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The Airlifter

Newsletter of the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association

Promoting and preserving the troop carrier/tactical airlift heritagewww.troopcarrier.orgsecretary@tacairliftassoc.org

Volume XXV

Finances

We currently have \$10,825 in our checking account plus \$350 in checks for a total of \$11,175. Jim Esbeck advises that there is currently \$8,021.50 in the convention account of which \$475.00 is dues. That gives us a total of \$11,600 in association funds. We paid a \$500 deposit on the hotel and lent \$1,400 to the convention account to avoid paying monthly fees. We got a check from Boeing for \$1,000 which we applied to the \$1,900 the convention owes the association. The convention owes the association \$900.00 plus the \$475.00 in dues.

New Association Email

If you received this newsletter by Email you already know that the Association now has a new Email address at secretary@tacairliftassoc.org. We were getting a lot of bounces from certain Email servers, particularly MSN.com and Hotmail. The reason given was that part of our server had been blocked for some reason. We have no idea why but it may have been that some domains were being used for spam. We started looking for a new means of maintaining contact with our members, first trying an Outlook Email and even trying to send the newsletters from my personal Gmail account. However, it turns out that those servers have address limits, usually of 100 at a time, so we started looking for something else. I discovered that Google also offers Business Email and suggested to the officers and board members that we take that route. When I went to sign up for the account, I found that instead of using a Gmail address, Google business either uses a company's existing domain or allows the organization to purchase a new one for \$12.00. Since we have been having trouble sending Email from troopcarrier.org, I decided it would be better to purchase a new one and, for lack of a better term, decided on tacairliftassoc.org. The cost to the Association is \$12.00 a year for the domain plus \$4.75 per user per month or a minimum of \$50.00 a year. We only have the one address so we just have the one user. Look for all future correspondence from this address.

Convention – Less than Two Months Away!

Our convention has moved from planning to the registration phase, and registrations are coming in. As Jim Esbeck receives the registration forms, we are putting the names on the web site (there is an asterisk by those who have paid the registration fee.) Currently, we have registrations from over sixty members and

guests with new registrations coming in almost daily. Be aware that there is a cutoff of August 31 for the special rate at the hotel! After that date, reservations at the reunion rate will not be guaranteed. Details on the convention, plus links to convention information and the registration forms can be found at www.troopcarrier.org/convention.html. Note - it is very easy to book your room using our special Hilton web page. You'll find the link at the link above.

Convention Speaker

In keeping with our unofficial tradition of having a member as our dinner speaker, our speaker is going to be Leon Franklin, whose name appears in government publications as Irl. Leon has a long background in the troop carrier mission, going back to C-123s at Pope. His military background was with the 331st, 346th and 347th Troop Carrier Squadrons at Sewart and Pope, the 464th Troop Carrier Wing and 839th Air Division. He served in Vietnam with MACSOG. After returning to 839th AD, he deployed to Europe with the 7th Special Operations Group. In November 1970 Leon was one of two aircraft commanders on the C-130E(I)s, often called Talons, who participated in the raid on the Son Tay Prison Camp in North Vietnam. (The other AC was the late Al Blosch.) We're looking forward to Leon's address of the group.

Pima Air & Space Museum and the Aircraft Graveyard



SAM MCGOWAN AT PIMA

Last year when we were discussing where to have this year's convention we devoted space to a description of sights around Tucson, particularly the Pima Air & Space Museum and the nearby "airplane bone yard." At our 2008 convention in San Antonio, the board recommended and the membership voted to have our conventions at a place where there is some kind of military aviation attraction since we're a military aviation organization. Military aviation attractions include Air Force bases, air shows with a military demonstration team and military displays and military aviation museums. (This is why Branson and Dollywood are not included as possible sites for future conventions.) Tucson certainly fills the bill.

The Pima Museum dates back to 1966 when the commander of the Military Aircraft Disposition and Storage Center proposed to the Tucson chapter of the Air Force Association that they spearhead an effort to found a museum to display examples of the historic aircraft then in the graveyard that were being sent to smelters. They formed a foundation and gained support from local officials. In 1968 the foundation purchased a plot of land just south of Davis-Monthan Air Force

Base from the Bureau of Land Management and work was begun. The following year the Foundation convinced the Indian government to donate one of the Indian Air Force B-24s to the museum and the proposal was accepted, under the condition that the foundation pay the delivery cost. An Air Force crew was formed to go to India to recover the historic bomber and fly it to Tucson. Since then the museum's collection has grown to over 150 aircraft, including some that can be found nowhere else. To see what the museum has, visit their web site at <http://www.pimaair.org/>.

I was privileged to be able to visit the Pima Museum in February 2003 when I had a trip to Phoenix and the other pilot and I drove down. The above photo was taken that day by the museum's C-130A.

Troop Carrier/TAC Airlift Memorial at USAF Museum

One of the items we will be discussing and voting on during our members meeting in October will be the design, construction and placing of a memorial to troop carriers and tactical airlifters who fought and died in America's wars in the memorial park at the US Air Force Museum at Dayton, Ohio. While there are memorials to airmen who died in aircraft accidents, to the best of my knowledge there has never been a memorial of any kind erected anywhere to those who died in combat in any of America's wars. A lot of units and associations purchase a bench, which is the least expensive means of placing something. However, due to the intent, some of the officers and board members feel that we should place a memorial. Once we vote to go ahead with the project and decide if we want to plan for 2016 or wait another two years (and none of us are getting younger), we'll need to start a fund-raising project and develop a design. In short, this is something that is going to take a lot of work and will need some people who are willing to work to conduct the campaign. We have a number of retired general officers and we hope that one of them will be willing to spearhead the effort. Although it would be fine if we are able to raise all of the funds from within the membership, we will not be limited to the membership. We can solicit funds from anyone who has an interest or connection to the military in general and to the tactical airlift mission specifically. For example, Boeing and Lockheed made billions off of transport aircraft they and Douglas produced. (Douglas merged with McDonnell and is now part of Boeing.) We're probably talking about in the neighborhood of \$15,000-20,000 to have the memorial made and placed at the museum. If we solicit through the organizations, donations will be tax deductible because it would be within our stated purpose of educating the public and the IRS recognize us as a wartime veteran's association with charitable status.

