

The Airlifter Volume XVII

The Airlifter



Newsletter of the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association

Promoting and preserving the troop carrier/tactical airlift heritage

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Volume XVII

Financial Report

As of today's date, we have \$5,890.05 in our checking account and one check for \$25.00 to be deposited, a total of \$5,915.05. There have been no expenditures since our last newsletter.

Convention in Warner Robins

Planning for our upcoming convention in Warner Robins, Georgia is nearly complete. Arrangements have been made with the Hilton Garden Inn and Hampton Inn for special rates of \$99.00 at each hotel and they are now accepting reservations. The phone number for the Hilton Garden Inn is (478) 971-1550. For the Hampton Inn, the number is (478) 953-9443. Tell them you are with the TCTAA when you call in order to get our special rate. It is necessary to call the hotel direct to book at our rate.

Our agenda will basically be this:

Wednesday, October 17 – arrive with registration that evening in the hospitality room.

Thursday, October 18 – Board and members meetings and presentations all day, with a box lunch served. (Ladies will be welcome for lunch.) Reception that evening at the Museum of Aviation adjacent to Robins Air Force Base.

Friday, October 19 – Take coaches to Marietta to tour the Lockheed-Martin Factory.

Saturday, October 20 – Memorial Service, other events at the Museum of Aviation, afternoon open for individual tours of the museum. Banquet that evening at the Museum of Aviation.

Sunday, October 21 – Farewell breakfast at the Hilton Garden Inn.

Breakfast will be served on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday mornings at the Hilton Garden Inn. Lunch on Thursday and Saturday. The registration fee is \$160.00 for members, \$120.00 for spouses/member guests and \$185.00 for non-members. Costs of all food, which include refreshments at Thursday reception, the Friday banquet, breakfast Thursday-Sunday and lunch on Thursday and Saturday are included in the registration fee. Non-members have the option of joining the Association upon registration and then paying the member rate. We are currently arranging for a guest speaker at the banquet. Any attendees are welcome to make a presentation that is somehow related to our organization and its

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intent. Please let Tom Stalvey know if you are interested in making a presentation. The Association has a projector available for Power Point and other computer-generated presentations.

Roger Greuel's wife Janet is working on an agenda of things for the ladies to do on Thursday while we are having our meetings and on Friday for those who don't want to make the trip to Marietta to visit the Lockheed/Martin factory.

Wartime Service Dates

The TCTAA is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a wartime service organization, which gives us certain privileges not available to members of 901C (19) veterans organizations. Because of this status, we have to maintain a percentage of at least ninety percent wartime veterans. This is currently not a problem, but is something we have to be aware of. The Federally recognized Wartime Service Periods are as follows:

Mexican Border Period: May 9, 1916-April 5, 1917; for veterans who served in Mexico, on its borders or in adjacent waters.

World War I: April 6, 1917 – November 11, 1918; for veterans who served in Russia, April 6, 1917-April 1, 1920, extended through July 1, 1921.

World War II: December 7, 1941 – December 31, 1946

Korean War: June 27, 1950 – January 31, 1955.

Vietnam War: August 5, 1964 – May 7, 1975 (February 28, 1961 for veterans who actually served "in country" before August 5, 1964.)

Gulf War: August 2, 1990 through a date to be set by law or Presidential Proclamation.

For our organization, this really doesn't present too much of a problem, however it could possibly mean a restriction on the number of veterans whose service was after World War II and before Korea and after Korea and before Vietnam. For each such member and for associate/family members, we have to have ten members whose service was in one of the specified wartime periods.

Mighty Eighth Museum

While you're in Georgia, you might want to consider a trip to Savannah and a visit to the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum, which is located just west of there in Pooler. We are all familiar with the Eighth Air Force's record in World War II when it's massive force of Boeing B-17s and B-24s waged war on Germany and Occupied Europe. Some of us have relatives who served with it – for example, my dad was an aerial engineer on B-24s with an Eighth Air Force group (93rd) and my uncle was a B-24 pilot in two other groups. What few are aware of is that Eighth originally also included a troop carrier wing with two groups until the North Africa invasion when they flew American and British paratroops to North Africa and became part of Twelfth Air Force. Savannah is 163 miles east of Warner Robins. The museum's web site is www.mightyeighth.org.

