

# The Airlifter Volume XIV

## *The Airlifter*

Newsletter of the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association

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



July 22, 2011

Volume XV

### **Financial Report**

As of July 5, 2011 we have \$6,948.41 in our checking account. At present, there are no planned expenditures other than deposits to reserve facilities for next year's convention.

### **Sad News**



We were saddened to learn of the recent death of our newly elected association president, Dennis Ybarra, who passed away at his home in Roswell, New Mexico on May 16. His widow, Lynn, said that he died in his sleep of respiratory problems. Dennis was a retired USAF major whose tactical airlift career started at Clark AB, Philippines in 1970 when he arrived to join the 29<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Squadron. Since the 29<sup>th</sup> was in the process of inactivation, he transferred to the 774<sup>th</sup>. When he left Clark he went to Forbes AFB, Kansas and from there to Dyess AFB, Texas when the 313<sup>th</sup> TAW inactivated. At Dyess he rejoined the 463<sup>rd</sup> Tactical Airlift

Wing and the 774<sup>th</sup> TAS. On his TCTAA membership application Dennis showed that he had been in all four squadrons of the 463<sup>rd</sup> at either Clark or Dyess. Upon retiring from the Air Force, Dennis accepted a position with the City of Roswell, New Mexico as manager of the city airport, the former Walker Air Force Base. His face became familiar to corporate and freight pilots who operated into Roswell, including TCTAA members Carl Wyrick, with whom he had served at Forbes, and myself. I had actually failed to make the connection between Dennis and Clark until this past December when we met for lunch in Sugar Land, Texas while he was here visiting his son. After his retirement from the City of Roswell, Dennis became active in a number of veterans groups. He was a volunteer driver for a New Mexico veterans group that provides van services transporting veterans to appointments at the VA facilities. Dennis was an enthusiastic supporter of the TCTAA and was looking forward to serving as our president. He will be greatly missed.

### **New Officers**

Due to Dennis Ybarra's passing, our former vice-president, Mike Welch, moved up to the position of president. Mike is a retired USAF chief master sergeant who currently works for Boeing in their C-130 Avionics Modernization Program. Mike's military service was with the 6<sup>th</sup> MAS at Hickam, then with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Aerial Port Squadron at Pope AFB, NC after he cross-trained to loadmaster. He went overseas to the 606<sup>th</sup> Air Commando Squadron at Nakonphanom, Thailand on C-123s. He returned to Charleston AFB, SC and spent the rest of his USAF career in C-141s. Upon retirement, he took a position with McDonnell-Douglas in their C-17 program. He is

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involved with a number of airlift related organizations, including the Airlift/Tanker Association and the Professional Loadmasters Association.

To replace Mike as vice-president, the board voted during a recent teleconference to appoint board member Ralph Bemis. Ralph has been associated with the TCTAA since it first started and was our previous treasurer. His troop carrier/tactical airlift association was all in C-130s at Dyess, Clark, Sewart, CCK and Little Rock. He was awarded a Silver Star for service in Vietnam and is one of our most highly decorated members.

### **Spare 617 Airplane to USAF Museum**

It is now official – C-130E 62-1787 is going to the US Air Force Museum sometime in the not too distant future. I am in contact with the museum curator, who has advised me that the airplane will be coming there. I've also learned that it's pretty well worn out, so it will probably be going to Dayton soon, although how long it will be before it goes on display is another question. I'll keep everyone posted as I learn new information about it.

### **2012 Convention**



During our recent teleconference the board voted to have our next convention October 18-21, 2012 in Warner Robins, Georgia, with most of our activities at the Museum of Aviation adjacent to nearby Robins Air Force Base. The Museum of Aviation is rated as the second-best museum in the US Air Force museum system, second only to the USAF Museum in Dayton, Ohio. Tom Stalvey, our current treasurer, is serving as chairman of the convention planning committee. He recently visited the museum and reported to the board that it is an ideal place for a convention of an organization such as ours. I have visited the museum twice myself in the past ten years and came away very impressed.

The museum was established in the 1980s and achieved much of its success by the association of Brig. Gen. Robert L. Scott (see following piece), who grew up in the Macon area just north of Warner Robins. Gen. Scott is famous for his World War II classic "God is my Copilot," which is based on his wartime experiences in China with the famous Claire Chennault. Macon was also home to Baptist missionary John M. Birch, who was instrumental in guiding Lt. Col. James H. Doolittle and his crew to safety after they crashed in China, then went on to become Claire Chennault's intelligence officer. Birch performed some of the most daring intelligence gathering missions of the war, and became famous throughout China, so famous that he is believed to have been deliberately killed by Chinese communists during the final days of the war out of fear of his influence over Chinese Christians. Members of his family still live in the Macon area and many of his personal effects are on display in the museum.

Watch for future announcements regarding the convention on our web site at [www.troopcarrier.org/convention.html](http://www.troopcarrier.org/convention.html). We are posting the names of those who have indicated they plan to come and so far have 24 names. Many have indicated that they will be accompanied by their wives.

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### Early Days in the CBI

While the first US Army transport operations took place in the Southwest Pacific in early 1942, similar operations in the China-Burma-India area of operations occurred not long afterwards. The War Department began making plans for a sustained bombing campaign against Japan from forward airfields in China in early 1942 as it became apparent that the Japanese were going to prevail in the Netherlands East Indies. Several special projects were authorized to move aircraft to India, one of which was Project AQUILA, a project under the command of then Col. Caleb V. Haynes, who had achieved some fame before the war by flying long-range transport missions in converted B-24s. Along with a squadron of Boeing B-17s, the AQUILA force included a transport element of C-47s. Hayne's copilot



on the flight from the US was Col. Robert L. Scott, a fighter pilot who somehow managed to be assigned to the mission.

