



The Airlifter

Newsletter of the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association

April 19, 2008

Volume V

Editors Note

Please accept my apology for sending this newsletter out so late. It should have gone out before March 31 but we held off waiting for a definite date for the 2008 Convention. We will be sending out a special edition sometime after May 1 when convention details have been finalized, along with an up-to-date membership list.

Business Meeting

Nine TCTAA members, officers and board members met at the Clear Lake Hilton in Clear Lake, Texas on February 2, 2008 for the first official business meeting and organizational meeting for the Association. Present were Bobby Gassiott, Tony Girtman, Ernie Gassiott, Ace Bowman, Billie Mills, Andy Vaquera, Sam McGowan, Ralph Bemis and Hector Leyva. We got a lot accomplished, including review and adoption of our by-laws and election of officers and board members. We also agreed that since 2007 was essentially a do-nothing year, all memberships will be extended by one year. Among other things, we discussed goals of the Association and future reunion plans. Chairmen for the Membership and Reunion Committees were appointed and plans were made for Association growth. Everyone left with a feeling of optimism for the future of our organization.

Finances

Association finances are in pretty good shape. Prior to the meeting, we had \$8,300 and some change in the bank, of which roughly \$6,000 is from dues with the remainder being reunion funds that were sent in for the 2007 reunion. The facilities and catering for the business meeting came up to right at \$1,000.00. After making some deposits, we still have just over \$7,600 in the bank.

New Officers and Board Members

We are fortunate to have the people who will be serving as officers and board members for the coming years. They are as follows:

Officers

Chairman of the Board, Ace Bowman

Vice-Chairman, Carl Wyrick

President, Hector Leyva

Vice-President, Rodney Crawford

Secretary, Sam McGowan (Founder)

Treasurer, Ralph Bemis (Founder)

Board Members

Tony Girtman (Founder)

Bobby Gassiott

Billie Mills

Chick Anderson

Craig Clifton

Sherman "Gomer" Pyle

Jim Esbeck

Andy Vaquera

Alternate Board Members

Jim Ostrem

Joe Newman

Legal Advisor

Ernie Gassiott

Our senior leadership truly represents the troop carrier/tactical airlift mission as it has developed since it was established in 1942. Ace Bowman is a graduate of West Point who served as a navigator with 315th Air Division units in the late 1950s and continued in various assignments until his retirement. Carl Wyrick's name is well-known among troop carriers of the 1960s. He started out as a C-119 pilot with the 10th Troop Carrier Squadron and progressed through various assignments in C-123s and C-130s including the staff of the 315th Air Division in Asia during the Vietnam War. Hector Leyva is a retired loadmaster who started out in MATS and went to C-130s at Sewart, then to CCK where he flew on the hazardous resupply missions over An Loc and Kontum in 1972. Hector is heavily involved with a number of veterans' organizations, including the San Antonio Chapter of the Distinguished Flying Cross Society. Rodney Crawford is also a retired loadmaster who served in C-130s in TAC and PACAF and who recently retired from Boeing. We also have a lot of troop carrier/tactical airlift experience on our board – for example, Billie Mills started out as a radio operator and flew in the Berlin Airlift before entering the aviation cadet program. As a pilot, he flew C-119s and was one of the first C-130 pilots in the Air Force. He often flew with the Four Horsemen. As his career progressed, he served with several troop carrier and tactical airlift units as a line pilot and Stan/Eval pilot. After a tour at Clark where he became the chief of C-130 standardization for 13th Air Force, he took command of the 61st Tactical Airlift Squadron at Little Rock and took

it overseas as the first AWADS squadron to see combat. We are truly blessed to have men of this caliber in leadership roles in our organization.

2008 Convention

After considerable discussion, the board has decided to have the 2008 convention in San Antonio, Texas November 6-9. We pursued the possibility of meeting in Fayetteville, NC with what we thought was a World War II troop carrier veterans group, but the group turned out to be World War II re-enactors, and this could present problems for our organization since we are a recognized military veterans group. Since we have two enthusiastic members in San Antonio – one of whom is our new president – and the city has a strong military aviation connection, we decided to have the convention there instead. Tony Girtman originally volunteered to chair the reunion committee, but had to resign from that position due to family health issues and Andy Vaquera graciously volunteered to assume charge of the committee along with reunion planning. Andy is a retired USAF Reserve Chief Master Sergeant and San Antonio native and has lots of connections around the city. He is putting together what promises to be a fantastic event, so make plans to come and visit the city where many of us started our military careers.