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Troop Carrier in Alaska

The northern Pacific area of the Pacific Ocean Area of Operations is often called the “forgotten theater” of World War II, and as with all of the areas of operations, troop carriers played a significant role there. Because the Aleutians Chain, which become the Kuriles in the western part near Japan, practically connect Alaska with Japan, it was obvious that Alaska itself would be threatened. Shortly after the attacks on Pearl Harbor and the Philippines, the Army activated Alaska Air Force to defend Alaska. Barely a month later the new air force became Eleventh Air Force, in keeping with the Army’s new policy of numbering its domestic and overseas air forces. Four months later on June 3, 1942 Japanese carrier aircraft attacked Dutch Harbor, a city on the island of Unalaska at the beginnings of the Aleutian chain. The attack was initially believed to be the beginnings of a Japanese invasion of the Alaskan Mainland, but was actually a feint to draw attention away from Midway, the Japanese real target. Three days later Japanese troops landed on the islands of Attu and Kiska, remote islands a little over half way between Alaska and the Kamchatka Peninsula and less than half way to the northern islands of Japan that were claimed by the United States. The two islands remained in Japanese hands for just under one year. On May 11, 1943 US troops landed on Attu and by the end of the month the island was in Allied hands. An invasion of Kiska in August found that the Japanese had abandoned the island. Allied troops still managed to suffer over 300 casualties, all from “friendly fire”!

After the Japanese lost Attu and abandoned Kiska, the “war at the top of the world” became essentially an air war, with US Army and Navy bombers attacking Japanese targets in the Kurile Islands. The War Department considered basing B-29s in the Aleutians for attacks on Japan but abandoned the idea due to the often horrible weather conditions – frequent fog and misting rain – that was prevalent in the Aleutians. To support combat operations in the Aleutians, Eleventh Air Force included two troop carrier squadrons, the 42nd and 54th. The two squadrons operated out of Elmendorf Field at Anchorage until February, 1944 when the 42nd transferred to Lawson Field, Georgia and was ultimately inactivated. After that the 54th remained as the sole troop carrier squadron in the Eleventh Air Force area. The following story came from new member R.T. Short whose father, Richard, was a pilot in the 54th TCS.

Alaska Flying, 1944

Christmas time 1944, 17 new pilots arrived in Alaska. Lt. Richard Short, describing himself as an apple-cheeked boy of 20 from Omaha, Nebraska and newly graduated from flight school, recalls the time.

Lt. Richard Short

We arrived in Anchorage about Christmas time, 1944. Snow and cold greeted us and we were sent out to the outskirts of Fort Richardson under control of the Army Command, who were not too happy with these so called, “fly boys”, who received 50% more pay for flying at least four hours per month. In the middle of the forest with deep snow and bitter cold, we were placed in small Quonset huts with a kerosene heater

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in the center of the hut, which barely worked and was totally inadequate. For several days we were given nothing to do, except to fall out at about 6:00 am and answer roll calls, after climbing down



several flights of steep stairs covered with deep snow and then sent back to our hut. We saw no reason for the charade. We did not fall out for roll call. After being threatened with dire consequences, we were told we would be court marshaled or given the 104 Article of War. The Army was going to make examples of us, until the 54th C.O. Colonel Grossmith called the Army telling them to send the pilots over to his squadron. So we became members of the 54th Troop Carrier Squadron, a nice Christmas present.

We were assigned four men to non-commissioned officers' apartments, with our indoctrination beginning with local flights and becoming familiar with the C-47 and local area. The next step was to accompany as a third pilot on trips out to the chain of islands to learn the actual routine of flying with radio beams and directional radio compasses.



Also when to fly and when not to fly, to follow the radio beams religiously, and practice locally blind flying along with link training. Instrument flying, when we would fly from base to base and the weather was a solid overcast, we flew at about 7,000 to 10,000 feet using the radio beams as highways. When we would pass over the beam transmitting station, which was close to the runway, the radio altimeter would suddenly start spinning and the noise from the beams would go silent, letting you know you were directly

over the station. From there you would begin your descent using one of the radio beams as a reference point. So you timed your distance away from the station then made a 180 degree turn all the time letting down hoping to break out of the overcast so you could see and land visibly. However, in overcast weather you usually did not break out until you got close to the ocean. Then hugging the ocean you found the runway. If you were not lucky, then you used the zero, zero approach. During the summer months when you would check your destination, the report would be clear and CFR conditions, but when or before you got to your destination in a short period of time, the land areas would suddenly develop a

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ground layer of fog, maybe 50 to 100 feet off the ground so that everything above the fog was clear. It was an odd sight to see everything above 100 feet to be free and clear above the fog.

