

# The Airlifter Volume XII

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## *The Airlifter*

Newsletter of the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association

*Promoting and preserving troop carrier/tactical airlift heritage*

August 23, 2010

Volume XII

**SPECIAL** – *the first flight of the penultimate airlifter, Lockheed's C-130 Hercules, was 56 years ago today, at Burbank!*

### **Association Finances**

As of July 31 Association finances stand at \$7,130.51, which does not include reunion funds which are coming in on a daily basis.

### **Convention**

Convention planning and organizing is continuing right along. Registration forms are coming in and are indicating a decent turnout. If you have not sent yours in yet, go to the web site at [www.troopcarrier.org/convention.html](http://www.troopcarrier.org/convention.html) to download the form and mail it in with your check. We have not set a definite deadline for registration, but the sooner you register, the better. We'll accept reservations at the door but we'd like to know you're coming in advance so we can make sure to have a T-shirt for you and an air show ticket if you plan to attend. There is a September 15 cutoff for reservations at the hotel. After that date, hotel reservations will be on a first-come/first-served basis at our special reunion rate. Mr. Peter Simmons of Lockheed Martin will be in attendance and will be making a presentation on developments in tactical airlift aircraft on Friday morning.

### **Memorial Service/Banquet Speaker**

We will be having a special memorial service at the 1<sup>st</sup> Aero Squadron site in Texas City on Friday afternoon before our banquet. This site is where the US Air Force and US Army aviation officially began. We have never selected a chaplain and one of our officers can conduct the service, but if there is someone who would like to do so, we'd be happy. A short 10-15 minute talk would be adequate. We're also planning to stay "in house" for a speaker at our Friday night banquet program (which will be short and sweet and troop carrier/tactical airlift related.) If you'd like to volunteer, drop me an Email at [sammcgowan@troopcarrier.org](mailto:sammcgowan@troopcarrier.org) or give me a call at 281-744-0020.

### **2012 Convention and Election of Officers/Board Members**

Two of the items that will be prominent on the convention agenda will be the selection of a site for the 2012 Convention. We have learned that it is important to have someone either local or familiar with the locality to do the legwork of arranging for a hotel, setting up caterers, etc.

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There are a number of good locations around the country that we might consider such as Dayton, Ohio (USAF Museum), Tucson, AZ (Pima Air Museum) and Macon/Warner-Robins, Georgia (Central Georgia Aviation Museum at Robins AFB.) We are open to suggestions and to volunteers who are willing to be in charge of setting things up. We are also looking for nominations for new people to assume leadership roles in the organization as present officers and board members reach the end of their terms. We need at least one new board member to replace Tony Girtman, who has stepped down due to family concerns. If you would like to be considered for a seat on the board or as an officer, please let Ace Bowman know. Ace's Email is [aceplace@clearwire.net](mailto:aceplace@clearwire.net).

### **Alaska Senator Ted Stevens – Troop Carrier Pilot**

Former Alaska Senator Ted Stevens died in the crash of a bush plane near Dillingham, Alaska on August 9, 2010. While he is known for his political career, Senator Stevens was a troop carrier pilot in World War II. After rejection for the US Naval Aviation cadet program due to eye sight, he managed to correct the problem with exercises and was accepted into the US Army as an aviation cadet in 1943. Upon completion of the program he was assigned to a troop carrier squadron with Fourteenth Air Force in China, where he flew C-47s and C-46s until the end of the war and afterwards. He remained in China until March, 1946 when he returned to the United States for seperation. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal as well as a Chinese medal for his service.

### **Blind Bat/Lamplighter**

US Air Force troop carrier and tactical airlift crews were tasked with a number of missions over the years that fell into the category of "special operations." Most of these missions were classified at the time and were not generally known outside of the sometimes small circle of men who actually flew them. One of the missions that has since become quite well known is the C-130 FAC/Flare mission operated by the 6315<sup>th</sup> Operations Group from Naha AB, Okinawa and its successor, the 374<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Wing – later redesignated Tactical Airlift – from sometime in the early 1960s until the mission was discontinued in June, 1970. I use the word "sometime" because there is no definite date as to when the mission actually started – some people have their own version of events that are based mainly on their particular experience. I have a letter from the late Lt.



