

The Airlifter Volume XIX

The Airlifter

Newsletter of the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association

Promoting and preserving the troop carrier/tactical airlift heritage



January 16, 2013

Volume XX

Finances

Our current bank balance was \$6,384.57 as of December 19. We just deposited \$425.00 checks for dues to deposit, which brings our total to \$6809.57. Expenditures since our last newsletter include a check in the amount of \$185.00 to reimburse Tom Stalvey for telephone expenses related to convention and \$29.87 to Avahost for domain renewal.

Warner Robins

We want to extend our sincerest thanks to Tom Stalvey, Roger Greuel and Roger's wife Janet for all of the hard work they put into organizing our recent convention in Warner Robins, Georgia. They did an outstanding job and everyone who attended had a great time!

Welcome to Our New Members

One of our goals is to recruit new members, and we've picked up several since our recent convention and others who joined prior to attending, including one World War II veteran Life Member, Ed Rearick, and another Life Member, Kenny Eith, whose background is in aerial port. Hanson Scott, who is a retired brigadier general and the former commander of the 314th and 463rd Tactical Airlift Wings, joined as a ten-year member. We'd like to welcome all of our new members and encourage all of our members to pass the word around about the organization!

Election of Officers and Board Members

At our organizational meeting in Clear Lake, Texas in early 2008 the board adopted staggered terms for officers and board members, with the Chairman, President and Secretary and some board members serving three year terms while the Vice-Chairman, Vice-President, Treasurer and other board members would serve for two. We adopted this policy in order to provide continuity to the leadership. At

The Airlifter Volume XIX

the 2008 San Antonio Convention the officers and board members whose terms were expiring were reelected by acclamation. Two years later in 2010 we decided to place all officers and board members up for election. Consequently, we now have some officers and board members who are up for election while some have asked to step down. Our current treasurer, Tom Stalvey, has asked to step down due to health concerns, as has board member (and former chairman) Ace Bowman. Ralph Bemis, who was our original treasurer and is now our vice-president, has agreed to resume the duty of treasurer which means we have to fill the office of vice-president and a vacancy on the board of directors. We've not really identified two board members as being in two year terms so we're asking if any of the other board members wish to step down. If so, please let Mike Welch know at mike.welch@boeing.com. Mike will be appointing a nominating committee to select nominees for the vacant offices. We're currently looking for people who would be willing to serve in some capacity. If you are, please let Mike know. We'll be sending ballots out by mail by March 1, with the new officers to take their seats on April 1.

2014 in Tucson!

It's decided! Our 2014 convention will be in Tucson, Arizona, the home of the Pima Air Museum, the Aircraft Grave Yard and Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, among other things. Jim Esbeck has been appointed reunion chairman and will be putting things together assisted by Bill Goodall, who also lives in Tucson. We haven't set a definite date yet, but it will most likely be in October. If you're in the Southwest and would like to help Jim and Bill, drop Jim an Email at JimEsbeck@aol.com.

Rick Lentz' Account of the Spare 617 Mission

The November issue of AIR FORCE magazine contained an article I had written about the air drops at An Loc. Shortly after it came out, one of the editors forwarded me an email from Lt. Col. Richard Lentz, USAF (Ret) who was the navigator on the mission. In his Email, Rick said that the account of what happened in the airplane is wrong. I emailed him and told him what I had come from the Air Force history and he emailed back that the historical record is wrong and that he's been trying to correct it for years. He sent me the following account and gave permission to publish it in our newsletter. Here it is, with only minor editing. No changes have been made other than spelling and punctuation.

Spare 617 and An Loc, 15 April 1972

Our first run was to be a standard drop descending from 6,000' to 600' AGL. However, due to the haze from the spring burning of the rice fields, we couldn't see the ground. We decided to drop below the haze layer and come in about 70° from our original heading; our new in-bound heading was 342°. Because the drop point was a radio tower off the left side of the aircraft, I was standing behind the pilot, Bill "Buddha" Caldwell. It may be the only reason I am alive today.

The Airlifter Volume XIX

At the one-minute warning, I advised the crew that at the five-second warning it may be longer than five seconds before I gave the green light for the drop as the DZ was a soccer field. Just before the five-second warning there was a loud explosion in the cargo compartment and I called out, "Crew, nav, we're taking hits." Then I said, "Crew, nav, five-second warning." About eight seconds later I called out, "Green light!" The next thing I knew, I was flat on my back waiting to hear the sound of the load leaving the aircraft. After 2-3 seconds I heard it leave the aircraft. I looked up at the flight engineer, TSgt Jon Sanders, and saw he was missing the left side of his head. I quickly scanned the pilot and co-pilot for wounds and they seemed okay. I then checked myself and found a small hole in the left shoulder of my flight suit. I arose from the floor of the cockpit and put on my O2 mask to refresh my brain.

The cockpit began to fill with smoke and TSgt Charlie Shaub, the loadmaster, came up and told me to open the pilot's and co-pilot's side windows while he removed the overhead hatch to clear the smoke from the cockpit. I then began making radio calls to Hilda, the 834th command center and helping the pilots shut down the port engines due to a fire warning light by running the flight engineer's checklist. When they shut down engines one and two, it meant there was no hydraulics to the main landing gear. After two failed attempts to hand-crank down the landing gear, the pilot sent me back to help the loadmasters but that attempt also failed. I went back to the flight deck and for some reason looked at the co-pilot's lower circuit breaker panel. I noticed that the two landing gear circuit breakers at the bottom of the panel had not been pulled. I asked the co-pilot to go slowly through the checklist again and this time he read "pull main landing gear circuit breakers on the co-pilot's lower circuit breaker panel." For whatever reason, he had skipped that the first three times. I pulled the circuit breakers and the loadmaster was able to lower the gear.

As we approached Tan Son Nhut AB, I ran the engineer's checklist and controls. As we turned from base leg to final, the number four engine's power dropped to 30 percent, Buddha looked at me and asked, "Did you see that?" I replied, "Yes." Thankfully, just as we leveled out on final, number four went back to full-speed.

