. Old, who had flown

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the first Army mission into China, remained on the Tenth Air Force staff until he took command of Eastern Air Force Troop Carrier Command.

The veteran pilots were crucial to the Allied retreat from Burma. They began hauling loads of troops that were so large that the civilian pilots flying Pan American DC-3s were incensed that the Army pilots were violating the airplanes' limitations. Some pilots brought out as many as 70 troops in an airplane that had been designed for 24.



FIGURE 2 C-47 OVER FORT HERTZ (THIS CAME FROM A DC-3 SITE AND APPEARS TO BE COMPUTER GENERATED)

Tenth Air Force's transports were crucial to the conduct of the war in the CBI. Although the Japanese occupied the southern half of Burma, the rugged Naga Hills remained in Allied hands. After Lt. General Joseph "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell walked out of Burma (Haynes and Scott flew into Burma in a C-47 to bring him out but he insisted on walking) large numbers of British and Chinese troops remained in northern Burma. Fort Hertz, a British installation in northeastern Burma, remained in Allied hands, although there was no contact with the fort for several weeks. In early July, British troops (most British troops in the theater were Indian) parachuted into northern Burma on a reconnaissance mission to determine the military situation in the region. Their orders were to march 150 miles to Fort Hertz. When they got there, they discovered that it was occupied by British troops who had gone into the hills when Burma fell. A month later a British officer flew over the fort and discovered that it was in British hands. The parachutists had reached the fort a few days before but had no means of communications. They signaled that the airstrip

was unsuitable for aircraft. The following day British airborne engineers parachuted into the fort and began work on the airstrip. By August 20 it was suitable for landings. Fort Hertz became an important post from which British and Burmese troops conducted reconnaissance operations and harassed Japanese positions. The fort was supplied entirely by air for more than two years.



FIGURE 3 C-47 DROPPING SUPPLIES BY FREE DROP

Allied troops occupied positions in the Naga Hills, a rugged region in the northeast corner of India on the border with Burma, all along the Indian frontier to the Arakan region on the Burmese western coast. The entire region is characterized by mountains in the 4,000-5,000 foot range, which made ground supply difficult. Allied forces in New Guinea began using aerial delivery to supply Australian troops fighting along the Kokoda Track in the summer of 1942. News of their success reached Stilwell, who advocated the development of an aerial supply capability by Tenth Air Force's transport elements. Processing and rigging of cargo responsibilities were given to the Quartermasters, who initially assigned the duties to laundry companies. As the war continued and airdrop became a major transport mission, other Quartermasters, including colored truck drivers, were assigned to airdrop duties and accompanied the loads to kick bundles out over the drop zones.

The resupply of British and Chinese troops in eastern India and northern Burma took up much of the valuable transport resources in the CBI, but the delivery of supplies to China was still

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a high priority mission. The only Army transport group in the theater was the 1st Ferrying Group, which had been organized specifically to ferry supplies to China, but the lack of air transport led to it being used to support combat operations while the China National Aviation Corporation made most of the supply flights to Chinese airfields. The group's C-47s and those assigned directly to Tenth Air Force flew logistical missions to China when they weren't supporting ground forces in eastern India. Transports were far from the only airplanes flying cargo missions into China. Chennault's B-25 squadrons ferried their own supplies from India to their Chinese bases; when two groups of B-24s arrived in the theater, they also ferried supplies, as did B-29s when they entered combat in the CBI in early 1944. (The tonnage carried by bombers is probably included in the 1.75 million tons given by Bowers.)

The threat to India and the corresponding use of the 1st Ferrying Group's airplanes to support combat operations caused great consternation in Washington among the politicians, both civilian and military, who were concerned with the delivery of supplies to China. They failed to understand that the threat to India was a threat to even the possibility of a ferry to China. When China Defense Supplies "aviation advisor" Frank D. Sinclair wrote that Tenth Air Force had "a defeatist attitude," he failed to realize that their concern with defending India was the only thing allowing any supplies to get through. Had the Japanese succeeded in their intentions toward India, there would have been no India-China Ferry because the airfields from which the supply flights were launching would not have been available.