USAF artist Keith Ferris's depiction

Col. Bill Cooke, a personal friend and former squadron mate who was a navigator at Naha from 1963-1966 in which he states that he was on the very first mission and puts the date as April, 1964. Another Naha veteran, flight engineer Harry

Sullivan, who arrived at Naha sometime in 1963, once told me personally that Naha crews started flying the flare missions a lot earlier than most people think and that he was also on some of the first missions. Both Bill and Harry have indicated that there were two crews involved, evidently one from the 21<sup>st</sup> TCS and one from the 35<sup>th</sup>. Since their accounts complement each other, I must take them as being accurate. I have also found evidence that flare missions may have been flown as early as 1962 in support of the

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WATER PUMP T-28 mission out of Udorn



AB, Thailand. Some veterans of the mission from 1964 who were assigned as maintenance men with the 21<sup>st</sup> TCS' E

Flight as flare kickers have jumped to the conclusion that the flare mission was an "E Flight mission" but this is only true in the sense that E Flight provided kickers to supplement the aircrew loadmasters starting in late 1964. The mission actually was operated by the 6315<sup>th</sup> Operations Group and was supplemented by crewmembers from the 815<sup>th</sup> TCS at Tachikawa.

Flare operations were not unique to C-130s. The use of bombers and transport aircraft to drop flares to illuminate targets for strike aircraft dates back to the early days of World War II when early model B-17s that had no belly turrets were used to drop flares for other bombers on night missions in the Southwest Pacific. US Army C-47s were often used to drop flares during World War II and their Air Force successors did likewise in Korea. Korea also saw flare support by US Navy crews flying four-engine PB4Y-2 Privateers, patrol bombers that derived from the Army's B-24 Liberator bomber. When the first US Air Force air commando SC-47s were sent to South Vietnam in 1961, providing flare support for night operations was one of their missions. Similarly, conventional C-123 crews from TAC and from later PCS units were frequently used to drop flares. The only thing that was unique about the C-130 flare mission was where they went, and that they eventually came to be considered as forward air controllers, even though they were never officially connected to the Air Force FAC mission.

The official history of the 374<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Wing records that when the mission

first started, flares were simply thrown out of the paratroop doors by the loadmasters, as was common on the C-47s and AC-47 gunships. As the mission further developed and became more established, a new system was developed that used an aluminum flare chute that was tied down on the rear cargo ramp and inserted between it and the partially opened cargo door. Due to loadmaster manning in the 6315<sup>th</sup> Ops. Group, "Cat Z" maintenance men from the 21<sup>st</sup> TCS E Flight were assigned to crews as "kickers." E Flight was a special unit that had been created to provide C-130s for CIA use on classified operations and included a number of maintenance personnel who had been placed on special orders. At the time all other Naha maintenance personnel were assigned to the 51<sup>st</sup> Fighter Wing, as were all of the C-130s on the base, due to the 51<sup>st</sup> being the host unit. Since the flare missions were classified, it was simpler to use 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division personnel rather than involving another unit.

The first recorded date for a mission is in November 1964 when a C-130 crew began operations over the BARREL ROLL region in Laos. In April 1965 the C-130s were used for the first time (at least officially) on missions over North Vietnam as depicted above. A single C-130 went out with a pair of Martin B-57s to look for targets. They were escorted by a USMC EF-10 to provide electronic countermeasures. A note on this print – I found it in a pilot store at Atlanta's Peachtree Airport in the 1980s. I have since learned from the artist, noted USAF artist Keith Ferris, that he painted it for a calendar for the B-57 association. The print was and is framed, but someone evidently simply framed the print from a calendar and put it out to sell. As far as I know, this is the only one in existence (and those that have appeared on the Internet are bootlegged from a scan I sent to several flare mission veterans several years ago.) The print is inaccurate. It shows a

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camouflaged C-130E but the airplanes used on the mission were actually C-130As and were unpainted at the time depicted.

Although some of the flare kickers insist that the mission started at Tan Son Nhut, this is very unlikely for a number of reasons. Some of the aircrew veterans of that time think they are probably thinking of the Southeast Asia trainer missions that operated from Tan Son Nhut. It is possible that the airplanes staged from there to Da Nang, which is much closer to the target areas – flights from Tan Son Nhut would have required flying over Cambodia, which at that time was neutral and was off-limits to US aircraft. Bill Cooke relates that they flew to Da Nang and then spent the afternoon in briefings before going out on the mission that night but he doesn't say where they flew from. He also says that on the first mission they came out and found that maintenance had spray-painted the airplanes (probably the bottoms of the wings) black!



The mission operated out of Da Nang until early 1966. In July 1965 Viet Cong sappers targeted the C-130s and destroyed two and damaged another. Some veterans mistakenly believe it was because of that attack that

the mission moved to Thailand the following year. The move to Thailand was actually the result of the termination of the mission from Da Nang and the immediate establishment of an entirely different mission out of Ubon even though it involved the same people and the same airplanes. Funding for the Da Nang mission was transferred to a new C-130 airlift operational location at Cam Ranh that commenced in May, 1966. The new mission

at Ubon was assigned to the 8<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing, with the airplanes, crews and support personnel assigned on TDY status.