When they arrived at Karachi, Haynes (upper left) and Scott (lower left) learned that their secret mission to bomb Tokyo had been cancelled. Jimmy Doolittle had raided Japan while they were enroute. In retaliation, the Japanese had gone on the offensive in China and Burma and had captured the Chinese airfields that had been planned for a bombing campaign against Japn. To make matters worse for the B-17 crews, their airplanes were taken away from them and they were reassigned to supplement the C-47 crews on emergency missions flying supplies to British and Chinese troops in Burma, where the Japanese were making rapid advances. Col. Haynes was placed in command of the transport operation and Scott was appointed by Maj. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton, Tenth Air Force commander, as deputy commander. Hayne's executive officer was Col. William D. "Don" Old, who would

make his mark in troop carrier. Old had gone on to India before Haynes and his B-17s departed the US to set up facilities and supervise ten Pan American DC-3s that had been sent to India to deliver gasoline and oil to China to fuel the Doolittle B-25s.



At Dinjan Haynes and Scott were joined by Col. Merian C. Cooper, one of America's most colorful aviators. Cooper flew bombers in World War I and was shot down and finished the war as a POW. He remained in Europe after the war and organized an American mercenary squadron for the Polish air force in their fight against the Bolsheviks and became a prisoner of the Soviets. After his release, he became an adventurer and film maker. His most famous movie is KING KONG. When war broke out he volunteered for active service in his Army reserve rank of colonel and went to India and eventually to China. The four colonels often flew transport missions into Burma. On one occasion Don Old was flying as copilot for Haynes while Cooper was riding in the back when their C-47 came under attack by a Japanese fighter. Old went in back where he and Cooper manned .45-caliber machine guns against the attacking fighter.

Initially, the C-47s and Pan Am DC-3s hauled ammunition, fuel and other supplies into Burmese airfields but as the military situation became desperate, the mission turned toward evacuation of personnel. The Army pilots "threw away the book" and began hauling as many passengers as they could cram into their C-47s, a practice that initially outraged the Pan Am

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civilians. But when they saw that the C-47s were carrying far greater payloads than their operating manuals called for, the civilian pilots followed the Army pilots' lead. When it became obvious that Burma was going to fall, Haynes and Scott were sent to bring Lt. Gen. Joseph Stillwell, the senior American officer in the theater, out. Stillwell refused to be evacuated and insisted that he was going to walk out with the British and Chinese (there were no American ground troops in Burma.) Haynes and Scott considered their orders and talked about knocking the general in the head and bringing him out against his will, but decided that wasn't a good idea even though it meant leaving him to face possible doom. Stillwell made good on his plan to walk out, and during the march he and his party were resupplied by airdrop. When he reached a village on the Burma-India Border Stilwell finally agreed to continue his journey on to Dinjan by air.

At some point while he was flying C-47s, a task he considered "insignificant," fighter pilot Scott obtained a single Curtis P-40 and began escorting the transports. Brereton had decided that when he got enough airplanes, Haynes would take command of X Bomber Command while Scott would be given command of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Group. On July 4, 1942 the China Air Task Force activated in China under the command of Brig. Gen. Claire Chennault. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Group, which included a few pilots and maintenance personnel from the American Volunteer Group along with all of the AVG airplanes, initially made up the bulk of its assets. Merian Cooper became Chennault's chief of staff and Robert L. Scott commanded the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Col. Don Old took command of the transports and later became commander of the Eastern Air Command Troop Carrier Command.

### **Jane Fonda Email**

Periodically an Email circulates around the Internet about actress and Vietnam anti-war activist Jane Fonda, telling how that during her visit to North Vietnam in the summer of 1972 she "betrayed" American POWs and as a result many were tortured and some were even killed. It's a compelling story, complete with the names of former POWs who were allegedly tortured. The problem is that it is largely untrue. Jane Fonda did visit North Vietnam and she was very outspoken in her antiwar views, and even went so far as to be critical of some of the POWs later claims, but she did not betray any prisoners and none were tortured because of her actions, let alone killed. This particular Email originally circulated after Ladies Home Journal magazine chose Jane Fonda as one of the 100 women of the Twentieth Century in 1999. Since then it has been modified and re-circulated with the most recent version claiming that President Barack Obama is somehow "planning to honor" her. When the original Email started circulating, the Vietnam POW association and the two officers mentioned in it, Larry Carrigan and Jerry Driscoll, denied the account as a hoax and asked veterans to stop circulating it. The only thing in the Email that was true was a reference to an American civilian who had been captured by the North Vietnamese who received punishment that may be construed as torture for refusing to participate in a meeting with Ms. Fonda. (He was made to kneel for several hours with weights on his shoulders.) Another POW was allegedly forced to meet with her by torturous means, but the torture was not instigated due to any of her actions. Allegations of POWs being tortured to death because of her actions are simply not true regardless of how reprehensible her antiwar activities might be. The Email has since taken on a life of its own and it periodically reappears, usually with some kind of change, and is circulated by people who forward it on to their friends without taking the time to verify whether or not it is true. Other Emails aimed at veterans have similarly continued circulating by the same means. One of those concerns former POW Senator John McCain, alleging that he collaborated with the North Vietnamese. There are a number of Internet sites that verify circulated Emails so please check out chain Emails and verify their truthfulness before you forward them.

Here is the complete text of the Email sent out by POW Association President Mike McGrath in response to the Jane Fonda and John McCain Emails:

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From:MikeMcGrath(mmcgrath@POP.IEX.NET)

Subject: Fonda, Ted Guy, John McCain, false stories...