Membership

Andy Vaquera has enthusiastically consented to be the Chairman of the Membership Committee. If you would like to volunteer to be on the committee with him, contact Andy at andyvaquera@sbcglobal.net. The role of the Membership Committee will be to promote membership in the organization by compiling a list of prospective members and placing ads and letters in various newspapers and periodicals. This is an important Association function and Andy is going to need a lot of help.

Army Air Corps/Army Air Forces, Air Transport/Troop Carrier



A question was raised at our business meeting about including the words “Army Air Corps” in our by-laws. A lot of veterans, including – perhaps particularly – World War II veterans – are somewhat confused over World War II terminology. Hopefully, this article will help clear the air.

As anyone who is familiar with the history of the US Air Force should know, the lineage goes back to the Army Air Service, which was established in World War I. Until it was established, all US Army aviation was part of the Signal Corps. In the 1930s the Army Air Corps replaced the Army Air Service, and the AAC continued in existence until the US Air Force was established in 1947 and most of the Army’s aviation assets transferred to it. All US Army aviation personnel were part of the Army Air Corps throughout World War II and right up until the transfer from Army brown to Air Force blue. However, in early 1941 the War Department, of which the US Army was the combat organization, was reorganized. Two separate organizations were established – the Army Ground Forces, which were commanded by General Leslie McNair, and the Army Air Forces,

commanded by General Henry H. Arnold, who also continued to wear a second hat as commander of the Army Air Corps. All of the previous Army corps continued to exist – Signal Corps, Tank Corps, Supply Corps, Air Corps, etc. while new ones such as the Women’s Army Corps were established to serve primarily as training and logistical organizations. However, for operational roles, personnel from the various corps were assigned to either the Army Ground or Army Air Forces. For example, the Army Air Forces included Signal, Supply and WAC personnel who wore the shoulder patch of the numbered Air Force to which they were assigned. However, as WW II continued, even though it remained in existence, the Army Air Corps sunk into a virtually inactive status by the end of the war, with all staff functions assumed by Headquarters, United States Army Air Forces. The Air Corps continued to exist on paper until the U.S. Air Force was established in 1947, but was essentially inactive.

The troop carrier designation also came along as a result of an Army directive. Until April 1942, the Army designated its air transportation units as “air transport,” with the original squadrons falling under the 50th Air Transport Group, which was headquartered at Wright Field, and was responsible primarily for delivering cargo to Air Corps bases around the US and as far as Alaska and Panama. As the Army became involved in airborne operations, its air transport squadrons assumed a second duty providing aircraft for paratroop operations. In April 1942 the Army Air Forces recognized the mission of transporting troops into combat, both airborne and ground troops, and re-designated its former air transport units as “troop carrier.” A few weeks later in June, 1942 an executive order established the Air Transport Command, an organization primarily responsible for issuing contracts to the airlines, from the headquarters of the Army Ferry Command, which had been established in 1941 to ferry US aircraft to pickup points for ferry pilots from US allies who had purchased them to ferry them overseas. As the new ATC expanded, it began operating its own squadrons and they were designated as “air transport” squadrons, using the designation that had formerly belonged to the units that were now designated as troop carrier. The Air Transport Command was a “service,” rather than a combat organization and thus was not given a combat role. The ATC consisted of two divisions, Ferrying and Air Transport, with the former responsible for ferrying combat aircraft both domestically and to combat units overseas while the Air Transport division was responsible for providing air transportation of cargo and personnel. For much of the war, ATC depended largely on the airlines for aircrews, some of whom flew airline aircraft that had been impressed for military duty.