Prior to the establishment of the new mission at Ubon the Air Force increased loadmaster manning in the Naha squadrons in preparation for replacing the maintenance men who had been flying as kickers with trained aircrew personnel. I was told when I joined the 35<sup>th</sup> TCS after receiving sudden special PCS orders that the change was because USAF was afraid a flareship would be lost and it would be hard to explain why non-aircrew personnel were aboard. The increase in manning was sudden and occurred in early 1966, as loadmasters received special overseas orders. Most came out of MATS and from TAC aerial port squadrons. The crew was initially established at eight men, with three additional loadmasters to supplement the normal five-man crew. One loadmaster, usually the ranking and/or most experienced, was assigned as the crew loadmaster with the other three as kickers. Most crews rotated loadmaster duties. The role of the loadmaster was to oversee the operation and be ready to jettison the load immediately while the three kickers remained behind the pallets of flares to load the launcher. The number of kickers was reduced to two after the launchers were modified with levers. Prior to that, someone had to sit on the door and literally hold the flares in place with his feet, hence the term "kicker"! The Air Force experimented with an automated flare launcher system but field tests in Thailand found it to be inadequate.

The policy of using aircrew personnel created problems when the loadmasters who came over in early 1966 rotated home and were not fully replaced. A shortage of loadmasters developed Air Force wide and particularly at Naha. Loadmasters from other 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division C-130 units were sent TDY to Ubon for a time to supplement the 374<sup>th</sup> TAW crews. The wing got



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permission to temporarily cross-train some wing maintenance personnel into the loadmaster field just so they could fly as kickers.

A second navigator was added to the flareship crews after Night Observation Devices were installed on the airplanes that had been designated for the flare mission. Originally, any C-130 on the ramp at Naha could be used but sometime in early 1968 a number of airplanes were modified with the addition of special ECM equipment, specifically a radar detector. The NOD was mounted in one of the paratroop doors and the operator sat just outside of the airplane behind the air deflector door. One unfortunate navigator accidentally extracted himself when he somehow managed to pull the D-ring on his parachute while climbing out of the seat! He spent the night on the ground and was picked up the next day. Not long afterwards he got word that he had been RiFed!

While flareships operating out of Da Nang worked in formations with B-57s, after the move to Ubon C-130s operated as single-ship forward aircontroller/flare ships. Four missions were scheduled out of Ubon each night, two over Laos and two over North Vietnam – until the North Vietnam operations were terminated due to an increase in anti-aircraft sometime in late 1966 or early 1967. Laos missions used BLIND BAT as a call sign while North Vietnam missions were LAMPLIGHTER. Two missions departed Ubon so as to be in place right after dark and the other two left several hours later and operated either until near daylight or they ran out of flares.

Missions were potentially very hazardous, but only two flareships were lost although a number received battle damage ranging from minor to severe. Right after the mission was established at Ubon several AC-47s arrived from South Vietnam to operate in conjunction with the C-130s.



*(The picture at left was taken when a 35<sup>th</sup> TCS crew came through Ubon on a leaflet mission. The leaflet crews included two medics. We took them out to show them the*

*flare system.)* Even though ground fire in Laos was light in comparison to North Vietnam at the time, two AC-47s were lost within a few days and the project was abandoned. Crews were briefed before each mission on the locations of known anti-aircraft positions and the navigators marked them on their maps. This made most ground fire inconsequential.

Although it was not known at the time, the C-130 and C-123 flareships that operated out of Nakonphanom were instrumental in the escape plans of US Navy pilot Dieter Dengler, as recorded in his book *Escape From Laos*. Dengler and the other prisoners in their Laotian camp, only one of whom was military – the others were crewmembers, one American, three Thais and a Chinese, from an Air America airplane that had been shot down in 1963 – were aware of the nightly flare missions and decided to escape and signal one of the crews. It just so happened that the crew Dengler eventually signaled was the crew I was assigned to in the spring and early summer of 1966. I myself was not aware of the connection until our former aircraft commander, Bob Bartunek, informed me. He knew Dengler from the Skyraider Association and the two had compared notes. All I remembered of the incident was that the guys up front had spotted some mysterious fires on the ground one night that were breaking out in a pattern that indicated they were being set. Bartunek and the other officers – the navigator was TCTAA member and noted military aviation novelist Dick Herman – informed intelligence of what they had seen when we got back to Ubon. Dengler was not rescued until almost two weeks later when he

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managed to get the attention of a passing Skyraider pilot by waving a parachute from one of the flares we had dropped over him (as he relates in his book. He told Bartunek that there were parachutes all over the place.) Although none of the enlisted men were ever told about it, Bartunek told me recently that he was called in to talk to intelligence immediately after Dengler was finally rescued.