You would leave Elmendorf Field early in the morning 5:00 or 6:00 am with a load of freight and replacement soldiers for the Aleutian bases. Our crew consisted of a pilot, a co-pilot, radioman and a crew chief. The pilot usually was a First Lieutenant or Captain, with the co-pilot usually a Second Lieutenant. We would start down the Kenai Peninsula, then carefully through the pass with mountains on both sides of you, higher than your cruising altitude. You were taught to pay attention here if you were not CFR. We then began our milk run, stopping at Port Heiden and Naknek if we had something for them. Their runways were just carved out of rock and tundra, being a little hazardous to land on at times. Later on R&R men would be flown into Naknek for fabulous fishing trips, one cast, and one fish. After leaving Naknek it was on to Cold Bay and then Umnak. From Umnak if it was getting late in the day, we would stop at Adak and R.O.N. (remain over night). Or if we did not have to make many stops, we would go on to Shemya or Attu. At Attu you would see Navy bombers, as they were taking off to bomb the northern Japanese islands. After Attu you would turn around and head back to Elmendorf,



stopping at those bases on the way back that you had freight for. We had pilots that would fly to Adak and return home within the same 24 hour period, especially during the summer when you had 24-hour daylight.

After a flight your name was placed at the bottom of the list of names in operations. You didn't fly again until your name came to the top. There were periods when you didn't

have a flight for three or four days and as long as a week. You were required to report each afternoon at Operations for a meeting where we usually had a ball playing ping pong and socializing. We were required to read the latest maintenance manuals and occasionally served as Officer of the Day. Also we were regularly scheduled for link training or practiced instrument flying locally which consisted of flying the plane totally on instruments even though the co-pilot could see and you were actually CFR. Otherwise your time was your own, with many trips to Anchorage.

Getting back to the island bases, there were some that were difficult to land on if the weather was not the best. One was Adak where you had to come in off the ocean heading west. If you missed your

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approach it was tough sledding because there were hills on the west, north and south sides of the runway. The runway started right at the waters' edge. The clouds were usually low 50 to 100 feet so you were right on the deck. Attu was the same, if you couldn't see the runway soon enough you had better turn and get out, trying something else because Attu was a short runway. Shemya was a whole different story with the whole island being just one long runway with absolutely no obstructions to run into. In case you missed your first pass, thank God for the Bartow lights on each side of the runway which helped orientate as to where the runway was. Many times visibility was zero and so bad you could see only one row of Bartow lights. You didn't know which side of the row the runway was on. Then just as you were ready to go around making another pass, you would spot the other row and swiftly line up and set the plane down safely with the tower asking you for your location, as they did not know you had landed because they could not see 100 feet. Usually if they had 100 foot ceiling over the runway we would drop down to the ocean staying below the overcast making for us an easy landing. Our planes would fly when no one else would fly the chain due to bad weather. **There were airline pilots flying for the ATC (Air Transport Command) who would not venture out in the kind of weather we called "routine".**

I remember one trip at Cold Bay where the winds blew at about 100 mph for several days. The forecast was for several more days. The wind direction finally swung right down the runway. One of the 54th pilots decided to take off in it figuring it was straight down the runway. He did, with the plane instead of roaring away, it seemed to rise vertically and of course once he was in the air, the wind strength meant nothing, so I got my crew, doing the same thing, no problem.

Icing of the wings was a periodic problem, but when you dropped down in altitude it started to melt. The spraying of isopropyl helped to melt the ice on the windshield, which at times, was two to three inches thick. Our pilots had so perfected their skills that zero ceiling and zero visibility did not stop them from landing. In other words, we could get in without having to go around making another attempt.

We also had on our C-47's a radio altimeter which was very useful when attempting a landing, where you could not see the runway. If my memory serves me correctly, we used this unit from about 100 feet down to about as close to the ground that you wanted to go before pulling up and going around or landing if you spotted the runway. It seems it was in ten foot increments, with each pilot having his own minimum height to the runway before he abandoned the landing. Three colored lights indicated where you stood as far as your relation to the distance from the ground. You set the height for the lights to let you know how high you were from the ground. I believe they called this system the SCS-51A Glide Path System. So along comes an experimental program in about 1945 called GCA (Ground Controlled Approach). We were to be the guinea pigs to see if a guy sitting in a little shack along side the runway could give you directions bringing you down to the end of the runway. Then telling you to take over and landing, as you should be able to see the Bartow lights. We practiced this new approach at Elmendorf where you had a special radio band tuned to the GCA. The fellow would come on giving you heading and

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air speed to follow. He would regulate your glide path, do everything but land the plane for you. They then took GCA out to the islands, setting up shop and life got considerably easier when tough landings in bad weather were made. Although I must say there were times when GCA said, all right you are right over the runway, "take over" and you still couldn't see anything, so you reverted back to your old system, bringing it in.