As a result of Sinclair's letter, General Henry H. Arnold, who held a position as the air representative on the Joint Chiefs, decided to transfer the 1st Ferrying Group to the Air Transport Command and give ATC responsibility for operating the India-China Ferry effective December 1, 1942. He also promised two troop carrier squadrons to Tenth Air Force. However, although the 1st and 2nd Troop Carrier Squadrons transferred to the CBI, the transfers were

apparently only on paper and the two squadrons organized in India with personnel who were already there. Both squadrons came from Pope Field, North Carolina where they had been training squadrons for troop carrier crews bound for duty overseas. They were eventually fleshed out with new arrivals and airplanes from the States. The 1st TCS was headquartered in India at Dinjan but the 2nd TCS was headquartered in China for a few months in early 1943. Ironically, the two squadrons were often temporarily attached to ATC for India-China Ferry duty.



In late 1942 the British went on the offensive in the CBI with the intention of retaking Burma. Their first operation was into Burma's Arakan region to capture the island of Akyab just off the Burmese coast. Akyab had a port and all-weather airfield. The campaign began in late December and continued into March, when the British decided to retreat after the Japanese reinforced their troops on the island. In February 1943 British troops mounted another offensive when Col. Orde Wingate took a force known as Chindits on a march into the Burmese interior. The force traveled entirely on foot and was resupplied by air. Unfortunately, the Japanese interrupted many of the supply drops by capturing the intended drop zones. The first Chindit operation was recalled to India in mid-March and returned the way they had come.

After the operation, Wingate returned to the UK to brief senior British officials, including

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Winston Churchill, on the operation. Churchill decided to take Wingate and his wife with him to the Quebec Conference in Montreal in August 1943 and have him brief President Franklin Roosevelt and other US officials on the mission and his future plans. Wingate pressed Roosevelt for more air support. Lord Lewis Mountbatten, who had just been appointed commander of a new South-East Asia Command, was also at the conference. Mountbatten told Arnold that he needed more air units in his theater. He would later state that he did not ask for a specially trained air unit – he just wanted more of the kind of units that were already there. Somehow, Arnold got the idea that a new type of air unit was needed and decided to authorize a special unit that was originally known as the 5318th Provisional Unit (Air). The new unit included fighter, bomber, troop carrier and liaison sections. The troop carrier section would eventually become the 319th Troop Carrier Squadron. In addition to C-47s, the 5318th was equipped with gliders. The liaison section operated C-64 Norseman single-engine transports. Additional liaison squadrons equipped with L-1s and L-5s were also sent to the CBI. One of the lessons Wingate had learned was the need for light aircraft to evacuate casualties from remote areas.



FIGURE 4 C-47 EVACUATING GLIDER PILOTS FROM BURMA

In late 1943 former chief of the Air Staff Maj. Gen. George Stratemeyer went to India to take command of all air forces in the CBI, including the Eastern Air Command under

Mountbatten's South-East Asia Command. Stratemeyer had visited the theater earlier in the year with Eddie Rickenbacker and was familiar with the military situation, including the shortage of air transport. One of his first actions was to establish an Eastern Air Command Troop Carrier Command with Brig. Gen. William D. Old, who had been in the theater since early 1942, in command.² In February 1944 Stratemeyer activated the 433rd Troop Carrier Group in India to command the 1st, 2nd, 27th, 310th and 315th Troop Carrier Squadrons. Like many other activations, the new group was an on-paper transfer of a group from the United States. When the 5318th Provisional Unit (Air) arrived in India, its troop carrier section was placed under the operational control of Old's Troop Carrier Command.