There were never any shells exploding on the pilot's side of the aircraft. The left side of the aircraft received 87 rounds from a dual-mounted 51-cal machine gun. An A-37 took out the gun shortly after it fired at us. Jon Sanders was killed by a shell that went through the co-pilot's upper circuit breaker panel, through his head, and between me and the pilot where it hit the pilot's side window and fell to the floor. I was hit in the shoulder by a circuit breaker cap which knocked me to the floor; it is still there. I also had tiny slivers of shrapnel in my neck and right ear lobe. The co-pilot, John Herring also had small scratches. I don't ever remember Buddha being wounded. John and I received a Purple Heart and the Silver Star as did Jon Sanders. A1C Dave McAlister walked off the plane and never flew again.

Yes, the two most forward pallets exploded halfway to the ground, but the other ten pallets landed on the DZ and were used to repel the NVA and VC forces. The U.S. Army advisor to the ARVN received shrapnel wounds in his abdomen on 16 April, and was on the same hospital ward with me. He came over to thank me and the crew and offer condolences for Jon Sander's death. He also described how they defeated the NVA and VC forces that weekend.

One final note: After being released from the Third Field Army Hospital in Saigon, I went out to the aircraft on 25 April to retrieve my flight gear. While on the aircraft, I spoke with two SSgt flight

The Airlifter Volume XIX

mechanics. They wanted to know why we shut down two perfectly good engines, there was no fire in the left wing, and flew home on two engines that had each been hit by twelve rounds of 51-cal shells. They told me there was no way engines three and four should have been turning! I can only say that God was looking after us and our guardian angels kept the plane in the air.

Medal of Honor for Charlie Shaub?

At our San Antonio meeting, Hector Leyva, who was one of the loadmasters in the lead airplane



of the three that were to drop over An Loc on April 15, 1972, suggested that the TCTAA pursue an effort to have TSgt Charles L. Shaub's Air Force Cross upgraded to a Medal of Honor. Hector and others who were at CCK at the time were under the impression that someone wanted to nominate Charlie for the Medal of Honor but that the nomination was blocked. After I got in contact with Rick Lentz, I asked him if Charlie had been nominated and he replied that he most certainly had, that he had made the recommendation himself. While he was in the hospital in Saigon,

a lieutenant colonel from the 776th TAS came to visit him in the hospital and asked him if would make the recommendation. He had the paperwork with him and it was filled out and submitted. Rick says that he heard that the recommendation was disapproved by "higher headquarters," but did not specify if it was within the wing at CCK or by someone in the chain of command. He also says that Charlie definitely deserved the nation's highest honor.

During our recent board members conference call, I suggested to the board that we consider resuming the effort on the basis of what Rick said. Some of us are also in contact with Dave McAleece, who was the other loadmaster on the airplane. Now that we are in contact with two eyewitnesses, we might actually have a chance of getting the Air Force to reconsider the award. In 2008 I contacted the Congressman who represented the district in which Charlie grew up and where he was living when he passed away but got no response. That Congressman has since retired and the district, the 6th Congressional District of Tennessee, is now represented by someone else. Our best avenue would probably be to contact all of the members of the Tennessee Congressional delegation and attempt to get them all onboard. Although I live in Texas, like Charlie Shaub, I am a native Tennessean and the award would bring honor to our native state.

The Airlifter Volume XIX

Charlie Shaub was orphaned at an early age. His wife died of Hodgkin's Disease in the 1960s and had no children and no brothers or sisters. His closest living relatives were two aunts, both elderly and possibly no longer living, and some cousins. Back around 1998 or 99 I talked to his cousin Linda Pearson, who lives in Portland, Tennessee. Unfortunately, I misplaced her telephone number and evidently wrote her Email address down wrong but we can probably track her down.

Mike Welch asked Hector and me to pursue the effort and George Dockery, who lives not far from Rick Lentz, volunteered to assist. If there are any members who live in the Tennessee 6th District, it would certainly help if you are willing to contact your Congresswoman. The 6th District lies just east of Ft. Campbell north of Nashville to Gallatin, then east a few miles and south to just below Shelbyville. Smryna and Murfreesboro both lie within the district. Please Email me if you are in Tennessee, particularly in the 6th District, and would like to help with the effort.

Here is a brief background on Charlie: He was originally a flight attendant on C-121s at Charleston AFB, South Carolina. When the Connies were phased out, he retrained as a loadmaster and flew C-130Es in MATS out of Charleston until he was transferred to McGuire. He didn't like McGuire and volunteered to go overseas and went to CCK where he was the loadmaster on Captain Bill Gunkle's crew in 1969. He returned to Charleston, but volunteered to go back to CCK.

Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift in MATS and MAC



At our recent convention, one of our members mentioned that the Air Mobility Command Museum at Dover, Delaware is claiming that Military Airlift Command was involved in tactical airlift in Southeast Asia. While the claim, which is made on the AMC Museum web page, is in reference to the – limited – use of MAC C-141s on in-country logistical operations out of Cam Ranh Bay into airfields such as Pleiku, there actually was a MATS troop carrier squadron that was heavily involved in tactical airlift missions into and within South Vietnam and elsewhere in Southeast Asia from the very beginning of US operations in support of the government of South Vietnam. In reality, MATS aircraft and personnel were involved in theater airlift operations



beginning with the Berlin Airlift, when MATS provided C-54s and their crews to troop carrier groups assigned to United States Air Forces, Europe on periods of temporary duty. One of the conditions of MATS' very existence was that it would support troop carrier operations when and as directed.

After the Korean War, the Douglas C-124 became a center of controversy when members of the MATS staff and Maj. General William H. Tunner lobbied for the transfer of all of TAC and SAC C-124s to MATS, claiming that they could be "better utilized." In 1958, after TAC started receiving C-130s, the Air Staff, of which Tunner was DCO in 1957, MATS

The Airlifter Volume XIX

was designated as “single manager for airlift” and all C-124s were transferred into it – with the stipulation that they would retain their original mission and designation. Consequently, the 62nd Troop Carrier Wing at Larson AFB, Washington and the 63rd Troop Carrier Wing at Donaldson AFB, SC and their respective squadrons, all of which flew C-124s, transferred to MATS. However, they retained their troop carrier designations and were dedicated for duty in support of Tactical Air Command and the overseas tactical commands when directed. A third C-124 wing, the 374th Troop Carrier Wing, was based at Tachikawa Air Base, Japan with two C-124 squadrons, the 6th and 22nd, and another, the 21st which flew a menagerie of airplanes providing airlift for CIA covert operations throughout Asia. The two C-124 squadrons were reassigned to MATS on paper, but remained under the operational control of PACAF’s 315th Air Division for theater operations, particularly with outsize cargo. A MATS air transport wing, the 5303rd, activated at Tachikawa to provide maintenance and other support functions for the two squadrons. The 21st transferred to Naha AB, Okinawa and equipped with C-130As.