(1) There is a boqus story floating around about Larry Carrigan, Jane Fonda, torture of POWs, death of POWs, strips of paper, notes given to Jane, etc. I just thought you should know that this is all bull crap propagated by someone for some unknown purpose....probably to bolster some hate against the traitorous witch. I'm not defending her, we all hate her as much as the next person, but you need to get your stories straight. Jerry Driscoll is my Secretary/Treasurer. I just talked to him. Same for A.J. Myers. They had nothing to do with the article attributed to them. They ask that we get their names off that bunch of crap. Tonight I talked with Larry Carrigan. He asked that we get his name off all that crap as well. He never left a room to talk to anyone like that. No torture or beatings to see Fonda. He was living with Bud Day, John McCain and a bunch of hard nosed resistors during the Fonda visit...lots of witnesses if you want to question him (or them). Larry was never near Jane. There were never any POWs killed on account of Jane. (Did anyone ever provide a name of one of these tortured fellows?) That story about the notes has a nice theatric touch, but no such thing ever happened. The only ones who met with Jane willingly, to my knowledge, were CDR Gene Wilber and LCOL Ed Miller. One NAM-POW was forced to go before the Fonda delegation. And I think that was only to sit at a table for a photo opportunity. I doubt he even got a chance to talk to her let alone slip her a note. To my knowledge, the worst that happened to the rest of us was that we had to listen to the camp radio (Radio Hanoi and Hanoi Hannah) with the Fonda propaganda. It pissed us off, but I doubt you can call that "torture." So, if you get a chance to SHUT THIS STORY DOWN to the groups who are forwarding it, PLEASE DO SO. You can cut and paste this paragraph is you want to. Doubters can come to me if they need to. MikeMcGrath, President of NAM-POWs. POW 30 June 67 to 4 march 73. ( mmcgrath@iex.net )

(2) Next, the false stories of John McCain's conduct. Again, there are false stories floating around the net about McCain. He was never missing from our group for six months. He never co-operated with the enemy. We have dozens of us who lived with and around John for his entire time (10-26-67 to 14 March 73). Larry Carrigan, for one, lived with or near both John and Ted Guy. Larry says Ted would never make the statements which are being attributed to him ...and Ted can't set the record straight because he is dead. We have dozens of roommates who will vouch for the loyalty and courage and conduct of John McCain. Here is a more accurate story: John had both arms and at least one leg badly hurt on ejection. He was bayoneted near the groin by a soldier as they were pulling him from the lake. After three days of interrogations and no cooperation, he was near death. They found out his father was Admiral McCain. They stopped the interrogations, gave him medical care, brought in a French reporter (with camera), and let him make a statement to his family that he was alive and would recover and come home. After laying off the rough stuff, and trying to get John to cooperate by the "good guy" treatment for a couple of weeks, they got pissed off that he would not give information or cooperate. So, they threw him in a cell with Bud Day (MOH recipient) and Maj Norris Overly. McCain was in danger of dying from maltreatment. Maj Overly had to nurse both men back to health. From that point on, McCain resisted just as hard as any other POW. He went through the same interrogations and treatment. His roommates can testify to his valor and patriotism. In short, I think that the slanderous reports by faceless people (and some are attributed to Ted Guy...which I doubt are true) are from the bunch who are really pissed off that McCain made a political decision to back Clinton when Clinton decided it was time for "normalization" of diplomatic and trade relations, and it was time to have Ambassadorial level representation. To many, that made John a traitor. To most, it was just a political reality. It opened the door to better cooperation for a host of areas, including a full accounting of the POW/MIA issue (which is still an ongoing issue today. We have 2,060 yet to account for). If you want to get the straight story on McCain's conduct, please contact his roommates. Start with the Honorable Orson Swindle at (OrsonIII@aol.com ). Thanks for helping shut down these Phony stories. Again, you can copy this paragraph if it will help. Mike McGrath, President of NAM-POWs.

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*Bottom line: Who are these guys who pretend to know who the POWs are, what we are, how we think and thought, how we conducted ourselves, what we said, what we did, or why we did whatever. There are over 50 books written by or about us which pretty much detail our ordeal. For book list, see our web site at: ( [www.eos.net/rrva/nampow/nampows.html](http://www.eos.net/rrva/nampow/nampows.html) ) If that isn't enough, please contact us personally and get the straight story. Over 280 of our e-mail addresses are on the NAM-POW web site. We also list the 300 or so Phony POWs on the Hall of Shame. But please don't attribute anything to us that is not verified. Thanks. Mike*

Note – The above Emails were published almost a decade ago. The Email addresses are no longer valid but McGrath's current Email can be found on the Nam POW website at <http://www.nampows.org>.

### Project Turnkey



Beginning in early August 1966 a strange sight appeared at airfields on Okinawa, Taiwan and in the Philippines and South Vietnam. It was a C-130A, but instead of bearing traditional PACAF markings or the newly authorized jungle camouflage, this particular airplane wore the Day-Glo Orange colors of the Alaska Air Command and sported the symbol of the 17<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron behind the cockpit. Everyone wondered just what an AAC airplane was doing in 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division's area of responsibility.

(Picture by Stan Davis)

As it turns out, the strangely-painted C-130 – at least to people who were used to looking at silver or camouflage airplanes – was on a special assignment in Taiwan in support of Project TURNKEY, a US Air Force civil engineering project constructing an air base on the coastal plains north of Qui Nhon at the town of Tuy Hoa. The project was unique in terms of airfield construction in Southeast Asia because the Air Force decided to hire its own contractor and build the base itself instead of waiting for the existing construction apparatus to build it. The contractor awarded the bid told the Air Force it needed to have a C-130 assigned to the project for its exclusive use. 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division, the organization responsible for airlift in Southeast Asia, had no airplanes to spare for the project. The contractor had been involved with projects in the Defense Early Warning system, or DEW Line, and had worked with the 17<sup>th</sup> TCS from Elmendorf. They asked the Air Force if one of the 17<sup>th</sup> TCS airplanes could be assigned for its use and the Department of Defense approved the assignment.