There were a couple of other incidents that occurred during our tour that indicate that the enemy was concerned about us. One night we were coming back from a mission when we were told to drop flares and look for an unidentified aircraft that had been spotted near Ubon. At around the same time there was a probe of the base by the flare mission enlisted men's hooch. Chinese



Nung guards patrolled on the dike shown in the adjacent photograph. One night we came home from a mission

and learned that enemy troops had killed one of the guards right across the fence from the barracks by slipping up behind him and cutting his throat. The guard managed to fire his shotgun, which tipped everyone off. One loadmaster, David Rae, had an illegal Swedish K submachine gun in his locker but there were no other weapons around. Had the guard not managed to fire his shotgun, God only knows how many of my buddies the enemy troops might have killed!

The flare mission was flown exclusively by crews from the 21<sup>st</sup>, 35<sup>th</sup>, 41<sup>st</sup> and 817<sup>th</sup> squadrons, sometimes supplemented by men who came down from Tachikawa from the 815<sup>th</sup>. I personally don't recall any 815<sup>th</sup> crews being at Ubon when I was there, but there were some 815<sup>th</sup> personnel assigned to Naha crews. Since the 815<sup>th</sup> was based

in Japan, their situation was somewhat convoluted due to Japan's neutrality issues. Japan-based crews were first sent TDY to Naha – Okinawa was still under US control – and then sent further TDY to Southeast Asia. Additional loadmasters came from the 7<sup>th</sup> Aerial Port Squadron, which was headquartered at Naha with detachments at other 315<sup>th</sup> AD C-130 bases.

Surprisingly, in spite of the tremendous amount of ground fire encountered by flareship crews, only two were lost. The first loss occurred in May 1968 near the South Vietnamese border. The second was in November 1969. The POW/MIA community unfortunately picked up on false intelligence that indicated that the copilot of the second airplane had somehow survived the crash and became a prisoner of the North Vietnamese. In the 1980s a former photo interpreter who had become involved with the MIA issue thought he saw a series of letters in a photograph that had been taken of an abandoned former POW camp. Although other intelligence specialists identified the markings as shadows, he persisted and then went looking for Personnel Authenticator codes that might match the letters he thought he saw and settled on those that belonged to the copilot of the lost flareship. Never mind that the airplane had been seen to blow up in midair and the difficulties of a pilot getting out of the wreckage of a tumbling airplane, the POW/MIA community was convinced they had “proof” of an MIA who had become a POW and either they or the military notified the family. Even though photo was proven to not show anything, it was widely circulated and the unfortunate officer became a poster child. When the wreckage was examined by USAF investigators in the 1990s and the copilot's remains were found and identified, some of his family refused to believe it.

The flare mission was also political. One officer in particular who did not like it was

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then-Col. Harry "Heinie" Aderholt, who commanded the 56<sup>th</sup> Air Commando Wing at NKP. His wing included the 606<sup>th</sup> Air Commando Squadron, which operated modified C-123s that were used in the flareship role using the call sign "CANDLESTICK." Because the C-130s were from conventional squadrons, Aderholt complained about them and tried to have them brought under his control or disbanded entirely.

The mission changed considerably over the years as evidenced by differing recollections by veterans who were there at different times. Originally, the mission was to seek out North Vietnamese truck and other traffic on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and southern North Vietnam. By the time it ended, it seems to have become more of a test-bed for new equipment and for intelligence-gathering. Crews who were there at the end talk about counting anti-aircraft rounds. Late in the mission some crews were given laser-designators to illuminate targets. The Black Crow ignition detector system that was installed on AC-130 gunships was first tested on a Blind

Bat airplane. Noted AC-130 veteran "Gunship Charlie" Spicka that the flare mission had nothing to do with the later gunships but the official USAF history of the gunship mission says otherwise. The history relates that the AC-130 was the result of an Air Force requirement for a system that would combine the FAC mission with firepower in one airplane.

In the end, when the mission was finally terminated in June 1970, the funding did not go to the AC-130 program, which had been operating out of Ubon for over a year by that time. Instead, it was transferred to a new program that used highly modified Martin B-57Gs that had been equipped with detection system so they could find their own targets and targets for other aircraft.