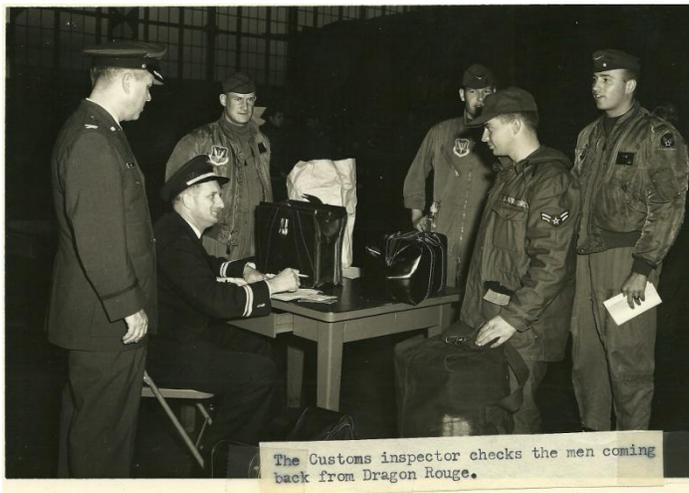
A list of existing memorials is available on the USAFM web site - <http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/exhibits/memorial/index.asp>.

A Great Story – Pearl Harbor to Vietnam by Col. William L. Welch

A few weeks ago some of us Pope veterans got into a discussion about Col. William L. Welch, the commander of the 464th Troop Carrier Wing in 1963-1966. Don Hessenflow, who was Col. Welch's PIO for much of that time, found that he was living in Las Vegas but that he passed away a couple of years ago. Don also found that he had written a book about his military experiences. I went to Amazon and found it and ordered a copy. The book was "self-published" in that it was published by a company that publishes books

for authors for a fee. It's only a little over 100 pages but I found it very interesting, not only because he was my wing commander but also because I have an interest in World War II and the Air Force in general. A lot of us have wondered why he never got a star and now I think I know why.

Col. Welch was a Missouri native. The place where he was born and spent his early childhood doesn't even appear on a map but it was evidently just south of St. Louis. His father moved the family to St. Louis when he was a boy and that is where he grew up. As a teenager, he held two jobs, one with a local hospital as a surgical assistant and the other with a shoe manufacturer. He saved his money and enrolled in a teacher's college in Cape Giraudoux. When World War II broke out, he volunteered for the Finnish Air Force and was preparing to leave for Finland when his mother intervened and tore up his ticket so he applied for the Army's aviation cadet program. This was in 1940 before the US became involved in the war. Upon completion of pilot training, he was assigned to a bomber squadron in Hawaii flying Douglas B-18s, the bomber version of the DC-2. His aircraft commander was Major Walter Sweeney, who many of us knew as General Walter Sweeney, the commander of Tactical Air Command in the 60s. He was on the ground when the Japanese attacked. He and other officers and enlisted men set up machineguns so they could fire back at the attacking Japanese fighters. His first combat mission was a patrol looking for Japanese submarines off of Hawaii – and he found one. The Army began replacing the obsolete B-18s with new Boeing B-17s and Lt. Welch became a B-17 aircraft commander. He participated in the Battle of Midway.



The Customs inspector checks the men coming back from Dragon Rouge.

COL. WELCH WATCHING AS CUSTOMS CHECKS CREW RETURNING FROM DRAGON ROUGE (DON HESSENFLOW)

more recent arrivals joined the 43rd Bombardment Group. Col. Welch is very candid in his impression of some of the things that happened in Hawaii and the Southwest Pacific. He relates how that during the attack on Pearl Harbor and the nearby airfields, a lot of men were standing around looking up at the Japanese planes when they were suddenly strafed. He tells how one of his squadron mates transferred to an A-20 squadron and died while on a check flight when the check pilot, who was in another airplane, had him shut down one engine while down on the deck and he flew into the water. He is also far from charitable with his description of how one of the pilots in the 43rd BG, although he doesn't mention him by name, was awarded the Medal of Honor after he tried to fly over a Japanese installation at 25,000 feet instead of 35,000 and was jumped by fighters. A number of his crewmembers were killed and they didn't get the pictures they were sent out to take. His squadron mates were disgusted with him

but the higher ups decided to take the opportunity to gain some publicity for Fifth Air Force and put him in for the Medal of Honor.¹ Nowhere in the book does he mention his own decorations.

After flying a 50-mission combat tour, Captain Welch was approached by his group and division commanders who requested that he volunteer to extend his tour and take command of a squadron. Reluctantly, he did and was promoted to major. He ended up flying just two short of 100 combat missions against the Japanese. Shortly after he got his own squadron, the B-17s were replaced by B-24s. He states that although he preferred the B-17 because it could climb to 35,000 feet, he had no reservations against the B-24. In the fall of 1943 he and some of his squadron mates flew some war-weary B-17s back to the States. General Kenney wanted him to take the B-17 on a war bond tour to publicize Fifth Air Force but the Army Air Forces had no interest so he was sent to Smyrna Army Air Field, Tennessee to “qualify” in the B-24 he had been flying in combat and then went to Maxwell AAB, Alabama as an instructor and found that most of his fellow instructors were only concerned with avoiding going overseas and getting shot at. He, on the other hand, wanted to go back overseas and kept volunteering for an assignment to the new B-29 squadrons that were being formed, and the Training Command kept turning down his request. Finally the AAF decided to turn Maxwell into a B-29 training base and he was given command of the B-29 training squadron. By that time the war was nearing an end and he decided to stay put.

Throughout the late forties and fifties he alternated between ground assignments in the Pentagon and overseas and flying assignments in SAC as a B-47 squadron and wing commander. He put on his eagles in 1954. Throughout his career he was mentored by Sweeney, who was climbing up the ladder until he took command of Tactical Air Command just as SAC’s star was beginning to wane and TAC’s was on the rise. In early 1963 as he was nearing the end of another tour in the Pentagon he asked for a flying assignment and was told to talk to Sweeney. Sweeney offered him a fighter wing but he decided on troop carrier instead and went to Pope to take command of the 464th Troop Carrier Wing just as the wing was finishing up its role providing C-123s and their crews to South Vietnam and was preparing to transition into the new C-130E.