The 17<sup>th</sup> TCS had been at Elmendorf for two years at that point. The squadron was part of the 64<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Wing, which activated at Dyess AFB, Texas in 1960 with C-130As from Sewart, where the 314<sup>th</sup> and 463<sup>rd</sup> Wings were converting to C-130Bs. The 61<sup>st</sup> TCS at Sewart had equipped with ski-equipped C-130Ds for operations in support of the DEW Line. (The C-130D was merely a C-130A with skis.) When the 61<sup>st</sup> converted to the C-130B, its airplanes went to Dyess to the 17<sup>th</sup> TCS. In 1962 the wing at Dyess began equipping with C-130Es and the Air Force decided to transfer the 17<sup>th</sup> TCS with its mixture of C-130As and Ds to Elmendorf, which was closer to Greenland than Texas.

Project TURNKEY got under way on August 1, 1966 and a single 17<sup>th</sup> TCS C-130A (or perhaps a D with the skis removed) was sent TDY to Taiwan to support it. Initially the airplane was based at Ching Chuan Kang Air Base, but in order to save flying time it was moved to Taipei where the company's offices were located. The initial operation

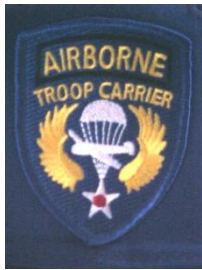
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continued through the end of November, but other airplanes and crews came down from Elmendorf to replace them at least until mid-July 1967. Inspections were performed at Naha. TURNKEY missions involved transporting the construction company's personnel and equipment back and forth between Taipei and Tuy Hoa, with occasional trips to Clark AB, PI.

Thanks no doubt to several Olympia beers and the long arctic nights, a rumor developed among some of the Elmendorf personnel that the reason the 17<sup>th</sup> airplane had been sent to Taiwan to support the project was because the Vietnam C-130 crews "can't hack it." The rumor also expanded to include a belief that the Air Force didn't understand that a C-130A and a C-130D were the same airplane. The rumor came about because the crews saw the wreck of a C-130A near the old runway that existed at Tuy Hoa before construction began on the new air base. The wreck was of a Naha C-130A that suffered a prop reversal problem while landing and went off the end of the runway. Although the airplane wasn't damaged, the Army managed to destroy it by running a cable through the cockpit and attaching it to a tank in an attempt at removing it from the runway. The fuselage was then turned into an Army officers club. The accident investigation determined that a propeller had hung up on the low-pitch stop and did not go into reverse. A similar accident at Bien Hoa with a DC-130A drone launcher caused 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division to place restrictions on airfields for its C-130As. The 17<sup>th</sup> crews somehow got the idea that they had been sent to support the operation because of the accident. The accident occurred in early March, however, five months before the Firebirds C-130 began operating into Tuy Hoa. Even though the restrictions placed on 315<sup>th</sup> AD's C-130As limited operations into short fields by C-130As, they did not apply to the C-130Bs and Es that equipped the division's other seven squadrons.

### Troop Carrier and our WW II Vets



When several of us first started considering forming an organization dedicated to perpetrating the heritage of the troop carrier mission and the mission that followed it, we immediately decided that we should adopt the emblem of the IX Troop Carrier Command as our official emblem. Although IX TCC was not the only World War II troop carrier organization, it became the largest, with more than 1,000 C-47s and C-53s and roughly twice as many gliders. At one time there was an organization of World War II troop carrier veterans and that is the emblem they used. In the case of IX TCC, the emblem signified what the command was all about – conducting airborne warfare using transports to deliver troops and supplies by parachute, glider and air landing. Our organization was established for ALL troop carrier veterans and veterans of the organizations that followed them as tactical airlift units.

As of today, we have five active members whose service was in or started during World War II. One, Col. Bill "Bones" Blanton, served as a navigator on B-24s during the war, then went to pilot training and became a troop carrier pilot. Abe Snell was a pilot in the 29<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron. Don Nisbett entered the military in 1945 and flew troop carrier for many years. Lee Yagel was in operations in several troop carrier squadrons during and after World War II and Theodore Whitcomb, who is one of our newest members, was an aerial engineer with the 1<sup>st</sup> Troop Carrier Command and the 1<sup>st</sup> Combat Cargo Group. (Combat cargo units were scaled-down troop carrier outfits, with fewer support personnel assigned.) Considering that less than 15% of the men who served during World War II are still living, it is remarkable that we have five as active members. There were a few others who attended the first two troop carrier/tactical airlift events we had in Galveston who have not joined the association (perhaps because they don't know about it.) One is deceased.

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Regardless of when we served in the troop carrier/tac airlift mission and in no matter what capacity, we were in some way influenced by the men who started it all in World War II. Some were our squadron and wing commanders. The tactics we used were based to a large extent on those that had been developed through trial and error over the mountains of New Guinea and the beaches at Sicily. I remember reading in my Multi-Command Manual 55-130 about low-level tactics used in New Guinea by C-47 pilots. Coincidentally, one of the officers I knew at the time had been one of those pilots. We all knew men, officers and enlisted alike, whose service dates back to the early 1940s. Some of them were our fathers, uncles, cousins, friends.

We should pay special honor to those men. In fact, I intend to recommend to the board that we award a life membership to all of our World War II vets and that in the future any WW II vet who joins will only have to pay a one-time membership fee of \$25.00.

### Yes, They Were Heroes

Sadly, due to the paucity of days of early 1942, some of US military history have if they were ever story that has received very historians or World War II played by Army Air Corps crews in an attempt to bring (and a few women) who had country in the Philippines. Harbor and most know that was “wiped out” at Clark



information from the dark the most heroic actions in long since been forgotten, remembered at all. One little attention from enthusiasts is the role transport pilots and their some relief to the men been abandoned by their We all know about Pearl MacArthur’s air force Field on the opening day

of the war. (Actually, it wasn’t. While a squadron of B-17s was severely damaged by a strafing attack and ten P-40s were caught in a bomb pattern while waiting to take off, the bombers and fighters in the Philippines actually waged a fierce defense against the Japanese until they ran out of parts – but that’s another story.) Few know that although the US Navy refused to attempt to supply the men in the Philippines except by submarine, a small transport force flying a variety of airplanes made a valiant attempt to deliver supplies to Mindanao and from there on to Bataan and bring out evacuees on their return flights. They also played a role in the defense of the Netherlands East Indies and the subsequent evacuation of US airmen from Java, another operation that has received very little attention in the printed word. Three of those transports were Consolidated B-24A Liberator bombers that had been converted to transports. What they did, along with a few other LB-30 Liberators and several war-weary B-17s, demonstrated what could have been possible if the Air Corps had paid more attention to air transport before the war and there had been an entire group of B-24 transports instead of just three.