Toward the end of the mission, some of the modified C-130s were used for daytime reconnaissance missions over Laos. These missions operated out of Cam Ranh Bay.

### The First Allied Airborne Army



In the summer of 1944 immediately after the Normandy Invasion, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces Europe (SHAEF) commander General Dwight Eisenhower activated what was essentially an air force army. On July 16, 1944 Ninth Air Force commander Lt. General Lewis H. Brereton was called to the office of General Carl Spaatz, the senior US Army Air Forces officer in Europe "to discuss an important matter." Upon his arrival, Brereton was informed that Eisenhower had obtained approval from US Army Headquarters to form a new multinational airborne army and that he was to command it. The new army would consist of the US 82<sup>nd</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Divisions as well as the 17<sup>th</sup> Airborne, which was still arriving in the UK, along with the British 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Divisions and the 52<sup>nd</sup> Lowlanders, which was a special unit trained for air transported operations. A fourth US airborne division, the 13<sup>th</sup>, was still in training in the United States, but would join the new army when it arrived in Europe. The new army would also include Brereton's own IX Troop Carrier Command and the Royal Air Force 38<sup>th</sup> Group, which was the RAF counterpart to IX TCC. Brereton was not happy with the new assignment. Having been in combat from the very first day of the war when he was commander of Far East Air Force in the Philippines, for the



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preceding two years he had been heavily involved with the development of air-ground cooperation as the commander of Ninth Air Force and its predecessor Middle East Air Force. He had transferred to the UK almost a year before to organize and train Ninth Air Force, which had become the largest air force in the world. Yet, at the same time, he was the ideal candidate for such a position. In October 1918 he had joined the staff of US Air Service commander Brigadier General Billy Mitchell, and had immediately been put to work on a plan to develop and implement US Army parachuted infantry troops on an attack at Metz, Germany. World War I ended before the attack was launched, but Bereton's plan formed the basis of the new US Army airborne forces that were developed in the early days of the new war.

Although the new unit was Eisenhower's idea, it came about as a result of British pressure to combine the US and British airborne forces under the command of British Lt. Gen. A.F.M. "Boy" Browning. US Army commander General George Marshall had insisted on the new command with an American in command and Eisenhower had gone along with it. US Army Air Forces commander General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold gave the plan his stamp of approval. Brereton was concerned about being placed over Browning, who was senior to him in date of rank. The following day Brereton met with Spaatz and Eisenhower together. During the meeting, Ike told him that he wanted "imagination and daring" in the formation of plans to make best use of the new army to help shorten the war.

Brereton had many concerns about the new unit. He knew it would be met with opposition from the ground commanders and from Supply, who would insist on using the C-47s for logistical operations and support of ground operations and would create conflicts with airborne operations. That particular problem was dealt with by reassigning the transport groups in the Eighth and Ninth Service Commands to a new air transport wing and by the immediate transfer of 100 Air Transport Command C-47s that were being used in the US for domestic operations to Europe for combat operations. As the war progressed, several groups of Eighth Air Force B-24 Liberators were frequently detailed to IX Troop Carrier Command for resupply operations.

The new army was activated on August 2, 1944. Allied forces had begun their breakout from the Normandy beachhead after almost two months of intense combat and were preparing to move toward Germany. On August 4 Brereton recommended to SHAEF that the new unit be named the "First Allied Airborne Army" since it would include Americans, British, Polish and French troops. The new headquarters was set up at Ascot, an English manor that Brereton had been using as the headquarters for Ninth Air Force. Over the next few weeks Brereton and his staff planned a number of airborne operations that never came to fruition for one reason or another, most often because of the rapid advance of Allied forces, particularly Lt. Gen. George Patton's Third Army. In early September Brereton's staff began working on plans for Operation MARKET, an airborne operation in Holland in support of British Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery's GARDEN operation to seize key bridges across the Rhine at Arnhem in Holland. Airborne forces would seize a series of bridges over which 21<sup>st</sup> Army armored columns would advance toward Arnhem to relieve the British 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne.



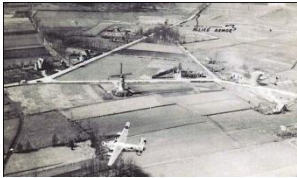
MARKET commenced on September 17, and was the largest airborne operation in history. It was also the first major daylight airborne operation in Europe, and in spite of misgivings, they went off without a hitch, and with fairly light casualties. Paratroops had been very critical of troop carrier pilots on previous operations, but this time they had nothing but praise. Pilots whose airplanes had been hit by ground fire



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held their place in formation until their troops could jump, then crashed to fiery deaths. Pilots making supply drops to the beleaguered British at Arnhem were noted for their courage. One British officer would later say that there wasn't a troop carrier pilot who dropped at Arnhem who didn't deserve the Victoria Cross, the British equivalent to the Medal of Honor.