For the next six years the two MATS squadrons operated under PACAF control independently of the MATS system. Their missions were the same as that of the three assigned C-130 squadrons, two of which were consolidated at Naha while one, the 815th, was at Tachikawa. The C-124s were used particularly for outsize cargo operations. While other MATS C-124s operated into rear area airfields such as Da Nang and Tan Son Nhut, the Tachikawa-based airplanes operated into any airfield long enough for their use, a practice that would continue until 1969. After a fourth C-130 squadron was assigned to 315th Air Division, the 6th TCS transferred to Hickam AFB, Hawaii in 1964 to replace the 50th Air Transport Squadron, which was there as part of the 5302nd Air Transport Wing.



based MAC C-124 crews is that they carried two large bulldozers into the airfield at Kham Duc on May 10, 1968, two days before the heroic evacuation.

In April 1969 315th Air Division inactivated, and as it did, the 22nd MAS transferred to Travis AFB, Carolina, where the 6th MAS had already transferred. Both transfers were on paper; neither

The Airlifter Volume XIX

squadron operated C-124s out of Travis. By 1969 MAC was transferring all of its C-124s to Reserve and Air National Guard units in anticipation of the assignment of the huge Lockheed C-5A Galaxy to its squadrons. There was still a need for outside cargo capability in South Vietnam, so the Air Force transferred four former MAC C-124s to Clark Air Base, Philippines where they were assigned to the 20th Operations Squadron in the 463rd Tactical Airlift Wing where they continued the 22nd's former mission.

The Aerial Port



Since 1953 the aerial port squadron has been a major part of the troop carrier and tactical airlift mission. However, there haven't always been aerial port squadrons as part of the Air Force. When the Army Air Corps first established transport squadrons in the 1930s, the preparation of cargo for air shipment and aircraft loading was considered to be a responsibility of the unit to which the cargo belonged. Since the first transport squadrons were organized as part of the Air Corps' Maintenance Command to provide logistical support of combat squadrons around the US and in Alaska and Panama, the majority of the cargo they transported originated at the Maintenance Command depots. Each of the transport squadrons was based at an airfield at a depot.

Cargo was processed, loaded and offloaded by Maintenance Command personnel. When the transport mission was expanded to include other units' cargo, cargo processing and handling became a Quartermaster responsibility and continued to be through the Korean War.

In December 1941 the Army Air Corps found itself in a war in which air transportation would play an important role. However, no real planning had been made for the development of air transport although a few far-thinking officers, particularly Brigadier General George C. Kenney and Major General Lewis H. Brereton, saw the potential for air transport as a military weapon. Brereton was the senior Air Corps officer in the Philippines at the outbreak of war, then transferred to India after the Allies were defeated in Java and from there to the Middle East, where he initially commanded the Middle East Air Force, which became Ninth Air Force when Lt. Gen. Frank Andrews arrived to assume the role of theater commander in November 1942. A year later Brereton transferred to the UK to reorganize Ninth Air Force as a tactical air force to support the Normandy invasion. Ninth Air Force included IX Troop Carrier Command, the largest tactical airlift organization ever seen. After the Normandy Invasion, Brereton moved up to command the First Allied Airborne Army. In mid-1942 Kenney arrived in Australia to assume the dual role of chief of staff for air on General Douglas MacArthur's staff and commander of Allied air forces in the Southwest Pacific Area of Operations. At the time of his arrival, Kenney's command included two troop carrier squadrons, the 21st and 22nd, which were engaged in resupplying Australian troops fighting on the Kokoda Track in Papua, New Guinea. Kenny arrived with plans to make use of air transport to "provide mobility", as we would say today, to the Allied ground forces. Within a few weeks after his arrival, the two troop carrier squadrons had become crucial to Allied plans in New

The Airlifter Volume XIX

Guinea. By the end of the year, they were joined by two more and three more were on the way to the theater with the 317th Troop Carrier Group.

Troop carrier operations in New Guinea – and later in the Middle East, North Africa, the Mediterranean and, finally, Western Europe, involved the movement of ground units and their supplies. Consequently, the units were responsible for processing their own equipment and supplies and loading it onto the airplanes. In his book about his experiences with the 6th TCS in New Guinea as an enlisted pilot, Maj. Ernie Ford related how that the Allied Directorate of Air Transport developed procedures under which US and RAAF officers trained Australian infantrymen in cargo loading procedures. A team of Australian troops loaded the cargo, tied it down then flew on the C-47 or C-60 to literally kick it out the door over the designated drop zone, which the kicker team NCO gave the pilots directions to find. The Australian loading teams, whose duties were short-lived as they marched into the field to join their comrades once the supplies had been delivered, were supervised by American and Australian air officers who had been trained in cargo handling procedures and were familiar with weight and balance. By 1943 the DAT had established the 1st Air Cargo Squadron, which was made up of American and Australian officers and enlisted personnel whose duties were to supervise loading of aircraft. Detachments were set up at the airfields in Australia and New Guinea where transports operated. In other theaters where airborne operations became more prevalent, cargo processing and loading became the responsibility of airborne Quartermasters. In Burma where American troop carriers supported British and British Commonwealth troops, cargo was handled by the British units. (Air Transport Command operations were logistical rather than combat and ATC had its own procedures. For example, Army Air Force base units were set up at ATC bases to handle all support functions, including loading of cargo. Air Service Command transport squadrons operated in each theater as well to transport aircraft parts from depots to combat units; air service command personnel handled cargo.)



organize an airlift command and control organization. It's unclear whether Tunner organized it or if it was

In June 1950 North Korean troops attacked their brothers to the south and the United States suddenly found itself embroiled in another war for which it was not prepared, a war in which air transport would again play a major role. Far East Air Forces began rounding up every available transport and assigned them to the 374th Troop Carrier Wing at Tachikawa AB, Japan. Additional C-47s and crews were dispatched to Japan from the United States to join those that were already there since the 374th was primarily equipped with C-54s, which had no tactical capabilities. Reserve units equipped with C-46s were recalled to active duty while the 314th Troop Carrier Wing at Sewart AFB, Tennessee was directed to deploy its squadrons to Japan. Maj. Gen. William H. Tunner was directed to pick a staff to take to Japan on temporary duty to

The Airlifter Volume XIX

already in existence before his arrival, but Far East Air Force's transports were organized into the FEAF Combat Cargo Command. The CCC included a support unit whose duties included handling cargo and processing passengers and troops.