SAN ISIDRO

for the mission. Col. Welch commanded the Dominican operation and flew in the lead airplane, which was flown by TCTAA member Carl Wyrick with fellow TCTAA member Bobby Gassiott as

He only devotes one chapter to his time at Pope, but he goes into detail on his involvement in POWER PACK, the aerial invasion of the Dominican Republic. There are some places where his memory plays tricks on him. For instance, he confuses an episode in the Congo when local planters and mercenaries provoked a rebellion with the earlier Simba rebellion when a squadron from the 464th dropped and landed Belgian commandos on the airport at Stanleyville (TCTAA member and combat control veteran Don Strobaugh went in with the Belgians to help with communications.) The wing was awarded the 1964 MacKay Trophy

¹ A popular article about this MOH winner is circulating on the Internet.

the lead navigator. He does not call Carl by name but refers to him as “one of the best pilots in the wing” and says that he preferred to fly with him. After the mission was airborne, President Lyndon Johnson personally ordered that the operation be changed from an airborne operation to an air-land operation. Col. Welch was reluctant to follow the order because he felt it was unsafe but after talking to the senior Army officer and being advised that the 82nd troops would be able to de-rig the platforms so the vehicles could be offloaded, he reluctantly agreed. However, although the troop-carrying planes landed at San Isidro, part of the equipment carrying airplanes were diverted to Ramey AFB, Puerto Rico to de-rig their cargo so it could be driven off as soon as the planes landed. After they got on the ground, Col. Welch and his crew took control of the Air Force part of the operation. He went with some 82nd troops to take control of the tower and then put one of his pilots in the tower to direct traffic until an Air Force air traffic control team could arrive from the States. He also requested key officers, including TCTAA member Bo Bohannon, to come down and set up a staff.

He says something that was apparent at the time, and that was that the 464th became the premier C-130 wing in TAC during his tenure as commander. He attributes the wing’s success to the squadron commanders and operations officers, most of whom were recent overseas returnees, who were able to achieve cohesion and great morale. (Most, if not all, of the Pope veterans from that time will agree; many say their time at Pope was the best days of their Air Force career.) During his tenure as wing commander, the 464th finished C-123 operations in South Vietnam then transitioned into the C-130E and became involved in world-wide airlift operations. 464th crews made headlines (that were hijacked by MATS) for their role in the dramatic Congo rescue operation in November 1964. Pope crews and maintenance and support personnel were on rotation to Africa, Europe and the Pacific in 1964-65.

Bear in mind that the colonel was in his eighties when he wrote the book and he sometimes got confused. He relates how that crews from the 464th deployed troops from the 82nd Airborne to Pleiku. However, the troops were actually the 1st Cavalry Division and they went to An Khe, not Pleiku. He also implies that they made the move in C-130s but the new cavalry division actually went to Vietnam by ship and 464th crews who had just deployed to Mactan moved them from Qui Nhon to their new base. He refers to the 464th as the 464th Airlift Wing when it was in fact the 464th Troop Carrier Wing.



The colonel’s tour at Pope was up in the spring of 1966 and he transferred to McDill to join Strike Command where he continued to work with TAC C-130s. He went back to the Congo with a detachment of 464th C-130s to help put down another rebellion against the Congolese government, this time with the mercenaries on the other side. They had been hired by European planters to organize the rebellion.

Welch’s next and final assignment was back to Spain, this time to Torrejon. In the 1950s he had opened up and commanded SAC’s deployment base at Zaragoza. Having

been a colonel for fourteen years, he had been told by his commanders that he was going to receive a star. When the brigadier general’s list came out in 1968 he was not on it. (His promotion was most likely blocked by President Lyndon Johnson because had not followed his orders to the letter during POWER PACK.)

Once again, he was told that he'd be promoted on the next list but he said he'd heard that before, so he put his paperwork in to retire so he could get a new start in civilian life while still in his forties.

Troop Carrier's Heyday



Col. William Welch commanded the 464th Troop Carrier Wing when Tactical Air Command's troop carrier forces were in their heyday, a time that began in 1957 when the 314th and 463rd Troop Carrier Wings began equipping with the new C-130A and continued through the mid-sixties and into the early seventies. Previously, TAC's troop carrier forces were equipped with World War II vintage propeller driven aircraft that, with the exception of the C-123, were lacking in true tactical capabilities. While the C-123 had excellent short-field capability, it was lacking in payload and lacked the range for overseas deployments. TAC's primary long-range transport was the Douglas C-124 but Lt. Gen. William H. Tunner was leading a political campaign to have them all transferred to MATS. In fact, Tunner's goal was to have all airlift

consolidated into one command.

The new C-130A offered new possibilities. It had been designed to operate off of short, unimproved runways and to carry a 30,000-pound payload over a 1,500 mile range. In 1955 TAC developed a new concept called the Composite Air Strike Force and activated the Nineteenth Air Force as a "suitcase air force" at Foster AFB, Texas as a rapid deployable headquarters to command CASFs. In 1958 the new air force transferred to Seymour Johnson AFB, North Carolina. At about the same time TAC's C-124s transferred to MATS but retained their troop carrier identity and mission, as did the two PACAF C-124 squadrons at Tachikawa AB, Japan. TAC was in the process of equipping two wings with C-130s. Additional C-130s would go to 315th Air Division in Japan and 322nd Air Division in France. The existing troop carrier wings were inactivated and the squadrons assigned directly to the divisions.



C-130 AT NAHA DURING QUEMOY-MATSU CRISIS

The first CASF deployed to Turkey in support of US efforts to prop up Lebanon after the assassination of Iraq's King Faisal II led to unrest in the Middle East. 322nd Air Division C-119s and C-130s moved troops to Turkey and Lebanon from Europe while TAC C-130s supported by MATS C-124s flew support personnel and equipment from several TAC fighter/bomber and reconnaissance wings to the region. No sooner had the strike force left

for the Middle East than the Chinese Communists stepped up shelling in what appeared to be preparation for invading the islands of Quemoy and Matsu which lay right off of the Chinese mainland. A second CASF was dispatched to the Far East but since much of its C-130 force was involved in the Lebanon crisis, TAC turned to MATS to provide supplemental airlift. In 1961

Communist threatening of the German city of Berlin led to a third CASF deployment, this time to Germany. There were other contingency situations during the time period – such as the deployment of UN peacekeepers to the former Belgian Congo in 1960 – that involved TAC troop carrier squadrons on rotational duty in Europe and the Far East but were not CASFs.