The second Chindit operation, known as Operation THURSDAY, started moving into Burma on foot in February 1944. The main body of the operation was planned to fly into Burma in gliders. Unfortunately, the glider operations did not go well. The fields that had been selected as landing zones turned out to be crossed by logging trails and were pockmarked with buffalo wallows. Few gliders arrived intact. Fortunately, enough men and equipment were landed to construct a primitive runway. As soon as it was declared suitable for landings, Troop Carrier Command began flying in troops. All told, Troop Carrier Command flew some 9,000 Chindits into Burma. However, THURSDAY failed to accomplish its objectives, particularly the capture of Myitkyina to which the Chindits got no closer than fifty miles.

After the operation got underway, the Japanese launched an offensive in India and threatened the air bases around Imphal. By mid-March it had become apparent that THURSDAY was a failure and a troop withdrawal began. Unfortunately, one of the casualties of the operation was Wingate, who died when his B-25 crashed. Yet even though the force that had been

² General Old is not to be confused with Brig. Gen. Robert Olds, with an S, who commanded the Army Air Corps Ferrying Command.

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flown into Burma was withdrawn, the first group of Chindits, who had walked in, remained, as did a specially trained group of Americans who had marched into northern Burma – and onto the pages of history.



FIGURE 5 MERRILL'S MARAUDERS ON THE LEDO ROAD

In February 1944 a special force of American troops began a march into Burma. The 5307th Composite Unit, code-named GALAHAD, was made up of soldiers with combat experience on Guadalcanal and in New Guinea and troops who had served in the Panama Canal Zone. Originally, the American unit was intended to operate with Wingate's troops but Stilwell decided that American units should be under his command and decided to use them in Northern Burma. The GALAHAD force, which came to be known in the press as "Merrill's Marauders" after their commander, Brig. Gen. Frank Merrill, was non-mechanized. Their supplies were carried on horses and mules and all resupply was by Tenth Air Force troop carriers, with most resupply by airdrop. A liaison squadron flying light airplanes flew into jungle clearings to evacuate casualties.

Although the THURSDAY force failed to accomplish their objectives and was withdrawn, Stilwell decided to send the Americans to capture the important airfield at the town of Myitkyina. Myitkyina had been the objective of the British "special force" but they had got no closer than fifty miles. After marching over 60 miles across the rugged Kachin Hills, on May 17, 1944 the

Marauders attacked and captured the airfield. Troop carrier began arriving with Chinese troops. Although the Chinese troops failed to capture the town immediately, they put it under a siege that lasted until August. Troop carriers kept the airfield open and brought in reinforcements and supplies. Fortunately, the rainy season was late but the troop carriers continued to fly into the airfield even after it did.

Tenth Air Force transports had begun supplying troops in Burma and along the Indian frontier by airdrop in late 1942. Early British operations made it clear that air resupply was crucial to Allied success in the region. The rugged terrain and lack of roads ruled out other methods of supply other than pack mules and horses. When necessary, ATC transports were placed under Troop Carrier Command for particular operations. Still, more air transport capability was needed. The Air Staff obtained permission to activate new groups over and above the groups that had been authorized by Congress. The 5318th Provisional Unit became the 1st Air Commando Group and two additional air commando groups were authorized, each with a troop carrier squadron. (Only one would go to the CBI; the other went to the Southwest Pacific.) Air transport was a particular need in the CBI. With the authorized troop carrier groups at strength and deployed overseas, the Air Staff activated three groups and gave them the designation "combat cargo." While the 1st, 2nd and 4th Combat Cargo Groups activated and trained in the US, the 3rd CCG activated in India in June 1944. Each group commanded four squadrons with 25 transports each and an airdrome squadron to provide services at forward airfields. Although combat cargo veterans insist they were different from troop carrier, any differences were minor. The main difference was that the groups that trained in the U.S. weren't trained for large-scale airborne operations. CC groups were intended for operations in forward areas and were smaller in scale than conventional troop carrier groups with fewer support personnel. Other than that, there was no difference. In fact, the 3rd CCG never trained in the US at all. It was formed with

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transports and crews that were rushed to India in response to the Japanese offensive on the Indian frontier. Allegedly, the group was going to return to the US after the crisis for training but after several weeks of combat operations, it had all of the training it would ever need and remained in the CBI for the duration of the war.