Tunner and his staff were only in Japan on temporary duty and in early 1951 they were replaced by personnel with combat experience. FEAF commander Lt. Gen. George Stratemeyer, who had commanded US air operations in India and Burma during WW II, organized a new air division and gave it the designation of the 315th Air Division, a former B-29 unit. Air Force Reserve Brig. Gen. John "Jock" Henebry, who had brought his 437th Troop Carrier Group to Japan from Chicago, was placed in command. Henebry's previous wartime experience had been in the Southwest Pacific where he served as an A-20 and B-25 strafing pilot before joining Gen. Kenney's staff. Henebry was well acquainted with the role of Fifth Air Force troop carriers in the Southwest Pacific and when he went on reserve status after the war, he, like a number of other high ranking officers, was given command of a troop carrier unit. One of Henebry's first actions after he took command of 315th was to activate the 6127th Air Terminal Group to provide cargo and passenger processing and supervise loading and offloading operations at airfields throughout the Western Pacific. Air terminal personnel flew into forward airfields to supervise loading and offloading of aircraft; during operations in North Korea, they were the last out as C-47s and C-54s evacuated troops and wounded out of forward airfields as Chinese troops advanced southward. However, while 6127th personnel were responsible for supervising loading of cargo, aerial delivery functions had remained with the Army when the Air Force was established and airborne Quartermasters rigged loads for airdrop, installed aerial delivery equipment in C-119s and flew on aerial delivery missions to eject cargo.

One of the lessons learned during the Korean War was that the Air Force needed its own personnel to handle air freight operations and inspect cargo loads that had been rigged for airdrop. New units called aerial port squadrons were established at Tactical Air Command bases in the United States and overseas. In the Pacific, the 6127th Air Terminal Group became the 7th Aerial Port Squadron. The 1st, 2nd and 3rd Aerial Port squadrons were established at TAC bases in the United States. A squadron was established in North Africa as the 5th Aerial Port Squadron but it soon moved to Germany, then to Evreux-Fauville Airbase, France. In 1964 MATS assumed responsibility for airlift operations in Europe and took control of 322nd Air Division; 5th Aerial Port transferred to MATS. Two years later when President Charles De Gaulle declared that all foreign military personnel must leave France, 5th Aerial Port transferred to Mildenhall, England. The history of the 6th Aerial Port Squadron during this period is unclear. Each of the aerial port squadrons included air freight, passenger and aerial delivery sections. In addition, they also included a combat control section, which appears to have been a new entity although the Army had established special "pathfinder" platoons after the invasion of Sicily. The First Allied Airborne Army established "combat control" units within its troop carrier groups, but the WW II combat controllers were actually experienced troop carrier pilots who were trained to fly gliders and, accompanied by a radio operator, were the first to land during glider operations. The two pilots then directed subsequent glider landings. The new Air Force combat controllers were enlisted men who were trained in air traffic control procedures and given parachute training. Officers were qualified as parachutists and trained to command the sections. The aerial delivery sections included both Air Force personnel who had been trained as riggers and "dropmasters," a function that had previously belonged to

The Airlifter Volume XIX

the Army. Dropmasters originally were Quartermasters who were given aircrew training and placed on flying status to eject cargo during World War II. The aerial port dropmasters were awarded the newly created aircraft loadmaster AFSC which had been established for enlisted air freight personnel who were placed on flying status to operate loading equipment and supervise loading of the gigantic new C-124.

Vietnam was the first conflict to see aerial port units in combat support operations, although their predecessors in the 6127th Air Terminal Group had been heavily involved in combat operations in Korea. Initially, the 7th Aerial Port Squadron at Naha AB, Okinawa provided aerial port functions in Southeast Asia but in 1963 the 315th Troop Carrier Group was established at Tan Son Nhut to control airlift operations in South Vietnam and the 8th APS was established under it. The 6th APS was established at Bangkok's Don Muang Airport to operate aerial port functions in Thailand. As the US escalated its role in Southeast Asia, plans were made for the establishment of additional aerial port squadrons in South Vietnam, the 14th APS at Cam Ranh Bay and the 15th APS at Da Nang, and the 2nd Aerial Port Group was established at Tan Son Nhut to command and control them. Although the 14th APS included an aerial delivery section with loadmasters assigned, the 15th at Da Nang apparently did not. All combat control operations were performed by the combat control section at Tan Son Nhut.

Aerial port personnel truly are the “unsung heroes” of the Vietnam War. Each squadron included



mobility teams made up of air freight personnel who flew into forward airfields with forklifts and other equipment to offload cargo from arriving transports and break down the pallets so the cargo could be distributed to the using units. Mobility team personnel rotated in and out of forward airfields which put them in close proximity to combat operations. Since C-123s and C-130s came to be known as “mortar magnets,” mobility team personnel were subject to almost daily mortar and rocket attacks. It can probably be safely said that they had the most dangerous job of the war as far as Air Force enlisted personnel are concerned. Even though combat controllers have taken the Army pathfinder motto of “first in, last out,” there were often mobility teams present at airfields where combat controllers weren’t present and Army airborne units included –

and still do – pathfinder personnel who were trained to setup drop zones and control airdrops.