In 1961 Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara activated Strike Command, a unified command that included the Army's Strategic Army Corps, or STRAC, and elements of Tactical Air Command.² STRAC originally was the Army's XVIII Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg but had been expanded to include other units. Based at McDill AFB, Florida, Strike Command was responsible for rapid deployment of ground and air forces to overseas "trouble spots" where local unrest threatened to escalate into regional conflict. TAC's troop carrier squadrons were crucial to Strike Command's mission, both to deploy forces to overseas locations and to provide airlift support for the deployed forces. Initially, the Navy had no involvement with Strike Command but in 1965 its Atlantic Fleet became the naval component. Strike Command's role was to assist overseas commands if necessary but its primary operations were in areas where there was no US military presence; particularly the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In 1964 Strike Command sent Project LEO, a small force of C-130s, to the Congo to support the Congolese government battle rebels who called themselves Simba. Simbas captured the city of Stanleyville and took Europeans and a few Americans hostage and precipitated Operation RED DRAGON (DRAGON ROUGE in French), a joint US-Belgian operation to free them. Although the rescue mission was planned entirely by USAFE and the Belgian military, because Strike Command had operational control in the Congo the mission passed to its control when it entered African airspace. (The command situation was complicated even further because the TAC C-130s were on temporary duty in France with 322nd Air Division which had recently transferred to MATS and a MATS mission commander was assigned to the mission.)



**MULE TRAIN C-123S DROPPING
VIETNAMESE PARATROOPS**

TAC's mission was to train combat crews for overseas service. It was a mission that developed immediately after World War II when Tactical Air Command was established to command tactical air units including troop carrier. The CASF requirement led Congress to authorize the purchase of a new model of the C-130, the B-model, and the activation of a third wing in the United States. The 64th Troop Carrier Wing reactivated at Dyess with two squadrons, the 17th and 18th. The 17th received ski-equipped C-130Ds from the 61st TCS at Sewart. The two original wings gave up their A-models and equipped with new C-130Bs. Their A and D-models went either to Dyess or to the overseas squadrons except for one squadron at Sewart, the 345th, which transitioned into C-130As from C-123s. Congress authorized the purchase of a long range version of the B-model and it was designated as the C-130E. TAC originally planned to convert the wing at Dyess to the E-model along with the 464th at Pope, which was operating C-123s. The Pope conversion was put on hold due to the sudden need for C-123s in South Vietnam. In 1963 the 64th at Dyess inactivated and a new wing, the 516th, activated there with three squadrons

² Strike Command was renamed Readiness Command in 1972; in 1987 it was replaced by Special Operations Command.

and began equipping with C-130Es.

In 1961 TAC set up a new unit at Hurlbut Field, Florida to train USAF personnel for advisory duty in Third World countries. The new unit had a troop carrier section equipped with specially configured SC-47s. In December 1961 TAC began deploying some of its units to Southeast Asia, starting with the FARM GATE mission from the new JUNGLE JIM special air warfare unit at Hurlbut which included a few SC-47s. They were joined by RANCH HAND modified UC-123s and a conventional troop carrier mission that deployed as project MULE TRAIN with a squadron of C-123s from Pope. A second C-123 squadron deployed as SAWBUCK II. TAC's C-130 squadrons had been TDY to PACAF's 315th Air Division off and on since 1958. This continued until 1962 when the 345th transferred to Naha, Okinawa to become the 345th and became 315th's fourth C-130 squadron. The move was designed to reduce TAC TDY to the Pacific but the reduction was short-lived. In August 1964 North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked US Navy ships operating off the coast of North Vietnam. In response, President Johnson ordered bombing attacks on North Vietnam and several TAC fighter and reconnaissance squadrons deployed to the Far East as project ONE BUCK. Three TAC C-130 squadrons moved support equipment and personnel. One returned to its home base at Dyess but two, one from Sewart and one from Langley where the 463rd had transferred, remained in the Pacific.



C-130E AT AN KHE (DON HORTON)

wings assigned, each with three squadrons, with two exceptions – the 18th TCS transferred from Sewart to Lockbourne and TAC decided to retain a fourth squadron at Pope. The squadron, the 779th TCS, was scheduled to equip with modified C-130E(I)s and assume a special operations mission. When the 464th began the conversion to C-130s, its C-123s went either to Vietnam or to Hurlbut where the C-123 training squadron had been set up.

The transfer of the 317th to the US created a need for two TAC rotational squadrons to provide airlift support for USAFE. One squadron was from the 317th while the second was from the 464th at Pope. Two TAC squadrons were on rotation to the Far East, one from Langley and one from Sewart. In addition, TAC maintained a rotational unit at Howard AB in the Canal Zone. From August 1964 to August 1965 Pope supported JTF LEO at Leopoldville in the Congo. In addition to the overseas rotations, TAC's troop carrier squadrons were often involved in joint training exercises with the Army as well as normal training either at their home base or at Fort Campbell or Pope. In 1965 C-130s began replacing Guard C-119s at the Army

jump school at Fort Benning.

In April 1965 TAC's troop carriers were called on for what turned out to be an aerial invasion of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola in response to instability in the Dominican Republic. The island is divided into two countries, the all-black nation of Haiti and the Hispanic Dominican Republic. The operation, called POWER PACK, started out to be an airborne operation but was turned to air-land after the formation of some 144 C-130s departed Pope with troops from the 82nd Airborne. Every TAC wing was represented as were the MATS C-130E squadrons. By President Lyndon Johnson's personal order, the operation was changed from an airborne operation to air land while the formation was enroute to Santo Domingo. Johnson had a strong interest in the operation because he had personally ordered it, reportedly against the advice of his foreign policy advisors. He decided that it would look better in the eyes of the world if the C-130s landed rather than dropping their troops and their equipment by parachute.