FIGURE 6 C-47 DROPPING TO MERRILL'S MARAUDERS NEAR MYITKYINA

The Japanese offensive in the spring of 1944 was aimed at capturing the region around Imphal and Kohima, two Indian cities about 60 miles apart some 40-50 miles from the Burmese border. Had the Japanese succeeded, the ATC India-China Ferry would have been over because its bases would have been in Japanese hands. It didn't, in no small measure due to EAC Troop Carrier Command. By this time, troop carriers in the CBI had become expert at cargo dropping and those skills were put to good use supplying Allied troops engaged in combat in defense of the two installations. When the Japanese laid the town of Kohima under siege, the defenders were resupplied by air. TCC transports dropped to Allied troops defending Imphal. There were airfields around Imphal; TCC used them to bring in reinforcements and supplies. When the Japanese began their attack, EAC Troop Carrier Command was equipped with only 76 transports. The ATC force in India was much larger but USAAF policy had placed them off-limits to the combat commanders. Lord Mountbatten managed

to obtain one squadron of C-46s until additional



transports arrived from the US.

In response to the invasion, the Combined Chiefs decided to beef up EAC Troop Carrier Command. There were no units in the United States so the 64th Troop Carrier Group, a veteran unit that had been fighting in the Middle East and Mediterranean since November 1942, was ordered to deploy to India for 90 days to beef up troop carrier strength. A British squadron, 216 Transport Squadron, was also ordered to India for a temporary assignment. The activation of the 3rd Combat Cargo Group in June led to an additional 100 transports. By December, after the 1st and 2nd Combat Cargo Groups arrived, Eastern Air Command commanded 364 US and 94 British transports. When the 3rd Combat Cargo Group activated in June, it was assigned to a new air task force along with the just formed 1st Air Commando Group. The air commando group formed after Wingate's Special Force was withdrawn from Burma with the assets of the former 5318th Provisional Group. When the task force was formed, it had no defined mission. Two months later, in September, the British 177 Transport Group was added to the task force, which was designated as the Combat Cargo Task Force with the specific mission of conducting cargo operations in forward areas. Brig. Gen. Frederick Evans, the commander of I Troop Carrier Command in the U.S., was brought over

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and placed in command. The CCTF was eventually expanded with the addition of the 2nd Air Commando Group and two British transport wings.

By the time Merrill's Marauders captured Myitkyina, Stilwell's Chinese troops had built several airstrips in the Hukawng and Mogaung Valleys to handle fighters and transports. Immediately after Merrill's Marauders captured Myitkyina, eight P-40s were assigned to the airfield; the small force was soon increased to twelve. The fighters would take off, make a strafing run over the Japanese positions then come back and land. Japanese machinegun positions were a little over half a mile away, and every airplane that landed and took off came under fire. The fighters and the Chinese and American troops engaged in the attack on the city were reinforced and supplied entirely by air. Additional fighters moved into the airstrips that had just been built and were kept supplied by TCC. Although much of the air power in the CBI was American, the ground forces were British Commonwealth – including Canadians, Indians and Burmese – and Chinese. Stilwell's forces were entirely Chinese commanded by American senior officers. The only American ground combat troops in the theater were the remnants of Merrill's Marauders, which had been reorganized as the Mars Brigade and reinforced with additional regiments from the U.S. Like Merrill's troops, the men of the Mars Brigade, or Mars Task Force, operated exclusively in Burma. All ground and air forces in the region depended on EAC Troop Carrier Command and the Combat Cargo Task Force for resupply. Even after the Ledo Road was opened from Ledo to Myitkyina, most supplies were transported by air.³

Myitkyina finally fell to Stilwell's Chinese troops on August 3, 1944. Stilwell had been expected to continue the advance to the south but he decided to establish a defensive line twenty miles south of Myitkyina, to the consternation of the American air officers and Chaing Ki Shek.