Sometimes one plane was assigned to shuttle between Shemya and Attu. It would last about ten days to two weeks. I believe the freight was brought into Shemya where we took what was needed to Attu. You usually cruised about 50 feet off the water back and forth, with most of the time spent loading and unloading the planes. As I remember we lost two planes while I was there. One letting down into Cold Bay hit the mountains, with some of the crew surviving. Another plane crashed on landing at Elmendorf during a storm, most likely wind shear was the cause. No survivors as I remember. Also one plane dropped through the ice at Point Barrow. In the spring it was brought to Nome, after being repaired. I flew to Nome with a crew flying it back to Elmendorf.

After the war with Japan ended the squadron took the paint off the C-47's making them silver. The C-54's arrived in 1946 being able to fly non-stop from Elmendorf to Shemya. With the end of the war, my wife and I packed up our things and headed back to the States.

Project EARS

Throughout the Cold War the United States operated a number of classified missions using modified transport aircraft, particularly C-47s and C-130s, monitoring radio traffic from Iron and Bamboo Curtain countries. Sometimes called "Ferretting" missions, they were officially called Signals Intelligence, later changed to Electronics Intelligence. Since they were carried out by squadrons assigned outside of the troop carrier/tactical airlift mission even though the flight crews often came from TAC troop carrier squadrons, they normally can be considered outside of the spectrum of troop carrier operations.



However, at the height of the Vietnam War, a number of pilots and flight engineers from TAC troop carrier/tactical airlift squadrons were sent on temporary duty status to supplement the assigned flight crews in the 556th Reconnaissance Squadron at Yokota AB, Japan.

The 556th was one of two overseas units that operated modified C-130s on intelligence-gathering missions. The 7406th Support Squadron at Rhine Main, Germany began

C-130A-II operating modified C-130A-IIs in 1957. One of their airplanes was shot down on a mission in close proximity to Soviet Armenia in September, 1958. Originally designated as the 6901st Reconnaissance Squadron, the squadron became the 556th in 1968. While the European-based unit

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operated modified C-13As, the Japan-based squadron operated modified C-130Bs. Both types were distinctive from conventional transports because of the large devices mounted on pylons at the end of the wing. Although they looked like oversize pylon fuel tanks, they were actually the housing for the radio monitoring antenna.

There is an element of confusion over the assignment of the two squadrons because of their support of US Air Force Security Service operations. The flight crews were assigned to the respective theater command, PACAF in the case of the 556th, while the people in the capsule in the cargo compartment were AFSS. Flight crews consisted of two pilots, an engineer and two navigators. The AFSS team in the back consisted of linguists and radio technicians. There was little contact with them by the flight crew.



C-130B-II

Project EARS came into being. EARS was the codeword for the temporary assignment of a contingent of Tactical Air Command C-130 pilots, flight engineers and support personnel to Yokota to support the operations out of Cam Ranh. Elwyn Whitsitt, one of our newest members, was a pilot based at Pope where he had been for several years. He and several other pilots were selected for the TDY to Yokota, along with other personnel from Langley and Forbes. Because the C-130B and E were practically identical, the pilots and engineers were only required to do an in the pattern checkout. They were then sent to Cam Ranh, where they remained, to fly missions over Laos. *(The above photo was taken by member Stan Davis, who sent it to me years ago. At one time I had it on the net on a page I wrote called "Sneaky Petes." Although my page was lost, someone who was part of the mission copied the page for their own site and it's still on the Net. It shows one of the 556th airplanes at Cam Ranh.)* Elwyn, who was later involved with the 7th Special Operations Squadron in Germany, describes the missions over Laos as fairly routine. The pilots flew a route over Laos at a medium altitude that was generally out of range of communist antiaircraft, but low enough that they could see C-123 and C-130 flareships dropping flares and fighters making strikes below them. One night the drew fire from 57 MM antiaircraft and after that missions were flown at higher altitudes.

The 556th airplanes were still flying out of Cam Ranh in 1969-70, but by that time they were operating from the new Navy ramp just south of the West Ramp along with Army P2Vs and an assortment of naval aircraft. When Elwynn was with them, the flight crews lived on Herky Hill. Apparently TAC and

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possibly PACAF C-130 pilots and engineers continued supporting the 556th on TDY until at least 1971.