The B-24 was developed in 1939 in response to an Air Corps requirement for a long-range bomber called Project A. Contrary to popular belief, the Boeing B-17 was actually developed under a military requirement for a twin-engine medium bomber. It lacked speed, range and payload. When President Franklin Roosevelt gave the Air Corps more



or less carte blanche to develop and produce new aircraft in January 1939, the Air Corps took advantage of the opportunity to put out a requirement for a new four-engine bomber. The contract went to Rubeen Fleet’s Consolidated Aircraft Company, which came up with a new design built around the aerodynamically superior Davis Wing. The result was a four-engine airplane capable of carrying heavy loads over long distances. By the time the first B-24As were delivered to the Army, instead of assigning them to bomber squadrons, the Air



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Corps decided instead to assign them to the recently established Army Ferrying Command, a new organization that was set up in the spring of 1941 to ferry US-built combat aircraft to delivery points for Allied air forces. In the spring of 1941 the US sent a military mission to Great Britain, and in order to support it, Ferrying Command was given responsibility for developing a transport service. On July 1, 1941 Lt. Col. Caleb V. Haynes left Bolling Field for Scotland in a B-24 on the inaugural flight. By mid-October an average of six round trips a month had been flown. The crews were from the Air Force Combat Command, serving on TDY with the Ferrying Command.

When the US entered the war in response to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Ferrying Command had eleven of the converted B-24s in operational service. A number of other B-24As were in various stages of production for the British Royal Air Force, which had taken over an order originally issued by the French for an export version of the bomber which was designated as the LB-30. When war broke out, the Army Air Forces (the US Army Air Forces was established as a headquarters in June 1941) confiscated the LB-30s for its own use, with some assigned to transport duty while others were assigned to bomber squadrons. A squadron equipped with LB-30s that had originally been intended for duty in the Philippines was sent to Java in early 1942. Sometime in late 1941 or early 1942 three B-24A transports arrived in Australia. The exact circumstances of their assignment are unclear or even exactly when they were sent to the Southwest Pacific. Two were sent over by the Pacific route under the command of Lieutenants Ben Funk and A.C. Davis perhaps as early as December. The third had probably carried former Air Corps Chief Maj. Gen. George Brett to Australia when he was sent there to command US Army Forces in Australia a couple of weeks after Pearl Harbor. On January 28, 1942 the Far East Air Force Air Transport Command activated in Australia. (This organization is not to be confused with the ATC that was the forerunner of MATS; in mid-1942 it became a troop carrier command.) A week later Capt. Paul I. "Pappy" Gunn was placed in command and a few days after that the three B-24s and their crews were assigned to it. Two of the converted bombers were under the command of the ATC but one was under Gen. Brett's direct control.



The two B-24s were most likely sent to the Pacific sometime in late December 1941, probably in conjunction with a shipment of .50-caliber ammunition that left New York for the Philippines in two Pan American Airlines Clippers that had been requisitioned by the Army. Originally the Clippers were supposed to deliver the load to Manila, but after the three B-24s arrived in the Far East a new plan emerged under which the Clippers would go as far as Darwin and the B-24s would make the final delivery. As it turned out, the Clippers made it as far as Calcutta then were turned back to Karachi to offload their cargo. The three B-24s picked up the loads and delivered them to the Philippines although it's not certain if they

went to Mindanao or Manila. There are some conflicting accounts which indicate that there may have actually been four B-24 transports, three sent over under the auspices of the Ferrying Command and one that was assigned as Brett's personal transport. Originally, the three B-24s were supposed to return to India after making their deliveries in the Philippines but instead they remained in the Far East and became part of Pappy Gunn's ad hoc air transport command. They flew passengers and cargo all over the Far East, including trips to Mindanao and possibly to Bataan.

Just how many missions the B-24s flew to the Philippines is not recorded. They were supplemented on the Philippines resupply effort by crews from the 11<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron flying LB-30s, which were basically the same airplane except that they were armed while the B-24 transports carried only a tail gun. B-17s from the 19<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group were also sent north to Mindanao from Darwin with cargo and some personnel. Pappy Gunn made a number of trips to the PI in his Beech C-45. The B-24 transports were flying cargo north as early as mid-January and probably before that. The missions were long and dangerous, and were flown so as to transit Japanese occupied territory at night. Until February when Japanese troops occupied the northern islands in the Netherlands East Indies, there were fueling stops along the way that allowed smaller transports to make trips. In essence, the small transport force along with a few Navy submarines constituted the only means of moving supplies to the

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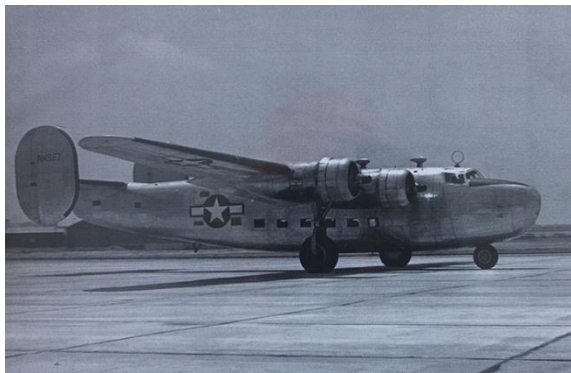
Philippines and evacuating crucial personnel. The Navy was so demoralized by the attack on Pearl Harbor that it was unwilling to risk its surface ships and transports to deliver supplies to MacArthur's men in the Philippines. Speaking of the men in the Philippines, the emphasis is always on the men who were on Luzon and who ended up on Bataan. Little is ever said about the large force on Mindanao, a force reputed to have been as large as 30,000 men. Army Col. John Robenson was given \$10,000,000 to purchase supplies for the Philippines and hire ships to make the deliveries. He was hampered in the effort because only a mere handful of Dutch and Filipino ships captains were willing to make the attempt and the US Navy was not willing to provide any kind of escort. A few ships managed to get through and make port at Mindanao and Cebu but most were intercepted by the Japanese.