³ It took days for a truck to reach its destination but it only took a C-47 a few hours.

Vinegar Joe felt that his troops were in need of rest. He remained in a defensive posture until mid-October when he was recalled to the United States.

Immediately after Stilwell left, the Allies returned to the offensive in Burma and began one of the most spectacular campaigns of the war, a campaign that depended heavily on air transportation. General Evans' Combat Cargo Task Force hauled staggering amounts of men and equipment on a scale that eclipsed the efforts of the Air Transport Command India-China Division, which by that time was under the command of Maj. Gen. William H. Tunner. Evans' command alone exceeded 50,000 tons of supplies each month beginning in February and continuing until May when Burma fell to the Allies. In addition, Tenth Air Force troop carriers, which never numbered more than 120 airplanes, were hauling in excess of 20,000 tons each month during the same period for a total of more than 70,000 tons a month.⁴ In March 1945 troop carrier and combat cargo transports, including those assigned to the 1st and 2nd Air Commando Groups, transported 96,000 tons into Burma.

Not only were Tenth Air Force's air transport groups responsible for transporting men, equipment and supplies into Burma, they were also delivering supplies for Brig. Gen. Claire Chennault's Fourteenth Air Force in China and providing air transport for Chinese troops. One squadron of the 443rd TCG was assigned to duty inside China. The 2nd TCS initially operated in China but returned to India in mid-1943. The 27th TCS transferred to China in May 1944 and remained there for the duration of the war. While the other squadrons brought supplies in from India, the 27th provided air transport for Chinese ground forces and logistical support for Fourteenth Air Force's fighter and bomber squadrons. About 40% of the tonnage carried by Tenth Air Force squadrons went to China.

By May 1945 most of Burma was in Allied hands. British paratroops were preparing to jump

⁴ The most ever carried by ATC transports in one month was a little over 55,000 tons.

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into Rangoon on May 2 when the Pathfinder planes spotted signs made by Allied POWs that read “JAPS GONE!” Rangoon was occupied without opposition. The focus of the war in the China-Burma-India Area turned toward defeating the Japanese in China. Getting supplies, particularly aviation gasoline, into China was a

major logistical problem. The 443rd Troop Carrier Group and the 2nd and 4th Combat Cargo Groups were placed under the operational control of the Air Transport Command’s India-China Division and assigned to routine logistical flying across Burma into China. It was an anticlimactic end for their wartime role.

A C-47 Gets a Zero

One of the most flabbergasting stories in troop carrier history occurred over Burma during World War II. In the spring of 1944 the 64th Troop Carrier Group was sent TDY from Italy to India to beef up EAC Troop Carrier Command. A crew from the 17th TCS commanded by Captain Hal Scrugham was on a mission near Imphal when they were attacked by Japanese fighters. He immediately put his airplane into a dive toward the ground (a common tactic for troop carrier crews if they were attacked.) One of the fighters closed in on Scrugham’s airplane. The pilot apparently miscalculated the relative airspeeds and collided with the slower C-47. The fighter cut approximately seven feet off of the transport’s tail. Scrugham and his copilot, Lt. Al Jost, managed to get their airplane on the ground about an hour later at a British airfield near Sylhet. When British intelligence officers interrogated their Sikh passengers, the senior NCO reported that they had seen the fighter fly into the ground after it hit their airplane. Scrugham’s C-47 was one of about half a dozen that were attacked by Japanese fighters that day. Another 64th TCG airplane lost five feet of its right wing then the pilot clipped a tree while evading a fighter. One of the crewmembers was wounded.