A few weeks before POWER PACK, TAC was ordered to deploy additional fighter and reconnaissance squadrons to the Pacific along with two C-130 squadrons in response to President Johnson's order to begin sustained bombing of North Vietnam in what came to be known as the "Rolling Thunder" campaign. The move was designated as Project TWO BUCK. A squadron from Pope began operations from Kadena AB, Okinawa while a Dyess squadron set up shop a few miles to the south at Naha. Each TAC C-130 wings had rotational squadrons in the Far East with the exception of the 317th at Lockbourne and the 313th at Forbes, which was still in training. TAC had decided that due to the C-130As shorter range plus the presence of four squadrons of A-models already in the region, the 317th would become responsible for airlift operations in Europe and the longer-range C-130Es from Pope would leave France.



DROP FORMATION TAXIING OUT AT TSN

95551 USAF

The four TAC rotational squadrons operated both into and within South Vietnam. In June 1965 315th Air Division established what became a permanent C-130 rotational unit at Tan Son Nhut Air Base using TAC rotational airplanes and crews after several years of temporary basing. In September the 464th deployed a second squadron to the Pacific when the 779th TCS moved to tiny Mactan, an island just off of Cebu in the Philippines, on project SIXTEEN BUCK.³ Immediately after its arrival, the 779th took over shuttle operations in Thailand, replacing C-123s that had been there TDY from Saigon. In the fall of 1965 a mixed formation of TAC and PACAF C-130s dropped Vietnamese paratroopers onto a drop zone north of

Saigon. The drop was preceded by airstrikes and even a B-52 drop. Once the troops were on the ground, they were unable to engage with the illusive Viet Cong, who were possibly alerted by the bombing prior to the drop.

³ TAC and the Air Force designated each aircraft movement to the Pacific using the BUCK designation. Some projects involved as few as two aircraft while others involved entire squadrons and multiple squadrons.

By the fall of 1965 it had become apparent that US forces had moved to the Pacific to stay. US ground troops were arriving at South Vietnamese ports and were beginning combat operations. A number of TAC fighter and recon. squadrons were on rotation to airbases throughout Southeast Asia and at out of country bases on Okinawa, the Philippines and Taiwan. TAC C-130 wings were supporting rotations at Kadena, Naha, Clark and Mactan with some wings supporting two rotational squadrons. The Air Force decided it would be better to send TAC squadrons to PACAF on permanent basis rather than maintaining the rotational squadrons indefinitely. In November 1965 TAC squadrons began transferring to PACAF. TAC's C-130 wings were hard hit. Each of the six wings sent at least one squadron to PACAF. The Langley-based 463rd transferred to the Philippines as a unit, with the wing headquarters and two squadrons going to Mactan and one to Clark where it was joined by a squadron from Forbes. Lockbourne also contributed a squadron which transferred to Naha. All told, TAC lost eight C-130 squadrons as well as the 314th and 463rd wing headquarters. The 64th reactivated at Sewart to become the command unit and a new organization, the 316th TCW, activated at Langley. While some of their airplanes were new production, some were MATS airplanes that had been replaced with C-141s.



TAC C-130E DROPPING LAPES AT AN KHE

structures, particularly bridges and one bridge in particular. The bridge that spanned the gorge known as the Dragons Jaw at the North Vietnamese town of Than Hoa had proven to be the most difficult target in North Vietnam. Mission after mission was flown against the bridge but after each attack, the bridge still stood. The two TAC crews and aerial port and ordnance personnel worked out a method using slotted parachutes to stabilize the weapons after they were dropped from low altitude into a body of water. One loadmaster who worked with them says they looked "like hot tubs." In May 1966 the two crews were ordered to deploy to Da Nang with ten weapons. Two missions were flown at the end of May and the first of June. The first crew dropped their weapons into the river and returned to Da Nang. Photos taken the next day showed that the bridge still stood so the second crew went out that night for a second attempt. They were never heard from again. An F-4 crew who were part of a diversion mission were also lost. After the transfer of the squadrons to PACAF, the TAC troop carrier wings returned to their mission of training and providing aircraft and crews for rotational duty in Europe and the Canal Zone. Readiness Training Units or RTUs, were set up at Sewart, Pope and Lockbourne to train C-130 crewmembers who were on their way to one of the PACAF squadrons and new TAC

Although the transfer of the TAC squadrons relieved the command of responsibility for providing rotational units to PACAF, the command's C-130s remained active in Southeast Asia for a time. The Pope squadron at Mactan remained until February 1966. In early 1966 a team from Pope went to Saigon to fly test missions using the low-altitude parachute extraction system (LAPES) and the parachute low-altitude delivery system (PLADS) to determine if they would be beneficial to US operations in South Vietnam. Two crews from Sewart were working with ordnance personnel at Eglin to develop a method of delivery of specially designed "mass-focus" weapons with magnetic fuses upriver from steel

personnel. Personnel bound for C-130Bs and Es trained at Pope and Sewart while those whose assignments were to C-130As trained at Lockbourne until the reserves started getting A-models and an RTU was set up at Ellington AFB, Texas. The former Acceptance and Evaluation Board at Pope was expanded to become the Tactical Airlift Center, or TALC, and became responsible for developing new methods of airdrop and other tactical methods.

On August 1, 1967 the troop carrier designation was replaced by “tactical airlift” and all troop carrier units became tactical airlift. Just how and why the new designation came about hasn’t been publically revealed, other than that the letter sent out by vice-chief of staff General Bruce K. Holloway announcing the change said the new name “more accurately reflects the mission.” The term “airlift” didn’t appear in the military lexicon until after the Berlin supply, which was called the Berlin “Lift.” Someone, perhaps Maj. General William H. Tunner, the commander of the VITLES task force, added air and it was called the “air lift.” Tunner combined the two words into one and started referring to the operation as the Berlin Airlift; he also started referring to the World War II India-China Ferry as the “Hump Airlift.” Both operations are now commonly known as airlifts even though the term didn’t exist at the time they were ongoing. By the 1960s “airlift” had come into common usage. The Air Force made it an official term when the new Military Airlift Command was activated on January 1, 1966. In reflection of its new name, the former MATS air transport wings were all given designations of World War II troop carrier groups but its air transport and troop carrier squadrons retained their numerical identity; MAC wings and squadrons were designated as “military airlift”.