The B-24s operated throughout the Far East, not only to the Philippines, they also made trips to Burma and into the East Indies. By late February the situation in Java, where Far East Air Force had set up its headquarters, had gone from bad to worse. The British lost Singapore and the Dutch and what little of the US Navy that was in the Indies suffered a series of losses. It had become obvious that the situation was no longer tenable and Generals Brett and Lewis H. Brereton, Far East Air Force commander, decided it was time to pull all US forces out of the islands. The three B-24s along with several LB-30s played a major role in the evacuation as mechanics and other support personnel made their way from outlying airstrips to fields where the Liberators were sent to pick them up. After departing airfields on Java, the Liberators flew to Broome, a town on the northwestern coast of Australia. It was there that disaster struck.



No military facilities were in existence at Broome and the airfield was undefended. The town itself had been largely evacuated after Japanese aircraft attacked Darwin, which lay more than 650 miles to the northeast. An evacuation center was set up on February 24 by Air Corps officers who had come out of Java, and a procession of aircraft began arriving the next day with Dutch civilians and the first military personnel to be evacuated. On the night of March 2 one of the B-24s went to Jakarta to bring out any men who might have been left behind, but after receiving no signal, returned to Broome where it arrived about dawn. During the wee hours of the morning an unidentified aircraft flew over the harbor and Air Corps officers on the field feared an attack the next morning. All planes were warned to complete their refueling

and loading and depart by 10:00, but there were still six airplanes on the field and fifteen flying boats in the harbor when a formation of nine Japanese fighters came in and began a strafing attack. One of the B-24s had just taken off with a load of wounded and was about 600 feet when three Zeroes attacked and shot it down. It crashed in the water and broke apart. Only one man survived. Lt. Edson Kester, the pilot, was an experienced transport pilot who had inaugurated the Washington to Cairo route a few months before. Capt. A.C. Davis and his crew were at the airfield



waiting to take off when the strafers appeared. Their B-24 was set on fire and burned up. Fortunately, Capt. Funk had departed in the third B-24 the day before and had already reached Melbourne.

After the disaster at Broome topped off the ignominy of the defeat in Java, the entire US Army – which was mostly Air Corps – went into a general funk and basically went on a two-week drunk, particularly those assigned to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Groups who had been in Java. Military discipline in those groups collapsed completely. Yet even as US forces had suffered their first real defeat in Java, the troops in the Philippines were still holding out, waiting

hopelessly for a promised relief force to arrive from Hawaii and California with food and reinforcements. General Brett moved his headquarters back to Australia while Brereton moved to India to establish a new air force to mount

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a bombing campaign against Japan. Yet while Brett was attempting to reorganize the forces in Australia, he was still charged with delivering supplies to Mindanao, where a large American and Filipino force still occupied all of the island except for an enclave on the other side of the mountains at Davao where the Japanese had established a sea port and depot to support its forces in the East Indies. The Japanese timetable for the capture of the Philippines had been thrown off by the stubborn defense on Bataan. With few supplies coming in by surface shipment, the troops on Bataan and Corregidor depended on submarines and the FEAF Air Transport Command for what little they got. Submarines made their deliveries directly to Bataan and Corregidor while the transports operated into a field on the Del Monte pineapple plantation on Mindanao. From there supplies continued on to Bataan in a tiny fleet of mostly single-engine airplanes, although Pappy Gunn and some of the other pilots from Australia made trips to Bataan in their C-45s and a couple of C-39s.

The surviving B-24 transport made an untold number of missions from Darwin to Del Monte, carrying in cargo and bringing out evacuees, many of whom had made their way south from Luzon. The airplane had become famous to the men at Del Monte, who referred to it as The Flying Red Cap and The Gravy Train. Captain Funk was joined by other pilots, particularly Captain Alvin J. Mueller, a native of Seguin, Texas who had previously been awarded a Distinguished Service Cross for a mission in a B-17 while he was with the 19<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group. Funk may have returned to the US – he would retire from the Air Force as a major general and commander of Systems Command in 1966. On the night of April 29, two weeks after Brig. Gen. Ralph Royce took a small force of B-17s and B-25s out of Del Monte because he thought it was about to fall, Mueller made the last landing at Del Monte. Shortly before midnight he took off and returned to Batchelor Field, a remote airstrip in the Australian outback about 30 miles out of Darwin. On either that trip or a previous one, Mueller brought out Carlos Romulo, a Filipino newspaperman who came out of Corregidor earlier that month. On the night of May 5 Capt. Mueller returned to Del Monte with a load of ammunition, mail and other cargo but when he arrived over the airfield, there was no signal that it was safe to land. He circled over the field for three hours, waiting in vain for a sign, then turned south for Darwin knowing they had used up too much fuel to make the trip. They made it as far as Batang Pele, an island group about 850 miles north of Darwin where Mueller ditched the airplane in a lagoon. The crew was eventually picked up by a submarine. (For further reading on the early days of WW II in the Philippines and Java read Walter Edmonds' *They Fought With What They Had*. It's available in its entirety on the Air Force Historical Office web site.)