Since large scale airdrops weren’t a feature of the Vietnam War, the combat control team’s mission was generally different than originally visualized. Combat control teams served on the ground at Khe Sanh and in the A Shau Valley during Operation DELAWARE but their primary function in Vietnam was to provide communications between airlift mission commanders, who were rated tactical airlift pilots and navigators from the out-of-country C-130 wings, and the Airlift Command Center in Saigon and its detachments, which were called Airlift Command Elements. Called TAILPIPEs because

The Airlifter Volume XIX

of their unique call signs, the airlift mission control teams flew into forward airfields where airlift operations were planned to act as the eyes and ears on the ground for the arriving pilots. An airlift mission control team, usually erroneously referred to as a combat control team because it included two combat controllers, were near-victims of the Battle of Kham Duc when someone in 834th Air Division insisted that they be flown back into the besieged airfield after they had been previously evacuated. They were landed at the airfield at the deserted camp over the protests of the airlift mission commander and the pilot who was ordered to take them back in. What would have happened to them had not C-123 pilot Lt. Col. Joe Jackson managed to land and pick them up will never be known (there were other Americans and hundreds of South Vietnamese still on the ground in the vicinity of the evacuated camp and most eventually made it to safety.)

Rigging of cargo in Southeast Asia continued to be a US Army Quartermaster responsibility with cargo rigged by riggers from the 109th, 383rd, 549th and 623rd Quartermaster Companies and Air Force aerial delivery personnel performed acceptance inspections. For some reason, in-country aerial port personnel did not normally fly as second loadmaster on C-130 airdrop missions. Instead, additional loadmasters from the C-130 squadrons were assigned to temporary duty as “duty loadmasters” and flew as second loadmaster on drops. (I’m not certain about C-123s. C-7 Caribous didn’t carry loadmasters. Loadmaster duties were performed by the flight engineer, sometimes with the assistance of Army Quartermasters, particularly from Special Forces.) In addition, the 834th Air Division detachments at Cam Ranh Bay and Tan Son Nhut included a few qualified C-130 loadmasters who sometimes flew on airdrop missions. When the 463rd TAW assumed the COMMANDO VAULT C-130 bombing mission in early 1969, second loadmaster duties were usually performed by one of the Det. Two, 834th AD loadmasters. Rigging of the huge bombs was performed by 14th APS aerial delivery personnel.

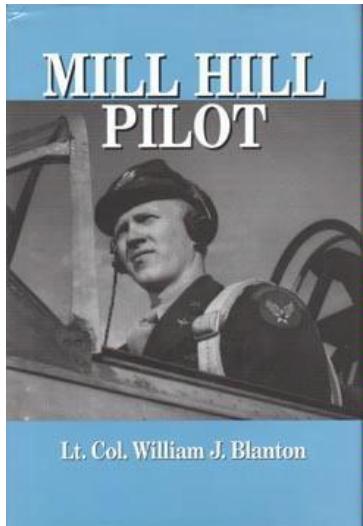
Aerial port personnel were also involved in other, now lesser known, troop carrier operations of the 1950s and 1960s. In the Pacific, 7th APS supported airlift operations into Taiwan during the Quemoy-Matsu crisis in 1958 while their peers in 5th APS in Germany supported operations in Lebanon during a simultaneous crisis. In 1960 and continuing until 1964 5th APS personnel were involved in airlift operations in the Belgian Congo. When TAC C-130s deployed Belgian commandos from Europe to the Congo for operations DRAGON ROUGE/RED DRAGON and DRAGON NOIR/BLACK DRAGON, 5th APS loadmasters were assigned to each C-130 crew. Our own Don Strobaugh, who was then a combat control captain, went with the Belgians along with a radio repairman. Although he was forbidden from jumping in with the Belgian paratroops, he and his teammate flew in aboard one of the C-130s and supervised operations on the ground. A few months later in April 1965 the US deployed elements of the 82nd Airborne Division to the Dominican Republic in Operation POWER PACK. While 3rd APS personnel at Pope loaded C-130s carrying additional troops and cargo to Santo Domingo Airfield, elements of the 2nd APS deployed from Lockbourne AFB, Ohio to offload them. (There evidently were no aerial port ground personnel involved in the original deployment, which was planned as an airdrop.)

In short, although it wasn’t until well into the second decade of US troop carrier operations that aerial port teams became a part of it, they performed valuable service in support of airlift operations throughout the most turbulent period of American history since World War II.

The Airlifter Volume XIX

(Note – after TAC's tactical airlift assets were merged into MAC after the Vietnam War, the former TAC aerial port squadrons were renamed “mobile aerial ports.”)

Mill Hill Pilot



Among the growing membership of the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association, we have many members who can only be described as icons of the troop carrier mission. One such person is Lt. Col. William J. “Bones” Blanton, who has been with us from the very inception and is now one of our Lifetime World War II members. Back in the 1990s Bill wrote and had his memoir of his military experiences published by Professional Press, a small local publisher in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. I recently had the privilege of reading it. Born in Lumberton, NC, his dad moved the family to Wilmington in 1932 after he found work there in a cotton mill. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, he was a high school student in Wilmington. Some of his friends dropped out of school to rush to enlist but Bill, on the strong recommendation of his father, who had served prior to and during World War I, decided to finish school first. In 1943 he enlisted in the Army Air Corps as an aviation cadet and

was sent to Centre College in Danville, Kentucky for cadet training and then to Spence Field at Moultrie, Georgia for preflight training.

Although Bill wanted to be a pilot, he was picked for navigator training and sent to Hondo Field west of San Antonio. By the time he graduated and was commissioned on August 17, 1945, the war in Europe was over and Japanese Emperor Hirohito had agreed to surrender. Large numbers of US troops were still based overseas and Bill was transferred to the Panama Canal Zone to fly on B-24 Liberators. A few months after he arrived at Rio Hato Airfield, his squadron traded in its Liberators for B-17s. Bill applied for a regular commission the Air Corps, but his application was denied because of a Federal law that forbade the commissioning into the regular Army of officers who hadn't yet reached their 21st birthday. After he applied to be mustered out, he was assigned to a mission to fly the Army's IG back to the States in “a plushed-up” B-17. The general was seated near the navigator's table and they talked a lot during the flight. Bill voiced his displeasure that he wasn't eligible for a regular commission and the general asked when he'd be 21. He told him his birthdate, which was only a few months away, and the general encouraged him to apply again because he thought there was going to be another round of commissioning. Bill was discharged in January 1947 and went to Washington to live with his sister while attending college at Columbia Technical Institute in preparation for enrolling at the University of North Carolina. He also wanted to renew his relationship with a young woman he had met during a flight to Washington from Panama, and who would soon be his wife.