MATS C-130E

Previously, the MATS and later MAC staff had started referring to its mission as “strategic airlift.” Certain MATS officers had taken the term for “strategic bombing” that came about during World War II and applied it to its logistical mission as part of an effort to have MATS upgraded to a specified command. The “tactical” term goes back to at least 1922 when the Army Air Service redesignated its Air Service Field Officers School at Langley as the Air Service Tactical School. The “strategic” term also seems to have originated in the same school, which had become the Air Corps

Tactical School after the Air Corps was established by law, by certain instructors who came to be known as the “Bomber Mafia” because of their strongly held beliefs that bombers were the Air Corp’s future. One of those instructors, Brig. General Harold L. George, was placed in command of the Air Transport Command. During World War II certain air forces, particularly Ninth and Twelfth Air Force, were referred to as “tactical air forces” and included “tactical commands” made up primarily of fighter/bomber groups whose mission was to provide air support for ground armies. The redesignation of the former troop carrier squadrons and wings as “tactical airlift” was an outgrowth of the MAC claim that its logistical mission provided “strategic airlift.”

Starting in 1965 when MATS began reequipping some of its squadrons with C-141s, MATS C-130s started transferring to TAC. In 1968 the last of the MAC C-130s transferred. Some MAC crewmembers went with the airplanes. A new squadron at Dyess, the 348th TAS, was made up largely of crewmembers who had

transferred to Dyess from McGuire. MAC was also in the process of phasing out its C-124s in anticipation of the introduction of the C-5A. In 1969 when the last of the C-124s left MAC, four airplanes each were assigned to the 463rd TAW at Clark and the 17th TAS at Elmendorf. Having received its full complement of C-141s and beginning to receive C-5As, MAC began pushing for a larger share of overseas airlift operations.

TAC troop carrier C-130s were absent from the war in Vietnam, which had increased from an advisory role to a full-scale military conflict by 1967, for more than two years. During that time, TAC wings supported rotational squadrons in France, then in the UK after US military units were expelled from France by President Charles de Gaulle, and Howard AFB, Canal Zone and flew RARE DATE airlift missions for MAC. TAC C-130s supported US and Bolivian special forces in their hunt for Che Guevara in 1967. On January 23, 1968 the Navy spy ship USS *Pueblo* was seized by North Korea and TAC once again rushed fighter and reconnaissance squadrons to the Pacific. The crisis placed an additional airlift burden on 315th Air Division and new TAC rotational squadrons were set up in Japan and Taiwan (and possibly Clark.) A few days later the Liberation Army of South Vietnam launched their countrywide offensive in South Vietnam, ushering in the most intense period of combat of the war. Just before the seizure, North Vietnamese troops laid siege to the Marine combat base at Khe Sanh, an outpost in the northwest corner of South Vietnam. In anticipation of a siege, Military Assistance Command Vietnam ordered 834th Air Division to prepare to airlift supplies into the base. As a result of the communist attacks and the siege of Khe Sanh, 315th Air Division began using the TAC C-130s that were sent over with the TAC fighter squadrons in response to the seizure of the *Pueblo* to take up slack in South Vietnam. A new C-130 operating location was set up at Tuy Hoa to supplement the existing locations at Tan Son Nhut and Cam Ranh Bay. TAC C-130s continued rotating to PACAF for most of 1968. In early 1969 a ninth TAC squadron, the 346th from Dyess, was PCSed to Ching Chuan Kang Air Base, Taiwan.

Shortly after President Richard Nixon took office, he began deescalating the American role in Vietnam. Troop withdrawals started in the summer of 1969 and accelerated as the year continued. With the deescalating war, the requirement for airlift in PACAF also declined, in part because MAC had picked up the majority of the intertheater airlift missions and the PACAF C-130 force was primarily involved in combat operations in South Vietnam and logistical support in Thailand. The Air Force decided to phase the older A and B-model C-130s out of active service and reassign them to the Air Force Reserve and the Air Guard to replace C-119s and C-124s. Reserve units assumed some roles that had previously been conducted by active duty units, including C-130A training and the ferrying of airplanes to and from the Pacific.



15/28 LAPES

An important TAC airlift role was the development of new airlift tactics, procedures and delivery methods. The Tactical Airlift Center at Pope worked with the Army to develop new airdrop methods. One 1969 development was 15/28 LAPES which used a 15-foot extraction parachute to pull three 28-foot parachutes out of the airplane to extract the load. With the three extraction parachutes, multiple platforms could be extracted in tandem. The TALC also developed a new method of restraining containers in the airplane that used the static line retrievers to cut the gate rather than the 15-foot extraction parachute that

was normally used. The TALC also developed and tested an automated flare launcher but it proved unsuccessful in combat. Another significant TAC development was the adverse weather airdrop system, or AWADS, which allowed qualified C-130 crews to drop without using outside visual references to determine the release point. AWADS led to the reintroduction of TAC C-130s to the war in Vietnam.

As the war in Vietnam decreased in intensity, the USAF began restructuring and the tactical airlift mission was directly affected. In addition to deactivating units in PACAF, it also deactivated TAC squadrons, particularly those flying older C-130As. The Lockbourne wing was shut down but instead of deactivating the 317th, USAF deactivated the 464th at Pope and transferred the 317th (on paper) to Pope. The 314th transferred back to the States (again on paper) to replace the 64th TAW which had transferred to Little Rock when Sewart closed. The 463rd at Clark deactivated and six months later reactivated at Dyess replacing the 516th TAW. The unit shuffle also included the deactivation of the C-130 wing at Naha, Okinawa but the 374th TCW took a trip by paper to CCK where it replaced the 314th, although the 314th squadrons kept their designations, with one exception; the 346th was redesignated and became the 21st.