As far as troop carrier units go, each was assigned to a numbered Air Force. Within the United States, there were four Air Forces – First, Second, Third and Fourth, each of which corresponded to a ground Army assigned by region. As the United States became involved in World War II, additional air forces (and Army forces) were established, both in the United States and overseas, for various purposes. Although all of the Army ground forces eventually were sent overseas, the First, Second, Third and Fourth Air Forces remained in the United States and combat units were transferred to new air forces that had been established overseas. For example, Fifth Air Force was the first overseas air force established, replacing the Far East Air Force which had formerly been in the Philippines. Fifth Air Force was established in Australia and moved northward during the war until it finally arrived in Japan. It was later joined by Thirteenth Air Force which was established in the South Pacific in early 1942. Tenth Air Force was established in India and was eventually complemented by Fourteenth Air Force in China. In Europe the first air force established was the Eighth, which included two troop carrier groups, although they both transferred to North Africa where they became part of

Twelfth Air Force. In late 1943 Ninth Air Force, which had formerly been based in Palestine and Egypt, transferred to England to become the tactical air force for the invasion of Western Europe. A major Ninth Air Force component was IX Troop Carrier Command.

Each of the numbered air forces reported directly to Hap Arnold in his capacity as commander of the United States Army Air Forces, which was the air combat component of the United States Army. And just as Hap Arnold served as commander of both the Army Air Corps and the Army Air Forces, aviation personnel assigned to the numbered air forces were members of both.

If anyone is interested in finding out more about the organization of the US Army Air Forces, go to your local library and look for Volume I of the United States Army Air Forces in World War II. This is a six volume set published by the United States Air Force starting in the mid-1950s by the Office of Air Force history and is a good source of information for troop carrier history as well as Army Air Forces history from World War II. The United States Army Historical Office also published a similar set of volumes that covers Army history during the war. Most libraries have a set on their shelves, and some public libraries serve as repositories for Federal documents, including historical volumes.

Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift History

One of the goals of the Association is to preserve and promote the history of the mission. We will soon set up a page on the Association web site with a list of publications where interested persons can research history for themselves. But meanwhile, here is a partial list of some important sources:

The United States Army Air Forces in World War II – A six-volume set edited by Craven and Cate that is available at most libraries. Each volume covers a particular phase of the war up through Volume V. Volume VI was produced later to cover the role of non-combat support organizations such as the Air Transport Command, training commands and Air WACs.

From Moresby to Manila With the 54th Troop Carrier Wing – A volume published at the end of World War II for veterans of the 54th Troop Carrier Wing, the parent unit for the troop carrier groups assigned to Fifth Air Force in the Southwest Pacific. A condensed history of the troop carrier mission in the harsh conditions from New Guinea to the Philippines, with lots of photographs.

The Greatest Airlift – The Story of Combat Cargo – A volume compiled by Captain Ennis Thompson, the PIO for 315th Air Division, immediately after the truce that ended the Korean Conflict that covers the role of the Far East Forces Combat Cargo Command, which became 315th Air Division in February 1951. It includes dozens, if not hundreds, of pictures and is a valuable source of information about the troop carrier role in Korea.

The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia – Tactical Airlift – By Col. Ray Bowers, a C-130 navigator who served at CCK, this is the official history of the US Air Force troop carrier and tactical airlift role in the Vietnam War. Published originally by the Office of Air Force history in 1985, it has been re-released in recent years and is also available on the Internet. It is part of a series of volumes published by the Office of Air Force History about the US Air Force role in

Southeast Asia, including volumes on the gunship and air rescue missions. All are available on the Internet for download.

Air War, Vietnam – This is a volume published for the Office of Air Force History by Arno Press immediately after the 1975 end of the Vietnam War that contains articles written by Air Force historians. Although it is heavily slanted toward events in 1972 – including the resupply of An Loc – it also contains several pages on the effort to destroy the Tan Hoa Bridge in North Vietnam, including an account of the *Carolina Moon* mission by TAC C-130s from Sewart.

And if course, if you are fortunate to be able to find a copy, there is my own *The C-130 Hercules, Tactical Airlift Missions, 1956-1975*, published by TAB/Aero in 1988. Another good source if you can find a copy is the bound volume of 315th Air Division newspapers *The Airlifter* from May 1966-August 1968. The original volume was presented to the late Marion L. Ray, who served as the Vietnam editor of the newspaper during that period. We were fortunate to obtain it from his daughter, Samantha Wales, who lives near Mobile, Alabama and were able to have about 60 copies made at Kinkos a few years ago. Bob Ruffin had a few more made from one of the original copies. Some of the above mentioned publications are available on the Internet from the Air Force Historical Office at www.airforcehistory.hq.af.mil/ . There are literally THOUSANDS of hours of material there to download or read online.