As the IG had said, the Army came out with a new round of appointments in March 1947 and Bill reapplied. In June he was notified that he was being offered a regular commission as a second lieutenant.

The Airlifter Volume XIX

His new assignment was with the 37th Troop Carrier Squadron at Greenville Airbase, South Carolina where the 313th Troop Carrier Group was based. He was assigned as a navigator on C-82s, and thus began his association with the troop carrier mission in which he would spend the next nineteen years. A few weeks after he reported to his new squadron, he and Kitty Burgess were married and began a life that would take them all around the country and eventually to Japan. Bill now had a regular commission and an assignment as a navigator, but he still wanted to be a pilot. In December 1947 he submitted an application for pilot training and less than two months later was notified that he had been accepted for the class starting on March 1, 1948. Upon graduation he received an assignment to the 10th Tactical



Reconnaissance Wing at Pope, an assignment with which he was not happy. Fortunately, the assignment was only temporary and he went to Marietta, Georgia for a few weeks with the 2589th Air Force Reserve Training Center. Finally, he got orders to Smyrna Air Force Base, Tennessee where he was assigned to the 314th

Troop Carrier Wing. Initially, he floated between a couple of squadrons as a pilot on C-82s and CG-15 gliders. In those days troop carrier pilots were required to be dual-qualified in both powered aircraft and gliders. One of the squadrons he was in was supposed to equip with Northrop C-125s, a tri-motored airplane that the Air Force intended to use as an assault transport. Although the C-125 had good performance, the fixed-gear airplane was plagued with mechanical problems and only three were ever delivered to the 2601st Assault Squadron. The squadron inactivated and its personnel transferred to the 61st Troop Carrier Squadron, which soon equipped with new Fairchild C-119s. Shortly after Bill checked out in the C-119, he participated in SWARMER, a joint Air Force/Army exercise in the Carolinas that was supposed to test troop carrier ideas advocated by Lt. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton and Gen. Henry H. Arnold during the war. (For some reason, Brig. Gen. William H. Tunner was given command of the exercise even though he had zero experience in troop carrier operations and no combat experience.)

On June 25, 1950 North Korean troops crossed the DMZ into South Korea thus beginning the Korean War, or "Truman's Conflict," as the troops referred to it. The new Department of Defense began making plans to deploy elements of the 314th Troop Carrier Wing to Japan and on August 28 Bill received orders sending him and his crew to the Far East for what was supposed to be a 60-day TDY which turned into a sixteen-month assignment. They were getting ready to depart, but the engineer hadn't shown up at the airplane. The squadron commander, Major McNulty, was at the airplane and when the tardy engineer finally showed up in a taxi, he pulled out his pocket knife and sliced the airman's stripes right off of his sleeve!

Bill and his crew finally arrived at Nagoya, Japan on September 18 after a harrowing trip in which they flew back to Kwajalein on one engine. The next day they flew to Ashiya, an airfield on Kyushu that was closest to Korea, which was only 90 miles to the west. From Ashiya, they commenced hauling cargo and troops to Korea. Their first mission was to Seoul's Kimpo Airport, which had just been retaken by Marines who landed at Inchon while Bill and his crew were enroute to Japan. Bill describes his loads as various types of supplies, rations and barrels of fuel – the same kinds of supplies troop carriers and their successors have been hauling to troops in combat since 1942. While the C-119s and other transports delivered their loads into airfields in North and South Korea, the C-119s were often used to

The Airlifter Volume XIX

airdrop supplies to troops in the field. On October 20 the 314th C-119s dropped 3,200 paratroopers from the 187th Regimental Combat Team on a drop zone near Sukchon and Sunchon north of Pyongyang to block North Korean forces who were retreating to the north. Bill's crew dropped 42 paratroops while



others dropped artillery and other equipment. It was the first time heavy equipment had been dropped in combat. The C-119s continued dropping supplies until the airfield at Yonpo fell into UN hands and became available for landings. The North Korean army was on the verge of defeat when the Chinese entered the war.

UN intelligence had determined that Chinese forces were massing on the north side of the Yalu River, which divided Korea from China. General Douglas MacArthur wanted to attack the Chinese before they crossed the river but

Truman denied his request. Chinese troops began slipping into Korea in October and in November they mounted an attack and began driving the UN forces to the south. During the retreat from the Chosen (also spelled Chosin) Reservoir, the C-119s airdropped cargo to the retreating Marines and soldiers while C-47s landed on hastily constructed airstrips to evacuate casualties. Horrendous winter weather had poured out of Mongolia across the Korean Peninsula and drove temperatures well below freezing. The C-119 crews had to fly with the clamshell doors removed and minus 42 air poured into the cargo compartment. On December 4 Bones picked up radio chatter about a Navy pilot who had crash-landed nearby and one of his squadron mates had landed to try to free him from the cockpit of his airplane. He circled over the site during the attempted rescue for which the Navy pilot, Lt. Thomas Jerome Hudner, Jr was awarded the Medal of Honor.

Lieutenant (j.g.) Thomas Jerome Hudner, Jr., United States Navy

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as a pilot in Fighter Squadron 32, while attempting to rescue a squadron mate whose plane, struck by antiaircraft fire and trailing smoke, was forced down behind enemy lines. Quickly maneuvering to circle the downed pilot and protect him from enemy troops infesting the area, Lt. (j.g.) Hudner risked his life to save the injured flier who was trapped alive in the burning wreckage. Fully aware of the extreme danger in landing on the rough mountainous terrain and the scant hope of escape or survival in subzero temperature, he put his plane down skillfully in a deliberate wheels-up landing in the presence of enemy troops. With his bare hands, he packed the fuselage with snow to keep the flames away from the pilot and struggled to pull him free. Unsuccessful in this, he returned to his crashed aircraft and radioed other airborne planes, requesting that a helicopter be dispatched with an ax and fire extinguisher. He then remained on the spot despite the continuing danger from enemy action and, with the assistance of the rescue pilot, renewed a desperate but unavailing battle against time, cold, and flames. Lt. (j.g.) Hudner's exceptionally valiant action and selfless devotion to a shipmate sustain and enhance the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.