Although the war in Vietnam had waned after the invasion of Cambodia in the spring of 1970, two years later it flared when communist troops came out of Cambodia and Laos in an effort to drive down Highway 13 to capture Saigon. Their attack stalled when they were unable to capture the town of An Loc but the town was placed under siege. By this time the PACAF C-130 force had been reduced to one wing at CCK and a squadron of C-130Bs at Clark which was in the process of inactivation. After South Vietnamese C-123 crews were unable to supply the town, MACV ordered the 374th TAW to begin airdrops. The 374th crews found themselves facing ground fire of an intensity that hadn't been seen since 1968. After three airplanes were lost, two to ground fire and one to unknown causes, the crews turned to high altitude airdrop using GRADS, a ground radar-directed system that had originally been developed for C-130 bombing missions. GRADS missions were accurate but time consuming. A TAC squadron made up of AWADS airplanes and crews from Little Rock and Pope was sent to Southeast Asia as project EASTER BUNNY. The AWADS airplanes proved successful in combat and from then on they were responsible for airdrop in South Vietnam and Cambodia.

In 1971 the Air Force commenced a study of the Air Force to determine how the future force should be constructed. The study determined that there was duplication in aerial port facilities with MAC and PACAF having its own facilities. The study team recommended the consolidation of all airlift functions into one organization. The consolidation was opposed by TAC commander General William W. Momyer, who had commanded Seventh Air Force at the height of the Vietnam War and who was well-familiar with tactical airlift operations dating back to his days at TAC headquarters in the 1950s. In his end-of-tour report, Gen. Momyer had stressed that tactical airlift operations as experienced in Vietnam during his command was decidedly different from routine transport operations and that they required highly motivated aircrews with special skill and training. Momyer retired in 1973 and as soon as he took off his uniform for the last time, USAF proceeded with plans to transfer all of TAC and PACAF's airlift squadrons to MAC. The TAC squadrons transferred in December 1974 and the PACAF squadrons transferred in early 1975.⁴

⁴ The Gulf War in 1990 revealed that the transfer had been a mistake due to command and control problems. In a reorganization after the war, the C-130 squadrons were assigned to the new Air Combat Command. However, the return to a combat command was short-lived. In the late 1990s the C-130 squadrons transferred into Air Mobility Command. However, the C-130 squadrons in the Pacific are now part of PACAF.

The Lockheed C-130J⁵



Back in 2007 the 41st Airlift Squadron at Little Rock received the first C-130J to be delivered to an active duty Air Force airlift squadron. I must say that it took the Air Force long enough to finally get around to assigning the revolutionary new airlifter to its active duty airlift force. Although it is not generally known, Lockheed first proposed that it develop a new model of the C-130 to be designated as the J-model way back in 1966! No, that's not a misprint – it was in 1966. Air Force C-130s had just completed their first year of combat operations in support of US ground troops in

South Vietnam and Lockheed was proposing a new model based on lessons learned there.

At the time, the Air Force was still receiving brand new C-130Es and the more powerful C-130H had already been developed although none were going to TAC's troop carrier squadrons. The price tag on the new model was going to be considerably higher than the C-130H so the Air Force decided to continue with deliveries of the E-model and purchase H-models to replace the older C-130As and Bs when they were retired from active service. Although Lockheed had no encouragement from the US military, it continued to experiment with new technology as it was developed to improve C-130 performance at a time when the Army and Air Force were both saying that they weren't interested in newer models of the venerable airlifter. The Air Force wanted something new, preferably without props, and was focusing its attention on a wide-body four-engine jet to replace the C-141. The Army, which had evidently forgotten how many helicopters it lost in Southeast Asia, wanted something that would take off and land vertically as did the Marine Corps. Meanwhile, Lockheed kept working on improvements to the C-130 design. The company built what it called its "Test Bed" C-130 to test new developments.

Landing and takeoff distance had long been an issue for tactical airlifters. Back in the early 1960s Lockheed and the Air Force experimented with boundary layer control. (For those who are not pilots, the boundary layer is the layer of air that moves around the surface of an airfoil.) Lockheed built a single C-130C that had jet engines under each wing, not to provide thrust but to produce compressed air that was directed through slots into the boundary layer to reduce friction (drag) and improve takeoff and landing performance. The Air Force was interested but the price tag was too high. In the 1980s Lockheed continued experimenting with its Test Bed C-130 to improve takeoff and landing performance. Since the US Air Force showed no interest, the company decided to develop a new model for foreign markets, particularly the British Royal Air Force and the Royal Australian Air Force. The company also decided to pursue FAA certification, although they later let it lapse in order to pursue military contracts.

The C-130J made its first flight in 1996 and deliveries began two years later. There was almost immediate

⁵ I took the picture at Keesler when participants in the first flareship reunion were invited to the 815th Airlift Squadron. They didn't have any airplanes flying but their sister weather squadron did and they made a low pass over the flightline for us.

opposition to the new model in the Air Force because the crew had been reduced to three; two pilots and a loadmaster. New technology led to the elimination of the navigator and the C-130 never really had needed an engineer – way back in the 1950s TAC had asked for a third seat because they wanted to have a flight mechanic as part of the crew to take care of routine maintenance while on missions and decided he might as well have a seat between the pilots so he could help monitor the instruments. There was widespread opposition to the new model in the active Air Force, particularly by engineers whose jobs would be eliminated. Yet even though the Air Force didn't want the J-model for its active duty squadrons, Congress appropriated funds to purchase several for Air Guard and Reserve units. The Air Weather Service decided it liked the C-130J's superior range and ordered them for its Hurricane Hunter squadron at Keesler. The WC-130Js are modified with the addition of pylon tanks to give the airplanes even greater endurance than the basic model (see above photo).

I had heard all of the criticisms of the J-model that were being put forth within the C-130 community. Then I was in Citation II class at Simuflite with two Lockheed pilots who also flew the company's Cessna Citation. One was retired Air Force and the other was retired Marine Corps. They told me that the J-model was light years beyond the other models; that it could take off from a 2,000 foot unimproved runway with a 30,000 pound payload then climb to 35,000 feet and go several hundred miles. When I told my C-130 friends what I had been told, they pooh-poohed it and came up with arguments such as that turboprops aren't supposed to operate at 35,000 feet. (I use to fly King Air 200s and although we didn't go that high that often, we could if we needed to for increased range.) For the record, the C-130J has a range of just over 2,000 miles while the E and H can only go 1,150 and 1,208 miles with a normal payload (34,000 for the J and 35,000 for the E and H.) The J is also 62 knots faster than the E and 44 knots faster than the H.