*Note – The artist depiction at the beginning of the article and the photo of a B-24A in flight are of B-24A 40-2376, the actual airplane that flew the final missions into Mindanao. However, I doubt that it still bore the American flag markings by that time since Far East Air Force had learned the lesson of camouflage at Clark Field on the opening day of the war. The photo of an airplane burning is an actual shot of the B-24 that was destroyed at Broome. The final photo is of the B-24 that is now owned and operated by the former Confederate Air Force, now the Commemorative Air Force. Below is a photo of it as it looks today.*



The missions flown by B-24 transports in early 1942 were some of the most heroic – and least reported – missions of the war, but they were not the only time that Liberators were used as transports in the combat environment. My

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uncle, Delmar D. McGowan, was a B-24 pilot in Europe in the summer of 1944. Once US troops initiated a breakout from the Normandy Beachhead and Lt. Gen. George S. Patton's Third Army began its spectacular advance across France, keeping it supplied with fuel was a major chore. To supplement IX Troop Carrier Command transports, several squadrons of Eighth Air Force Liberators were assigned to "trucking" missions flying cargo, mostly gasoline and diesel fuel, into recently captured German airfields. The missions often involved flying at low level across German-occupied portions of France, particularly in the area around Caen, where the Germans had built up their defenses in anticipation of an invasion and which were bypassed by the advancing Allied armies. My uncle said that the closest he ever came to being shot down was in that area – which is saying a lot since his first assignment was to the 492<sup>nd</sup> Bombardment Wing, which took so many casualties the group was broken up and on one occasion his crew was the only one from his squadron to return from a mission.

Eighth Air Force B-24s were also frequently assigned to fly airdrop missions, particularly during the MARKET/GARDEN operation into Holland when IX Troop Carrier Command's C-47s were heavily involved in paratroop and glider operations. My dad, who was also in B-24s in Eighth Air Force as an aerial engineer, once told me that troop carrier crews flew the most dangerous missions of the war. He had just finished his missions when my uncle was starting his and since he was no longer flying missions when Allied troops landed in France, he was not involved in the "trucking" or low-level aerial delivery missions. However, he respected those who were.

### Billie and the CIA

One of our most colorful members is Col. Billie B. Mills, who started out in the troop carrier mission as a radio operator during the Berlin Airlift and ended his USAF career after a long history in C-119s and C-130s. Billie, who now lives in North Mississippi just south of Memphis, has a very interesting story that he related to me a few years ago. I had previously read much of the story in the book *The CIA's Secret War in Tibet*, by Richard Conboy and the late Jim Morrison but it was a treat to hear the story right from the horse's mouth. Billie rose to the enlisted grade of staff sergeant as a radio operator then was accepted into the aviation cadet program. By December, 1956 he was with the 774<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron at Ardmore AFB, Oklahoma when the first operational C-130s were delivered. He had previously been flying C-119s and moved to the new C-130A as a copilot. The following year Ardmore closed and the 463<sup>rd</sup> TCW, the 774<sup>th</sup>'s parent, transferred to Sewart AFB, Tennessee to join the 314<sup>th</sup> TCW. Shortly after the wing arrived in Tennessee, Billie's home state, he was upgraded to aircraft commander.

Not long after he was upgraded, Billie was sent on a TDY to Peterson Field, Colorado. Before he left Sewart he was told that he and his crew would be taking cadets from the then-new Air Force Academy on orientation flights, an easy mission. But when he arrived at Colorado Springs he was met by men dressed in black suits, white shirts and ties, men who told him that he and his crew now belonged to them. Yep, it sounds like something out of a movie but this was no movie! Lt. Mills beat his way into operations and placed a call to Sewart, to the wing commander. The colonel told him, "Son, just do what they ask you to do – but don't let them kill you." Unknown to Lt. Mills – or anyone else – a few weeks before a C-124 had landed at Peterson Field with a secret load of passengers. The airplane was parked in a remote part of the airfield and met by buses with no markings and blacked out windows. The C-124's passengers were shielded from prying eyes and loaded onto the busses, which then departed for parts unknown.

"Parts Unknown" was actually Camp Hale, a remote US Army camp just north of Leadville, Colorado not far from Tennessee Pass. It's a scenic spot, a high mountain valley nestled deep on the Colorado Rockies just off of US 24 south of the modern resort town of Vail. Camp Hale was constructed in 1942 on land that had been purchased from private land owners and leased from the US Forest Service as a base for training in mountain warfare. While the valley where the camp was located is generally flat, it is surrounded on all sides by high mountains characterized by steep cliffs and rock slides, an ideal place to train mountain troops. The 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division trained at Camp

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Hale, as did several battalions organized to serve in mountainous terrain in Italy and elsewhere in Europe. The camp



remained open until 1965, and was used by the CIA to train Tibetan guerrillas from 1959 until it closed. There's not much there now. All one can see to indicate the valley was once the scene of a military base are the outlines of the streets and the remnants of the foundations where the barracks once stood. I've passed by it several times, most recently in the summer of 2009 when I took the photograph shown to the left.

Billie and his crew soon learned that they were going to be flying missions, at night, deep into the mountains and dropping strange looking Asian men into clearings marked by signal fires. To say that this was real clandestine stuff is

the understatement to end all understatements – it was clandestine all right, about as clandestine as you can get. The Asians were from Tibet, and they had all managed to get out of the country to join US Central Intelligence Agency sponsored guerilla groups and trained to be reinserted into their native country to fight the Chinese who had occupied it. They were initially taken to an uninhabited Pacific island where they were trained by CIA operatives from the Agency's highly classified Special Activities Division, an organization responsible for planning and carrying out paramilitary operations in countries where the US doesn't want its presence known. SAD operatives are the most highly skilled and trained operatives in the world, and the missions they perform are off the radar. If they ever become public, they are usually attributed to one of the military's special operations units such as Navy SEALs or US Army Rangers to protect their cover.