The Airlifter Volume XIX

A few days before Christmas, Bill's crew flew a load of Christmas parcels that had been shipped to Japan by readers of the Chicago Tribune from Tachikawa to Kimpo. A Tribune reporter accompanied the shipment and wrote about the mission for his paper. After the first of the year Lt. Blanton's crew dropped bundles of another kind, and this time they were intended for the communists. For several days his crew dropped cargo to a US unit at a particular location at a certain time of day. On the Chinese New Year they were instructed to drop at another point a few miles away. He found later that they new drop zone was in communist territory and the bundles were booby trapped! Another drop mission was even more lethal when they dropped thirty 55-gallon barrels of napalm on Chinese positions. In March Bill's crew was part of another large-scale airborne operation at Musan-Ni. One of his troopers was an Army sergeant who had been awarded the Medal of Honor in World War II. While enroute to the drop zone, the sergeant's ripcord somehow was pulled and his parachute spilled out, which made it impossible for him to jump with the rest of the troops. When they landed, the sergeant approached Bill and asked him to write up a statement on his behalf. Otherwise, he was expecting to be court-martialed. At the time, Bill wasn't aware of the man's record but an article came out about him in Stars and Stripes a few days later.

After sixteen months in Japan on what was supposed to be a 60-day TDY, Bill finally received orders to return to the US. Instead of returning to Smyrna, he was assigned to the 514th TCW, a reserve unit based at Mitchell Field on Long Island. Because he was a regular officer in a sea of reservists, the base personnel office assigned him as commander of the Air Police squadron! He got a call from his former commander in the 61st, Major McNulty, that he was requesting him for his office as chief of airlift operations at TAC Headquarters. Bones made the mistake of notifying his commander, a non-rated colonel, that he was getting orders and the colonel had them canceled! Fortunately, a few weeks later Bill was transferred into the tactical group and went back to flying with a C-46 squadron. The wing soon converted to C-119s, and since he was the only C-119 qualified pilot in the outfit, he was placed in charge of training for the rest of the wing pilots. The 514th was soon redesignated as the 313th Troop Carrier Group and transferred to Sewart Air Force Base, where the former Smyrna Air Force Base had been renamed.

In June 1955 the 313th inactivated and its personnel were reassigned to other units in the 314th TCW. Bill eventually ended up in the 62nd. After six months in Europe with the 62nd, Bill returned to Sewart and was assigned as a pilot with the 321st TCS. Although he had experience in operations and plans, it was not being utilized. Plans were underway to convert the 314th to the new Lockheed C-130 Hercules and in December 1956 Bill was selected to attend a staff-oriented course for operations personnel. On February 7 he was given a new assignment as the C-130 Project Conversion Officer for the 314th Troop Carrier Group. The following November he was designated as the 314th TCW Wing Standardization Pilot, a new title for what had formerly been "chief pilot." Six months later in June he was given the assignment of Chief of Wing Standardization for the 314th TCW. In his new capacity Bill, who was still a captain, was responsible for establishing all of the standardized procedures for wing personnel, including flightline personnel as well as aircrew. He made frequent trips to the Lockheed factory for meetings where factory and Air Force personnel were writing the aircraft manuals.

In the summer of 1958 the young King of Iraq was assassinated. President Eisenhower feared that the violence would spill over into Lebanon and ordered the deployment of a Composite Air Strike Force, including 24 C-130s, to the Middle East. Captain Blanton was ordered to proceed immediately to Langley with a C-130 and crew to set up a CALSU, or Combat Airlift Support Unit, and prepare to move TAC fighters to Europe. As soon as the other C-130s arrived, he and his crew supervised their loading and departure for Bermuda and on to Chateauroux, France and from there to their destination in the Middle East. As soon as the last airplane left, he departed with his crew for Chateauroux where he learned that he was to proceed to Evreux and set up a CALSU to coordinate the TAC C-130s, which would be returning

The Airlifter Volume XIX

there after dropping their loads. The TAC crews were up for 72 hours without an opportunity to rest. Later that year he was assigned to the planning staff for Operation BANYAN TREE, an exercise involving the delivery by parachute of a large force of paratroopers to drop zones in Panama. After planning the mission, he was chosen to lead it with his fellow planners, Captain (later lieutenant general) Robert Coverdale and Major Dan Grimes as his officer crewmembers. While he was on the mission, he was promoted to major. He and Major Grimes were later assigned to a special project to develop a high altitude, low-opening cargo drop capability for TAC C-130s. They went to Edwards AFB, California where they developed procedures to drop 24,000 pound loads of containers from 25,000 feet in darkness. Their main problem was determining the most effective altitude for the reefed parachutes to open and to develop a method to activate the shotgun shell cutting knives at the proper altitude, which turned out to be 4,000 feet above the ground, to insure the best accuracy. They developed a method to use ballistics to set a timer which would activate the cutting knife at the proper altitude. The boundaries of the testing zone, the location of which they weren't informed, were 5,000' X 5,000' with a successful test resulting in all bundles falling within the area. Since they would be dropping blind at night, they determined to use a radio beacon and drop based on the swing of the needle. Before the actual test, they flew a number of test missions to compare their observations in the airplane with measurements made by personnel on the ground. They flew one test drop at midnight on a Saturday night and later learned that all twelve bundles fell on the designated field.

In July 1959 Major Blanton reported to Langley for a new assignment at Headquarters, TAC where he was assigned to the office of the DCO as an operations officer in the Tactical Operations Branch, the same job Major McNulty had wanted him for in 1952. His principle responsibility was serving as the contact for all airlift matters between TAC Headquarters and the Continental Army Command, the Army's principle ground combat organization. He met monthly with his counterpart at CONARC to allocate airlift to the Army's various users, with the bulk going to the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions. Some 55% of TAC's airlift was allocated to the Army while the other 45% went to Air Force-directed missions and training. Other airlift requirements went through USAF Headquarters. He was project officer for all presidential trips abroad and was also in charge of planning for TAC support of the Navy's DEEP FREEZE project in Antarctica, which used ski-equipped C-130Ds from the 61st TCS at Sewart.