Even while the Air Force wasn't buying the J-model for active duty squadron, the Marine Corps was, as was the RAF and the RAAF. Even after the US became embroiled in combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Air Force wouldn't send Guard and Reserve J-models to the region because of various issues. When they finally did send them to Iraq, the J-models quickly proved that they were more suited to "hot and high" operations than the older models. The military suddenly realized that it needed them, especially to replace the aging C-130E that in many cases were as much as two decades older than the young men and women who were flying them. It took over two decades, but the US military finally realized that the only suitable replacement for a C-130 is – another C-130!

54th Troop Carrier Wing Special Airdrop Unit and the 308th Bombardment Wing

The air commando groups of World War II have been greatly publicized even though their contribution to the war effort was small. Only one of the three groups that were formed was ever used for any kind of special operation and that was before the group had been designated as an air commando unit. But there was another organization that was heavily involved in what today would be considered special operations. The 54th Troop Carrier Wing in the Southwest Pacific had a special unit whose mission was in part to resupply Australian ground units operating in close proximity to the most heavily defended Japanese installation in the region, the vast complex around Simpson Harbor near the township of Rabaul on the island of New Britain. They also operated on long range missions to resupply troops that had landed on islands in northern New Guinea. These special operators, as they would be termed today, were unique in that instead of flying transports, their aircraft were converted bombers, mostly Boeing B-17s.

The 54th Troop Carrier Wing activated in March 1943 using the headquarters of the 374th Troop Carrier

**BOEING B-17E**

December 1941 on special missions then were ordered to remain. All three B-24s were lost by the fall of the Philippines, two to enemy action during the evacuation of Java and the third when the pilot ditched it in the Maldives after arriving over Del Monte Airfield on Mindanao and receiving no signal that it was safe to land.

By the time the 54th TCW was formed, additional B-17s were becoming available as they were replaced by B-24s in the 43rd Bombardment Group. Instead of sending them back to the States, many B-17s were turned over to the 54th TCW for distribution among its troop carrier squadrons. The B-17s don't seem to have been assigned to any particular unit but were spread out among the troop carrier groups. They were initially used as logistical transports but in late 1943 when more B-17s became available, they were assigned to the 54th Troop Carrier Wing for a special airdrop unit. The B-17s were not stripped of their armaments and their guns could be used to strafe Japanese positions in close proximity to the drop zones. In December 1943, Allied troops landed on New Britain. The first landings were at Arawe on the south coast as a diversion for the main landings at Cape Gloucester ten days later. The special airdrop unit was given the task of resupplying the advancing ground forces as they moved deeper into Japanese occupied territory. The 54th TCW B-17s were soon operating as close as 35 miles to the Japanese stronghold at Rabaul.

Shortly after he arrived in Australia in the summer of 1942, Maj. Gen. George C. Kenney set up a special Air Task Force for operations at advanced bases until combat groups could arrive. The Air Task Force had no assigned aircraft or personnel other than its staff; its strength came from squadrons that arrived shortly after forward airfields had been established in newly captured territory. It was commanded by Colonel Fred Smith. In early 1944 the 308th Bombardment Wing was activated to perform the tasks formerly performed by the Air Task Force. Col. David W. Hutchinson was placed in command. Troop carrier groups and squadrons were attached to the 308th for forward operations as the Allies advanced through New Guinea and on to the Philippines and eventually to the Japanese mainland. One of the groups that operated under the 308th's command was the 3rd Air Commando Group, which was assigned to Fifth Air Force. General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester Nimitz decided that rather than capturing Rabaul, they would by-pass it and let it "die on the vine" by cutting the Japanese supply lines from their main base at Truk and continuing air strikes to neutralize the Japanese defenses. Allied bombers had been attacking Rabaul since the spring of 1942 but in November 1943 the intensity of the campaign increased. Land-based bombers flying from airfields on New Guinea were joined by US Navy carrier aircraft. To provide a means of rescuing downed

Group, which had been formed the previous fall to command the 6th, 21st, 22nd and 33rd Troop Carrier Squadrons. The 21st was the first of the squadrons to activate and its complement of airplanes included B-17s from its inception. As reported in the last issue, older B-17s that had come out of the Philippines were turned over to Captain Paul I. Gunn's provisional air transport squadron in early 1942 while the Japanese were beginning their advance into the Netherlands East Indies. The new squadron also included three Ferrying Command B-24As that had been sent to the Southwest Pacific in

aircrews, Australian New Guinea long-range commando teams moved into the jungles of northeastern New Britain to conduct patrols and search for downed airmen. An Australian intelligence officer maintained radio contact with the patrols and set up drop missions into drop zones designated by the patrols. The drop zones were marked with special panels. The B-17s took off from their bases so as to arrive at the drop zones at first light. The B-17s flew without fighter escort to preserve their security and depended on their gunners to defend against attacking fighters. They kept the ground patrols and the American airmen they rescued fed until they could be returned to their bases. The special airdrop section also dropped to Marines that were pushing inland on Cape Hoskins, a promontory on the north coast of New Britain.

In at least one case troop carrier B-17s tangled with and shot down Japanese fighters. On March 2, 1944 a crew commanded by Flight Officer Ralph G. Deardoff from the 69th TCS of the 433rd Group with Lt. Col. A.J. Beck from the 54th Wing flying as copilot was jumped by four Japanese fighters while they were dropping to troops on Mamote in Admiralty Islands. Deardoff turned for the harbor where US Navy destroyers could provide covering fire but his gunners shot down a Zero, the first Japanese fighter claimed by troop carrier gunners. More often the B-17 gunners expended their ammunition against Japanese ground positions. In one instance a B-17 crew dropped supplies onto a contested Japanese airfield then came back around to strafe the Japanese on the other side of the runway so the Allied troops could recover the supplies. It should be noted that the 54th TCG B-17s were not the only bombers being used to deliver supplies. The 308th Bombardment Wing frequently used B-25s to drop supplies, both to supplement the 54th TCW's transports and B-17s and because drops were often needed in contested areas where unarmed C-47s might be in danger.



Sunset at Clark (USAF Photo)