322nd Air Division (Combat Cargo)



Because of the US emphasis on operations in Southeast Asia after 1965, we might be inclined to forget that prior to April 1, 1964 when it transferred to MATS, 322nd Air Division (Combat Cargo) was USAFE's equivalent to PACAF's 315th Air Division for airlift operations within USAFE's area of responsibility. The official Air Force lineage applies that of the 322nd Troop Carrier Wing, which operated in the Southwest Pacific in World War II. After the war it became a division in the reserves, but inactivated in 1949. On March 1, 1954 the division reactivated at Wiesbaden, Germany as 322nd Air Division (Combat Cargo) but soon moved to Ramstein, although its stay there was short. In August, 1954 division headquarters transferred to Evreux-Fauville AB, France where it remained until the transfer to MATS almost a decade later. Although 315th Air Division had activated in Japan in February, 1951 no similar organization existed in Europe as there were only two troop carrier wings there until December, 1953 when the 465th TCW transferred to Toul/Rosiere, France. The 60th TCW had remained in Europe after World War II at Rhine Main, Germany while the 317th transferred to Europe for the Berlin Airlift and remained. In 1953 it was based at Neubiberg, Germany. All three groups were equipped with C-119s by 1954 – the 60th would later receive some C-123s. In 1955 the 465th moved to Evreux-Fauville, France while the 60th moved to Dreux.

In 1957 when the USAF began assigning C-130As to Europe, there was another reorganization. The 60th TCW was inactivated along with the 465th, leaving the 317th as the only troop carrier wing in Europe and the only wing in 322nd. The 317th headquarters inactivated in September, 1958 while the former wings subordinate units fell directly under the division. This arrangement lasted until March, 1963 when veteran troop carrier commander Col. Charles W. Howe, the 322nd commander, reactivated the 317th Wing to control the assigned C-130As while 322nd Headquarters controlled TDY TAC squadrons.

Shortly after 322nd began receiving C-130s, it was involved with the Lebanon Crisis in the Middle East, with division C-119s and C-130s airlifting US Air Force and Army personnel to Turkey, then on into Beirut. In 1960 322nd controlled USAF airlift operations in support of a United Nations mission to the former Belgian Congo. Division and TAC C-130s airlifted troops from several nations to Stanleyville. Crews from 322nd operated within the Congo supporting the UN force. (Historians mistakenly give responsibility for the mission to MATS, but in reality MATS supported USAFE through an air transport wing based at Chateauroux, France. In his memoir, MATS commander Lt. Gen. William H. Tunner implies that it was entirely a MATS operation and doesn't even mention the USAFE role.) In 1962 322nd was tasked with a new mission in India, where Chinese troops had invaded contested areas in the Himalaya. The Indian Airlift continued into 1963,

In the 1950s Gen. Tunner had commanded USAFE prior to returning to the Air Staff, then becoming

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commander of MATS. During and after his European assignment, he had lobbied for the transfer of all troop carrier functions in Europe to MATS. Although he retired from the USAF in 1960 (so he could actively campaign for John F. Kennedy), Tunner continued to have a strong influence through the Kennedy Administration. He finally succeeded in his goal of making MATS responsible for all airlift in Europe. On April 1, 1964 322nd Air Division transferred to MATS and the division headquarters moved to Chateauroux. The “Combat Cargo” designation was dropped. The 317th TCW transferred to the United States (which it had left in 1942 for Australia) and was based at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio. Although 322nd had become part of MATS, its airlift strength consisted of TAC C-130s TDY to Evreux from TAC troop carrier wings in the US. In November, 1964 TAC C-130s from the 464th Troop Carrier Wing at Pope flew the dramatic DRAGON ROUGE/RED DRAGON and DRAGON NOIR/BLACK DRAGON rescue missions airlifting Belgian paratroopers to rescue whites held captive in the Congo.

In April 1966 the 513th Troop Carrier Wing activated under USAFE as the controlling agency for TDY TAC C-130s, but it was attached to 322nd Air Division, which maintained operational control over its aircraft. 322nd remained in Europe as part of Military Airlift Command until April, 1992 when it inactivated.

Troop Carrier/Airlift Books

Several years ago I compiled a list of airlift/C-130 related books and posted them on the Internet. They are now at www.sammcgowan.com/books.html. I recently added links to Amazon.com for those books that are listed so they can be easily ordered. (If you want a signed copy of my books, order them directly from me.) I will soon be adding a link for Tom Stalvey’s memoir of his military service called The Lucky Loadmaster, which will soon be in print. Another book that may interest some of our members is veteran combat controller CMSgt Gene Adcock’s In The Eye of The Storm, a history of the combat control mission. Gene self-published the book several years ago through a university press. Ordering information can be found on the web site at <http://combatcontrolteam.embarqspace.com/>. Gene has a long history with troop carrier units at Sewart, Dyess and Tachikawa, among others, and I’m working on getting him into the TCTAA.

The Airlifter is always looking for personal accounts and any other information that might be of interest to our members. Either Email contributions to sammcgowan@troopcarrier.org or send them by mail to 3727 Hill Family Lane, Missouri City, TX 77459.