In August 1961 Maj. Blanton entered the Armed Forces Staff College at Norfolk, Virginia with a graduation date in January 1962. Two weeks after he received the orders assigning him to the school, he was notified that his next assignment would be with 315th Air Division headquarters at Tachikawa, a place with which he was familiar. He and his family departed Travis AFB, California on February 6 on a MATS C-121 for the flight to Japan. When he reported for his new assignment, he learned that he would be Director of Flight Standardization. At the time, 315th commanded three squadrons of C-130As, one at Tachikawa and two at Naha, Okinawa. A TDY squadron of TAC C-123s from the 464th TCW at Pope had just begun operations out of Tan Son Nhut and a second squadron would soon be on the way. The 315th Troop Carrier Group was soon organized at Tan Son Nhut to provide operational control of the C-123s and of out-of-country C-130s on missions in Vietnam. Bill was responsible for standardizations for all of them and when the C-123s were PCSed, he organized a C-123 Stan/Eval group at Tan Son Nhut. He also set up a HALO program when the division was tasked with the mission. When the Air Force decided to write a new AFM 55-130, he was 315th and PACAF's representative at the conference where the manual was reviewed. He also developed aircrew procedures for the use of the Air Force's new 463L cargo handling system.

Bill arrived at Tachikawa as a major and was promoted to lieutenant colonel while he was there. On February 2, 1965 he departed Japan for a new assignment at Ninth Air Force headquarters at Shaw

The Airlifter Volume XIX

AFB, South Carolina, which was under the command of Maj. General Marvin McNickle, under whom Bill had served when he was wing commander at Sewart in 1953-54. Bill's original assignment had been to the TAC IG's office but General McNickle requested that his assignment be changed. When he arrived in Sumter, he was assigned as Chief of Airlift Training in Ninth Air Force Hq. His new assignment put him in contact with TAC's three principle C-130 wings, the 314th at Sewart, the 463rd at Langley and the 464th at Pope. (The 516th at Dyess and 313th at Forbes fell under Twelfth Air Force.) He was also responsible for training of several Air Force reserve units. When President Johnson decided to deploy US troops to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, Lt. Col. Blanton went up to Pope to serve as Plans Officer, Airlift Task Force for operation POWER PACK. When TAC was tasked to establish Readiness Training Units in conjunction with the FAST FLY program to provide trained aircrews for duty in Southeast Asia, Bill's office was in charge of implementing the program at Pope, Lockbourne and Sewart.

When Bill reported for his new assignment at Shaw, he was nearing 22 years of military service and was eligible for retirement. Although he had intended to remain in uniform for 30 years, the war in Vietnam and family considerations caused him to have second thoughts. He and his wife Kitty had three children who were in school, and the transfer from Japan to South Carolina had affected them. The military was changing as politicians had started to use it for their own purposes and some were deliberately ham-stringing the military and preventing it from truly fighting the war in Southeast Asia. Bill and his family are devout Christians and heavily involved in Southern Baptist Churches. In January 1966 he put in his retirement papers, but military policy required a waiting period of six months. He was finally notified that his last day of service would be July 31, 1966 with his official retirement date on August 1. He and his family returned to Wilmington, NC where he had spent most of his childhood.

I feel very fortunate to have been able to read Bones Blanton's memoir, and that we in the TCTAA are privileged to have men such as him in our ranks. We have a rich heritage and some of the men who are part of that early heritage are still with us. Bill's book was published in 1997 at his expense. Although it is not generally available for purchase, there are a few copies available on Amazon.com.

Dues Reminder

It's that time of year again, the time when dues fall due. Many of our members are current but the following people's dues are now due:

Don Nisbett
Jim Ostrem
Sid McSwain
Carl Wyrick
John Smith
Jim Kinser
Charlie Luceno

The following members are inactive.
Reinstate your membership by paying dues!

Mel Copeland
Bill Crabtree
Tom Talbert
David Emerson
Charles Palmer
Wes Caton
Tony Kelley
Dick Herman
Don Strobaugh
Leroy "Doc" Holloway
Stuart Seely
Bill Wingrove
Jim Sternhagen
Dick Guessford
Michael Vaquera
James Shaugnessy

The Airlifter Volume XIX

Albert Moreno
Ronald Janow
Frank Pena
Charles Tourella
Robert Riojas

Dues are \$25.00 for two years, \$100 for Ten and \$250.00 for Life. World War II veterans

are entitled to complimentary Life Membership.
Please mail your check to:

TCTAA
3727 Hill Family Lane
Missouri City, TX 77459

What is the Purpose of Dues? What About Donations?

No one has ever asked, but since there is some space to fill, we might as well use it to discuss why we have dues anyway. Let me assure everyone that no one receives any kind of compensation whatsoever from the Association, other than reimbursement for expenses that have been paid out of their own pocket. (Many members consider personal expenses as charitable deductions since the TCTAA is a considered by the IRS as a charitable organization because we are a "wartime veterans" organization.) When the organization was first established, the purpose of dues was originally primarily to cover the cost of publishing and mailing out the newsletters. We still have publishing and mailing costs since we have some members who aren't active with Email. We also have other expenses, such as paying for our website domain and for web hosting services, which aren't that much but they do add up. We try not to use dues for convention

costs, although we did have to dip into them in 2010 due to the low turnout and a couple of last-minute cancellations due to health concerns on the part of members who had already registered.

The TCTAA is recognized by the IRS as a charitable organization, which means that all donations (not dues) are fully deductible for tax purposes. This is a benefit that opens up a lot of possibilities, which we have yet to use or even fully explore. For example, we could use donations for the publication of historical documents. In 2008 when member Steve Privette lost his home to Hurricane Ike, we took up donations and presented him and his wife Linda with a check which helped them during their temporary living while they were awaiting reimbursement from their insurance company. We have accepted donations from corporations which were used to offset the cost of our conventions.