During the initial stages of the operation, with all of the C-47s and British troop carrier planes committed to dropping paratroops and/or towing gliders, several Eighth Air Force B-24 groups were assigned to supply missions. On the second day of the operation 252 B-24s flew a resupply mission.

Although the airborne operations were a success, the British 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne troops who dropped at Arnhem with the intention of seizing the bridge ran into massive resistance. It turned out that intelligence reports which indicated a build-up of German troops in the area, but which had been ignored by Field Marshall Montgomery, turned out to be right. Two SS Panzer divisions had moved into the vicinity to reequip and rest, and their presence turned the operation into a nightmare. To make matters worse, British XXX Corps encountered major problems as they attempted to penetrate deep into Holland along narrow roads running through the lowlands. Although they finally reached the bridge at Arnhem, by that time it was too late as the British and Polish troops that had crossed to the other side of the Rhine had either been captured or had retreated back to the Dutch side. A total of 13,216 men were listed as casualties, the majority of whom were the more than 6,000 British paratroopers listed as missing. The 101<sup>st</sup> had suffered the most men killed – 573 of the 1,265 for the entire operation. US troop carrier losses amounted to 92 transports and 130 gliders while British losses stood at 72 and 2 – 22 transports were lost on the first day alone.

After the failure of the GARDEN portion of the operation, the American 82<sup>nd</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Divisions remained under British control for several weeks. Brereton still had the 17<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division in the UK in reserve. Over the next few months a number of airborne operations were planned, including ECLIPSE, an airborne invasion of the German capital city of Berlin. The 101<sup>st</sup> was finally withdrawn from combat in late November and sent to rest in France; the 82<sup>nd</sup> had been relieved two weeks previously. Brereton and Eisenhower were both concerned about the continuing use of the airborne forces as conventional infantry. Their mission was to jump in and seize key objectives until relieved by conventional ground forces.



In late December German forces commenced a major offensive against a weak position in the Ardennes Forest of Belgium. As German forces penetrated deep into the Allied lines creating a “bulge” from which the resulting battle got its name, the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne was pulled out of its rest area in France and sent to occupy the town of Bastogne. General Maxwell Taylor, the division commander, had gone to the US leaving his assistant, Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe, in command. Although Gen. McAuliffe would tell reporters after the battle that his situation never was desperate, bad winter weather curtailed air support and air resupply for several days.



The weather finally broke on December 23 and IX Troop Carrier Command commenced airdrops. At first light two Pathfinder C-47s dropped two pathfinder teams (the forerunners of the Vietnam Era combat controllers) into Bastogne. They were followed by 260 C-47s

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that made drops during the course of the day to deliver 334 tons of supplies at a cost of eight airplanes. IX TCC continued resupply missions to Bastogne until December 27, when tanks from Patton's Third Army reached the city. The final day of operations included a glider tow operation that turned into a disaster. After releasing their gliders, the two planes encountered heavy flak and thirteen, 26% of the formation, were shot down.

Field Marshall Montgomery's XXI Army Group had been held up in Holland ever since the Arnhem disaster, and had yet to make a successful crossing of the Rhine. In early February he presented a plan for Operation PLUNDER, a large-scale crossing of the Rhine. Montgomery's plan for a two-division size airborne operation using the American 17<sup>th</sup> Airborne, which had yet to make a combat jump, although it had fought as conventional infantry during the Battle of the Bulge, and the British 6 Airborne. The airborne operation was designated as VARSITY. Initially, VARSITY was planned to include the recently arrived US 13<sup>th</sup> Airborne, but losses and heavy demands on IX TCC reduced the number of transports available.

VARSITY would include a formation of Curtis C-46s. Considerably larger and with a heavier payload than a C-47, the C-46 had made a major contribution as a logistical transport on operations in Asia, particularly on the India-China Ferry from India to China (the term "Hump Airlift" did not come into use until years after the war when MATS commander coined the term "air lift.") Unfortunately, the fuel system was poorly designed and whenever an airplane took a hit, fuel would pool up in the bottom of the fuselage where it could be easily set off by a single round. A total of 46 troop carrier transports were lost on the operation with 39 to ground fire, nearly all of which were C-46s. The airborne commanders were incensed at the losses and forbade the use of C-46s for future airborne operations.