The India-China Ferry



So you never heard about the massive troop carrier operations in the CBI, huh? There’s a good reason you haven’t. The modern Air Mobility Command is the lineal descendant of the World War II U.S. Army Air Transport Command, and AMC, MAC and MATS historians have done a good job of publicizing the “Hump Airlift” even though ATC’s role in the CBI was eclipsed by the troop carrier effort. The Air Transport Command came into being in June 1942 when U.S. Army Air Forces headquarters issued General Order No. 8 establishing the Air Transport Command as a

military agency reporting directly to USAAF headquarters. The new command was established primarily to serve as a central agency for the issuing of military contracts to the airlines, and the air transport division was staffed with former airline executives who had been given direct commissions and assigned to an air cargo contracting office in the Air Service Command. The headquarters came from the former Army Ferrying Command, which had been set up in the spring of 1941 to provide Army pilots and crews from combat squadrons to ferry military airplanes purchased under the Lend-Lease Act. The new ATC came about after the chairman of the Civil Aeronautics Board, Mr. L.W. Pogue, proposed that the White House establish a paramilitary aviation organization to handle airline contracts. Pogue’s idea seems to have been for a

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headquarters to issue contracts to the airlines, a concept similar to the Navy's Merchant Marine.

Prior to the formation of the new ATC – there was already an existing Air Transport Command but it was redesignated as I Troop Carrier Command – the Ferrying Command started operating some transport routes using converted B-24 bombers and former civilian transports. In early 1942 the White House ordered the War Department to send a military mission to China, which at the time was apparently believed to be the route to attack Japan. Project AMMISCA included a transport group. At the time, no military air transport organization had been formed so responsibility for the new group went to the Army Ferrying Command, commanded by Brig. Gen. Robert Olds. Olds activated the 1st Ferrying Group, which consisted for the most part of Army reservists who had been with the airlines. The group began training at Pope Field adjacent to Fort Bragg. The 1st Ferrying Group became a subject of military politics from its inception. It was destined to operate out of India, where Maj. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton had just assumed command of Tenth Air Force after the Allied defeat in Java. Brereton saw the assignment of an organization outside of his command to his area as a violation of Army doctrine, which stipulated that all air forces in a theater were under the command of the theater air organization. Brereton had a good point; he would be required to support an organization over which he would have no control. He sent a message to USAAF headquarters protesting the arrangement. USAAF commander Lt. Gen. Henry H. Arnold agreed with him and the new group was assigned to Tenth AF. Olds protested, and the stress evidently cost him his military career and, ultimately, his life. (Olds was the father of fighter ace Robin Olds.) He had a heart attack and was retired, then died the following year.

AMMISCA was closely watched by the White House, with the delivery of military supplies to China as the highest priority. No one in Washington seemed to grasp the military situation in the CBI, where the Japanese captured the southern two thirds of Burma in April and

threatened India. The rugged terrain and lack of roads created a demand for air transport, of which there was very little in the theater. Tenth Air Force contracted with China National Airways Corporation, a civilian airline owned jointly by Pan American Airways and the Chinese government, to deliver supplies to China while the military transports supported combat operations. Responsibility for the delivery of China's military aid was with China Defense Supplies, a Chinese-owned company staffed by Americans. The company's aviation "advisor" was one Frank D. Sinclair, a prewar civilian aviator. Sinclair went to India to check on the India-China Ferry, as the air transport effort was officially known. When he returned, he wrote a scathing letter in which he accused Tenth Air Force of having "a defeatist attitude," which was perfectly logical considering that its area of responsibility was threatened by the Japanese. Sinclair's letter ended up on the desk of ATC chief of staff Col. C.R. Smith, the former president of American Airlines. Smith pressed Arnold to assign responsibility for the ferry to ATC. Under pressure from the White House, Arnold agreed.