May 12, 1968



A recent country song entitled “November 8, 1965” is based on the life of a US Army veteran who served in Vietnam with the 173rd Airborne and who experienced a highly emotional event on that particular day. Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift has it’s own significant dates that should be written in red, and the one for veterans of the Vietnam Era is May 12, 1968, which happened to fall on Mothers Day that particular year. That is the day that C-130 crews from all three C-130 wings assigned to 315th Air Division participated

in the most dramatic event of the Vietnam War, the evacuation of the camp at Kham Duc.

The camp at Kham Duc lay in a natural bowl surrounded by mountains a few miles inside the border between South Vietnam and Laos. By 1968 it was one of the few camps remaining in the highly contested border region of Vietnam’s Highlands. The only US personnel assigned there were members of an Army Special Forces detachment who were responsible for training members of a Civilian Irregular Defense unit that served as the primary military force at the camp. After the failed attempt to overrun the Marine camp at Khe Sanh, the Communists shifted their efforts southward and it became obvious that overrunning the camp at Kham Duc was their goal. Initial US/South Vietnamese plans were to defend the camp, and additional South Vietnamese and American troops were airlifted into the camp, starting on May 10 as troops from the Americal Division’s 196th Light Infantry Brigade were brought in from Chu Lai to reinforce the garrison. Huge C-124 Globemasters from the 6th Military Airlift Squadron, a MAC unit based in Japan but under operational control of 315th Air Division, brought in heavy equipment, including a bulldozer. On May 11 Communist troops over-ran the nearby outpost at Ngoc Tavok, and began building up forces around Kham Duc. Late that night General

William Westmoreland decided that the camp was in peril and rather than risking its fall, the camp should be evacuated, with the evacuation beginning at first light. Initial plans were for the evacuation to be by helicopter, but Seventh Air Force was ordered to be prepared to take over if necessary.

Things at the camp started going haywire at daybreak when a layer of thick fog blanketed the field, preventing aircraft or helicopters from landing. As it began to lift, the first helicopters made their way toward the airstrip. Communist fire brought down the first one into the camp, and it crashed right in the middle of the runway. Rifle fire killed the driver of the bulldozer that was sent out to push the wreckage off of the runway, and intense fire drove other helicopters sent to evacuate the camp away. It was well into the morning before the runway was cleared. Immediately after it was cleared, a C-130A flown by Lt. Col. Daryl Cole's crew from the 21st TAS at Naha AB, Okinawa landed with a load of cargo. Their airplane had suffered considerable damage during their approach and a main gear tire was shot out. Frightened South Vietnamese civilians mobbed the airplane before the loadmaster could get the load off the airplane and refused to move. Cole attempted to takeoff with the mob and cargo aboard, but the flat tire kept the airplane from attaining flying speed. He returned to the ramp where his flight engineer worked feverishly using a bayonet to cut away the remains of the tire.

While Cole and his crew were on the ground, at around noon a C-123 flown by Major Ray Shelton and his crew came in and managed to takeoff again with a mixed load of Vietnamese and US Army infantry personnel. It was the only airplane to get in and out of the camp safely all day. Soon afterwards, Lt. Col. Cole and his crew started up their airplane and prepared to attempt another takeoff. Aboard the airplane with them were the three members of the 834th Air Division Airlift Control Team that had been sent into the camp on May 10, The team was commanded by Major Jack Gallagher, a C-130 pilot from the 773rd TAS at Clark, and included two Air Force combat controllers from the 8th Aerial Port Group control team, Sergeants Lundie and Freeman. Gallagher was a World War II veteran who had flown a combat tour in B-17s and was no rookie. By a strange coincidence, Jack was my instructor in a couple of training courses at Flight Safety in Wichita, Kansas and I have heard his side of the story, a story in which he has been virtually accused of cowardice by some, particularly the Special Forces troops. Cole flew the damaged airplane back to Cam Ranh Bay – and was awarded the 1968 MacKay Trophy for the flight. Gallagher received no accolades – when he arrived at Cam Ranh he was ordered to take the two combat controllers and get on the next airplane bound for the camp. He protested vehemently, asserting that there was no mission for him and the two combat controllers at the camp any longer and that the camp was in imminent danger of being overrun at any time. Nevertheless, he was ordered back.