As it turned out, the airborne commanders' point was moot. VARSITY was the last airborne operation of the war. Within a few weeks, combat operations in Europe ceased.

### LOADMASTERS



As we are all aware, the aircraft loadmaster was an integral part of the troop carrier crew starting sometime in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but prior to that the history of loadmasters is sketchy at best. The first definite reference to "loadmasters" is in conjunction with the double-decker Douglas C-124 Globemaster II, which entered USAF service in 1951 at the height of the Korean War. Capt. Annis Thompson, PIO with 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division and the author of "The Greatest Airlift," refers to a program to retrain division air terminal personnel as loadmasters for the highly complex transport. The duty of preparing cargo for airdrop and inflight ejection goes back, however, to the early days of World War II when troop carrier squadrons in Australia and the 1<sup>st</sup> Ferrying Group in India began delivering cargo by air at about the same time. Because parachutes were maintained by Army Quartermaster laundry companies, when airdrop became a major mission, laundrymen were charged with preparing the bundles and parachutes and then began flying with troop carrier crews to "kick" them out of the door of the airplane. Their duties did not, however, include computation of weight and balance nor were they assigned to flights when airdrop was not involved. Load planning was the responsibility of officers, pilots and navigators, who were assigned to air cargo squadrons, the first of which was established in Australia in 1942.

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### AIR TRANSPORTATION TECHNICIAN (967)

Supervises the loading, unloading, balancing, tying down, and stowing of cargo in aircraft, and the operation of loading equipment.

Supervises execution of manifests, airways bills, and other forms required in connection with the movement of air freight and passengers.

May assist officer-in-charge of priorities, air freight terminal, or weights and balances in air transportation operation.

Must know limitations of load capacity for all types of cargo aircraft.

As the war continued and aerial delivery became more and more a part of US and British tactics, personnel were trained specifically to prepare cargo for airdrop and to fly on missions. By the time the Allies were preparing for the invasion of Normandy, IX Troop Carrier Command included a number of “dropmasters”, although the “kicker” term was most often used by the crews. Within the Air Transport Command, a world-wide logistical command, a need developed for men (and some women) to tend to the needs of passengers on long flights. Until early 1944 when military personnel became available for assignment to Air Transport Command crews, the majority of its flying was handled by contract with the airlines, including the providing of pilots and other crewmembers under contract. Most missions operated with a crew of two pilots, an aerial engineer, a radio operator and a navigator on overwater flights. In 1944 the Air Transport

### FLIGHT TRAFFIC CLERK (2967)

As member of the crew of a transport airplane, performs various duties in connection with handling of passengers, loading and unloading of cargo, and maintenance of records pertinent to flight.

Shares responsibility for maintenance of cabin discipline among passengers and security and safety of passengers and cargo. Distributes meals to passengers and crew members. Takes appropriate measures for protection of cargo and equipment, guarding against pilferage and unauthorized diversion of cargo. Collects passenger's transportation requests, checks loading and unloading of cargo, passengers, and passenger's baggage. Has custody of all traffic forms and prepares papers required by customs authorities. Serves as courier for classified mail and cargo.

May jettison cargo when so instructed.

Must be familiar with tie-down systems and proper placement of cargo in cabin to insure safe loading and unloading.

Command started “FIREBALL” flights from its depot outside Cincinnati, Ohio to India transporting high value cargo – mainly aircraft parts – for its airplanes assigned to the India-China Ferry. It quickly became apparent that someone needed to be on the airplane to keep track of manifests so ATC began assigning lower-ranking enlisted men as “flight clerks.” As the name implies, the duty of the flight clerk was initially to keep track of paperwork. Whether or not they had any training in load planning and cargo handling is unclear. By July 1944 the Army had created MOS 2967, Flight Traffic Clerk. The 2967 MOS was definitely an outgrowth of MOS 967, which was essentially that of an enlisted load planner and loading supervisor.

No MOS is identified as a “dropmaster” or specifically for handling of airdrop cargo, which leads me to believe that the dropmasters probably bore either the Flight Traffic Clerk or

the Air Traffic Specialist MOS. If anyone is interested in doing further research, the July 1944 US Army field manual establishing MOS numbers can be found at

[http://alternatetwars.com/BBOW/Sources/TM\\_12-427\\_1944.pdf](http://alternatetwars.com/BBOW/Sources/TM_12-427_1944.pdf). It is apparent from various histories that flight traffic clerks were not assigned to troop carrier crews as a regular member of the crew, but were assigned primarily on cargo drop missions. Nor were they generally assigned to ATC crews operating on the India-China Ferry. Accident records for ATC airplanes



lost on the “Hump Airlift” do not show flight clerks as part of the crew. This was no doubt since the flights were of fairly short nature – only a few hundred miles – and there were qualified cargo handling crews on each end. Flight clerks were, however, assigned to passenger missions.