The crew from Sewart may have been lacking in experience but they were military professionals in the truest sense of the word and they met the expectations of the men in black suits in every respect. In fact, they met them so well that they had the crew assigned to them for another mission. This time Mills and his crew flew to the other side of the world, to Japan. Their new mission was to train civilian crews to fly the C-130. The civilians were employees of Civil Air Transport, an airline that was started in China right after World War II by the legendary Brig. Gen. Claire Chennault. The original name was several syllables long and the pilots, crew chiefs, kickers and ground crews simply referred to it by the initials – CAT. When the Chinese civil war ended in a

communist victory, Chennault moved the airline to Taiwan. The company faced a financial blow when a court in Hongkong awarded ownership of about 70-75 of the airline's airplanes, mostly surplus C-46s and C-47s, to the new communist government. The decision was reversed a year or so later but by that time the airplane had deteriorated so due to exposure to the elements that they were no longer airworthy. The new Central Intelligence Agency was the airline's largest customer and Chennault managed to keep going by obtaining loans through it. Finally the CIA decided to buy Chennault out. The name of the company was changed to Civil Air Transport so the old initials would still apply.

The pilots who had been picked to fly the C-130s, which would be provided clandestinely by the Air Force, were all "old China hands," men with thousands of hours of flying experience dating back to World War II in many instances

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and to Korea in others. Billie felt somewhat intimidated as a young lieutenant working with men half again his age with thousands of hours of flying time. But the veteran pilots were eager and willing to learn and accepted his instruction without reservation. Billie may be willing to help me out here as I am writing this from memory of a conversation that took place several years ago, but my recollection is that he accompanied the CAT crews on their first missions over Tibet. Once the CAT crews had been trained and the first missions had been flown, Billie and his crew's role was over and they returned to Sewart.

The CIA and the Air Force worked out an arrangement for the use of the airplanes. The Air Force would continue to own and maintain the transports and would provide training for the crews when they were needed for an operation. Although when Billie and his crew went to Colorado Springs there were no C-130s yet assigned to the Pacific, the Air Force was making plans to equip the 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division's three troop carrier squadrons with the new turboprop transports. 315<sup>th</sup> had two squadrons at Ashiya AB, Japan and another, the 21<sup>st</sup> TCS, at Tachikawa. Originally assigned to the 374<sup>th</sup> TCW, the 21<sup>st</sup> transferred to the 483<sup>rd</sup> when its former parent inactivated. While other 483<sup>rd</sup> squadrons were equipped with C-119s, the 21<sup>st</sup> operated C-47s and C-54s in addition to C-119s and was already involved in classified operations with the CIA. Air Force support of CIA operations were conducted through an office at Kadena AB, Okinawa and the Air Force decided to transfer the 21<sup>st</sup> from Tachikawa to Naha AB, Okinawa in order to be closer to the CIA operating location and to get the squadron out of Japan in order to avoid possible political repercussions. The CAT crews were based at Tachikawa but when missions were scheduled, they flew down to Okinawa to join an Air Force crew at Kadena, then flew to Taklihi, Thailand where the Agency had a secret base, at least it was secret at the time. During the flight down to Thailand the Air Force crewmembers gave instruction to the civilians, then once they reached Taklihi, they went to Bangkok to wait until the CAT crews had finished their missions. Later on after the US got involved in Laos, a similar operation was set up within the 21<sup>st</sup> TCS and identified as E Flight. Operations over Tibet continued until 1965.

### **WE WANT YOUR STORIES!!!**

Guys, we really do want your stories for publication in our association paper. While I have no problem – at least so far – coming up with material, the more input we can get from our members the better our publication will be. PLEASE send me your stories in rough form if need be and I'll clean them up and include them in future issues of The Airlifter. Email them to [sammcgowan@troopcarrier.org](mailto:sammcgowan@troopcarrier.org).

### **Troop Carrier Email Accounts**

Let me remind everyone one more time that we have a number of troopcarrier.org Email addresses available. Our web hosting plan allows 50 Email addresses and we can increase it to 1,000 for only a few dollars. All it takes is for you to let me know and I can set it up, then you can change the password. I highly recommend this for officers and board members in particular, but they are available to anyone who would like to have one.

### **Our Board**

Allow me to make some comments about our new board. In the past we have relied on face-to-face board meetings, which were held few and far between and resulted in limited participation due to travel requirements. Now, thanks to the "miracle" of electronic communication, we are able to have meetings through teleconferencing, which allows each participant to join in the meeting from the comfort of their study, living room, den or what have you. By using this method, we can have a board meeting as often as we wish, and no one has to spend money to travel and there are no financial expenditures for meeting rooms, refreshments, etc. We've established a policy of having a teleconference on a quarterly basis. We're also using teleconferencing for the convention planning committee to get

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together and discuss plans for our convention. We can do likewise with other committees as time goes by and the needs arise.

### **Good News**

During our last teleconference Mike Welch shared some good news. Some time ago I discovered some military audio/visual film clips online and posted links to some of them on the links page on our web site. One film segment is of a C-130 from the 464<sup>th</sup> TCW at Pope returning to Leopoldville with the bodies of the American and European hostages who had been slain by Simba rebels during the Operation DRAGON ROUGE/RED DRAGON rescue mission in the former Belgian Congo during Thanksgiving Week, 1964. The tail number caught Mike's attention. He recognized it as the C-130E fuselage that the Air Force had given to Boeing to use to develop its C-130 Avionics Modification Package. The development phase of the project had been completed and the fuselage had been cast aside and was lying in the facility scrap yard waiting to be hauled away and cut up for scrap. Mike recognized the historical implications and told one of his coworkers, a former USAF officer with C-130 experience, and they decided to approach their employer about donating the airplane to a museum. Boeing and the Air Force agreed and the fuselage now resides at the Yank Aviation Museum at Chino Airport outside Los Angeles. At present the museum is rounding up the parts necessary to restore the airplane to display condition. Way to go Mike!