Several hours had passed since daybreak and except for those who had come out on Shelton's C-123 and Cole's C-130, no one had been brought out of the camp. A tremendous battle had been raging around the camp, with hundreds of air sorties directed at Communist positions nearby. Seventh Air Force had ordered an unprecedented "grand slam," giving priority to the defense of the camp, a contingency plan that had previously been reserved for operations over North Vietnam. Several airplanes and helicopters had

been shot down in the vicinity of the camp, and more would be lost before the day was out. General Westmoreland ordered a C-130 evacuation of the camp and 834th Air Division was ordered to begin landings.

The first C-130 into the camp was flown by a crew from the 774th Tactical Airlift Squadron from Mactan, PI. Major Bernard Bucher managed to land and load his airplane with more than 200 evacuees, mostly Vietnamese civilians. One of the Special Forces officers, a captain, also got aboard the airplane even though the evacuation plan called for the SOF people to come out last. His airplane flew into a hail of bullets from two .50-caliber machineguns that had apparently been captured when American outlying positions were overrun earlier in the day, then were set up off the end of the runway. The airplane was seen to shudder, then fall off and crash into a ravine, where it burst into flames. There were no survivors. An Air Force FAC working over the camp spotted the gun positions and immediately directed air strikes in to silence them. A second C-130 crew commanded by Lt. Col. Bill Boyd managed to get in without significant damage. Boyd took off in the opposite direction from Bucher and got in the air with a load of evacuees. The third C-130 crew was from the 21st TAS from Naha AB, Okinawa and was commanded by Lt. Col. John Delmore. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of AK-47 rounds came through the belly of the airplane and shot out the linkage to the power levers, forcing Delmore to crash-land his airplane on the runway. He managed to steer it to one side of the runway. Miraculously, his crew all survived with minor injuries and were rescued by ground personnel, then loaded onto a helicopter.



Intense airstrikes had managed to suppress the ground fire and the fourth C-130 landed and took off again safely. It was followed by three others – including a crew commanded by Major Billie Mills. Army and Marine helicopter pilots took advantage of the diversion offered by the C-130s and got in to make pickups at a point away from the airstrip. Many of the South Vietnamese troops at the camp were ordered to make their way through the Communist lines on the ground. All told, about half of the camp's defenders made their way to safety on the ground. A fifth C-130

commanded by Lt. Col. Jay Van Cleef landed at the camp and when no evacuees appeared, took off again empty. When he reported that no one had appeared, the controller in the Airborne Command and Control airplane orbiting overhead reported that the evacuation was complete. Van Cleef vehemently protested – he had just discharged Gallagher and the two combat controllers. A silence so thick it could be cut with a butter knife enveloped the previously congested airways.



When the evacuation began, the 834th command post had shifted all of the C-123s over the camp aside so the larger C-130s could get in and make pickups. Two C-123s were orbiting nearby. The first, commanded by Lt. Col. Alfred Jeannotte, managed to land but saw no one and took off again. As they banked to turn away from the runway, the crew spotted the three stranded airmen hiding in a culvert. Unfortunately, their fuel supply was exhausted

and they were unable to make a second attempt. The C-123 was flown by a crew with Lt. Col. Joe M. Jackson in the left seat and 315th Air Commando Wing Stan/Eval pilot Major Jesse Campbell in the right. Major Campbell had been administering a flight check to Lt. Col. Jackson, who was the detachment commander for the 315th at Da Nang. They managed to land their airplane without incident and pick up the three airmen, then get off again without receiving a single hit from enemy fire, although a spent 122-mm rocket struck the runway in front of their airplane but failed to explode. Jackson was awarded the Medal of Honor while Campbell received the Air Force Cross. The two enlisted crewmembers, TSgt. Trujillo and SSgt. Grubbs, were awarded Silver Stars. Reportedly, another C-130 was on the way into the camp with a second airlift control team when the three men were brought out. Lt. Colonel Jackson is the only troop carrier/tactical airlifter to ever be honored with the Medal of Honor.