In 1947 the Air Force became a separate service, and as it did so, many of the duties involving handling of cargo remained with the Army. During the Korean War, processing and handling of cargo for aerial delivery and the installation of aerial delivery equipment on C-119s was an Army airborne quartermaster responsibility and US Army personnel flew on drop missions. As in World War II, they were commonly called

“kickers.” The flight traffic clerk field remained on long-range transports, but was renamed Flight Traffic Specialist by the Air Force and primarily referred to military flight attendants. In fact, in 1951 it was renamed “Flight Steward.” Many of them were members of the Women in

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the Air Force, or WAFS. Berlin Airlift crews did not include flight traffic specialists simply because there was no need for them. There were evidently some assigned to the crew of the single Douglas C-74 that operated into Berlin for a few weeks in a test, but they did not fly on the C-54s that were assigned to the troop carrier groups responsible for the airlift. With the advent of the Korean War, a need developed for someone to be aboard troop carrier C-124s, and it is at this time the term “loadmaster” originated.



In 1953 as the Korean War was winding down, the Air Force reorganized its troop carrier functions. New aerial port squadrons were established at troop carrier bases while former US Army pathfinders transferred to the Air Force and became combat controllers. The duties of the airborne quartermasters of inspecting cargo for aerial delivery and installing and operating aerial delivery equipment also transferred to the Air Force, along with the career fields that had originally been established under MOS 967 and MOS 2967. A new Air Force career field was established as 60153, and designated as aircraft loadmaster specialist. In troop carrier wings, the new personnel were assigned primarily to the aerial port units and attached to troop carrier squadrons for flight on cargo drops (they were not used on paratroop drops – aircraft crew chief/scanners opened doors and coordinated with jumpmasters.) Within the Military Air Transport Service loadmasters were assigned to air transport squadrons but were not considered as members of the flight crew and were not covered by crew rest regulations as their duties did not involve direct aircraft operation. In fact, there was considerable discussion as to whether or not loadmasters were even necessary. Their necessity was finally established by the possible need for someone to jettison cargo on overwater flights.

US involvement in Southeast Asia led directly to the permanent assignment of loadmasters to troop carrier squadrons. When the 346<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron was ordered to Clark Field from Pope AFB, NC in November 1961, loadmasters were transferred into the squadron from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Aerial Port Squadron for the move. The transfer precipitated a reorganization within Tactical Air Command as the scanner position on C-123s and C-130s was combined with the loadmaster field and aircraft loadmasters became an integral part of the troop carrier flight crew. MATS never made a similar change for its heavier transports as scanner duties were



performed by “second engineers” on airplanes that carried flight engineers. At that time C-130s carried flight mechanics, who carried a maintenance AFSC. The combining of the two duties and an increase in the number of troop carrier and air transport squadrons as more and more C-130s were delivered to the Air Force and the advent of the C-141 created a need for hundreds of new loadmasters. In 1962 a new AFSC for loadmasters was established as 607XO, usually with an A prefix to denote assignment to flying status.

As the US role in Southeast Asia escalated, it became apparent that the loadmaster was the most important member of the troop carrier/tactical airlift crew after the pilot. As a general rule, loadmasters were young, often first-termers after 1966. Although their official duties only required them to “supervise” loading and off-loading, they often had to function as part of the loading crew. At off-load points as often as not there



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was no one to do the actual off-loading so loadmasters came up with what came to be known as “combat off-loading,” which was nothing more than simply allowing the pallets to roll off the back of the cargo ramp while the pilot taxied out from under them. How fast (or how slow) a loadmaster worked was a factor on how likely an airplane was to be caught on the ground by incoming artillery. In 1966 after 834<sup>th</sup> Air Division was established in South Vietnam, consideration was given to assigning C-123 and C-130 loadmasters to serve with US Army and Marine units in the field as load planners with TAC airlift liaison officers. Although the idea had merit, the limited number of qualified loadmasters and the increased exposure to ground combat of men with no ground combat training led to the assignment of loadmasters to aerial port squadrons in Vietnam for non-flying duty rigging cargo and serving on mobility teams. By the time US role in Southeast Asia declined, the loadmaster had become an established part of the military airlift mission.

For a more detailed look at the history of the loadmaster field, go to [www.sammcgowan.com/loadmasters.html](http://www.sammcgowan.com/loadmasters.html).

*See you in Galveston in October!*