FIGURE 7 C-87

Smith's plan was to reassign the 1st Ferrying Group to ATC and elevate its headquarters to become the India-China Wing of the ATC (it would later become a division.) He also proposed the assignment of four-engine C-87 transports to the new wing and the eventual replacement of the

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1st Ferrying Group's C-47s with larger C-46s, which had almost twice the payload. As it turned out, the first ATC squadron assigned to India was staffed by American Airlines pilots! Even with the C-87s, ATC's efforts were a spectacular failure. The new India-China Wing was actually hauling less cargo than Tenth Air Force had been. The average CNAC crew was transporting more cargo to China in DC-3s than the C-87 crews. The introduction of the C-46s was delayed due to the airplane's design problems. When they finally appeared in India, they turned out to be maintenance hogs.



FIGURE 8 C-46

The threat of enemy aircraft was practically non-existent. Tenth Air Force had established a route leading northeast from India's Assam Valley across the eastern reaches of the Himalayas (the high mountains were several hundred miles further west) then eastward to Chungking. Still, the crews faced dangerous weather conditions over the mountains, some of which reached 15,000 feet. Morale was low among the ATC pilots, most of whom were former civilian pilots who had been given direct commissions as "service pilots." Although they were qualified by the Army to fly twin-engine airplanes, very few had flown anything previously other than light single-engine airplanes. The accident rate was astronomical – more than 600 transports were lost by the India-China wing, all but a handful to accident. The majority were takeoff and landing accidents. Before he was transferred to India, Stratemeyer and Eastern Airlines president Eddie

Rickenbacker visited the CBI and came back to recommend that the ferry be transferred back to Tenth Air Force. The ATC staff, most of whom came from the airline industry, used their political clout to keep the operation under their control.

Gradually, tonnage into China began increasing, thanks largely to the assignment of additional aircraft and personnel to the India-China Wing. ATC had promised that it would immediately increase tonnage to 4,000 tons a month but it wasn't until the late summer of 1943 that this amount was finally reached. In the late spring of 1943 the first C-46s were dispatched to India, but they were plagued with problems and it took several months for them to have an impact. ATC was also operating C-54s but their limited altitude performance ruled them out for operations over "the Hump." They would eventually be assigned to the India-China Division but not until the final months of the war. The most significant increase occurred when Col. Thomas Hardin took over the Indi-China Wing and decided to make the ferry an around-the-clock operation. Tonnage soared, but so did the accident rate. In December 1943 more than 12,000 tons was hauled into China by ATC aircraft. (Figures for the Hump Airlift, as it is now commonly, do not include the tonnage hauled by tactical aircraft, including Tenth Air Force's troop carrier and combat cargo squadrons.)

Initially, one of ATC's problems was the uncertain military situation in eastern India. Frequently, ATC aircraft were needed to support combat operations until enough troop carrier and combat cargo squadrons were assigned to Tenth Air Force to provide the air transport needed by the Allied ground and air forces. Still, a major part of ATC's India-China Ferry tonnage was consigned to Fourteenth Air Force in China, which was an outgrowth of the original AMMISCA project. Even though the India-China Division reported directly to Washington, it depended on Tenth Air Force to provide the airfields and support personnel for its Indian bases.

The ATC effort reached a monthly tonnage level of just over 50,000 pounds at the end of the

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war but it never equaled the tonnages transported by Tenth Air Force, which hauled over 96,000 tons into Burma and western China in March 1945 alone. ATC's reached its highest tonnage level in July 1945 when it took credit for 71,042 tons. However, almost a third of that tonnage was hauled by Tenth and Fourteenth Air Force B-24s and Tenth Air Force troop carrier and combat cargo squadrons that had been placed under ATC

control after the defeat of the Japanese in Burma. ATC transports hauled just over 650 million tons in the CBI, with most of it transported in 1945. By comparison, Tenth Air Force and British transport squadrons hauled 1.75 million.

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Contributions

Please remember that contributions to this newsletter are not only welcome, they are badly needed! While I have a wealth of material for historical articles available, we'd like to include more personal experiences and news of our members. Please send any material for the newsletter to semcgowanjr@gmail.com.