Accounts of the day's events indicate that all of the camp's defenders were successfully evacuated by air. Such, however, is not the case. Only about half of the some 800 people at the camp came out aboard the C-130s and helicopters and not all of the defenders made it to safety. Several 196th Infantry troops were manning outlying positions and were essentially abandoned by the Special Forces personnel in charge of the camp. Some managed to make their way to points where they were picked up by helicopter but others were killed and one was captured and sent to North Vietnam, and was not heard from until he was released at the end of the war.

Veterans Issues

Although the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association is a not-for-profit organization and thus prohibited from political activities, as a veterans organization we are allowed to engage in limited activities related to legislation related to veterans and other veterans issues. There are lot of veterans, particularly C-130 veterans from Vietnam, who are having trouble proving to the VA that they are eligible for particular benefits. The most prevalent issues are those related to the "Agent Orange" benefits that were established during the Clinton Administration for veterans suffering from certain ailments that are "presumed" be possibly connected to chemical exposure. Under the terms of the law that established the benefits, a veteran has to have actually set foot on South Vietnamese soil, even if it was for only a few minutes passing through. Unfortunately, military records do not show temporary duty assignments and unless a veteran has some kind of proof to show that they actually were ON THE GROUND in South Vietnam, they are having trouble qualifying for the benefits. Tony Girtman recently sent an Email to his Congresswoman, who is involved with the House Armed Services Committee. We strongly encourage all of our members to contact their own Congressional representatives regarding this issue. And if you are having trouble proving you were actually in Vietnam, contact us and let us know. While we can't guarantee we can be of any help, we'll do our best!

Personal Stories and other Submissions

One of the most effective means we have of helping preserve our history is through personal accounts. We encourage all of our members to take the time to write down their experiences and submit them for publication in the newsletter. There is a lot of history among our membership and the more input we have, the more effective we can be. As most of us know, official accounts are often very sketchy and in some cases are inaccurate. Granted, for most of us, unless we have letters or other documentation, we're going to be depending on 40-60 year old memories and we may remember things differently than they actually happened, but legend

and lore are nevertheless important sources of historical information. Even if we're only 50% accurate, that's better than not recording the accounts at all! Please send all stories to me at SEMcGowanJr@aol.com or by mail to The Airlifter, 3727 Hill Family Lane, Missouri City, TX 77459.

Beginning with our next issue, we will be including articles taken from various military newspapers and other sources. The first such article will be one about our new vice-chairman, Carl Wyrick which was published in an issue of the 315th Air Division newspaper, The Airlifter.

National World War II Museum in New Orleans

I am writing this in a hotel room in New Orleans, where I visited the National World War II museum this morning for the first time. I have to say that I came away from the museum with mixed emotions. While it is perhaps an excellent place to give the children and grand-children of WW II veterans a small taste of what happened during the war, there really isn't a lot of detail for those with a strong interest in the war. There is a troop carrier presence – a C-47 is suspended from the ceiling above a Higgins Boat and some other military vehicles and equipment and there is also a display featuring a glider. The bookstore/gift shop is well-stocked. Unfortunately, many of the exhibits are somewhat sparse and consist mostly of photographs and text on the wall. Several short films give a very brief overview of events – for example, the entire war in Europe from Normandy to the fall of Berlin is covered in seven minutes with very little detail. Part of the problem is that the museum was originally intended to be only for the June 6, 1944 D-Day landings, but has since been changed to represent all of World War II, perhaps due to a conflict with the National D-Day Memorial in Bedford, Virginia. The Bedford memorial was sited there because a National Guard unit from Bedford suffered the highest casualties on Omaha Beach of any single US location. I've been to Bedford – my former son-in-law worked as a researcher there – and was impressed. The New Orleans museum is worth the time to visit if you happen to be in the area, but I wouldn't recommend making a special trip. There are other museums around the country that offer a lot more in terms of exhibits and displays, at least at this point in time.

Webmaster, Anyone?

If anyone would like to assume the duties of webmaster of our new site at www.troopcarrier.org/home.html , I would be more than happy to relinquish that position. I'm now working fulltime and supervising four other pilots and along with my duties as secretary and putting out the newsletter, my plate is getting full. Drop me a note at SEMcGowanJr@aol.com if you're interested and I will pass your name along to the other officers.