



The Airlifter

Newsletter of the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association
Promoting and preserving the troop carrier/tactical airlift heritage
www.troopcarrier.org

June 25, 2021

Volume XXXIV

Treasurer's Report

We now have \$30,992.68 in checking.

Chairman's Corner

A hearty HELLO to all you TC/TAA members. This COVID period has been challenging for all of us and it is great to see things opening up again. I hope life is getting better and brighter in the coming months for each of you.

Last year, our reunion in Branson, Missouri, was smaller than usual but everyone who attended had a most enjoyable time. Those of you who were not able to make it missed a great get together. Our sincere thanks to all that made it happen.

We are sorry to report that our President, Mike Welch died recently. He had been through a difficult and painful couple of years, but continued to show his love and dedication to us and to our organization. He worked diligently to make the Branson reunion and our coming reunion in San Antonio great for all of us. He will be missed. We had a conference call of the Officers and Board members of TC/TAA recently and Mike told us that because of his new diagnosis he may not make to our Reunion in October. It was a shock to me when I learned he died two days later. He gave his all to the organization to the end. I am proud to have known and worked with him. Fair Winds and Blue Skies, Mike!!!!

The Troop Carrier/ Tactical Airlift Association will be having its 15th Anniversary Reunion in San Antonio, Texas, near the Alamo, October 13-17, 2021. We will be staying at the Holiday Inn Riverwalk. The Riverwalk is a unique area, two and a half miles long, of restaurants, hotels, and entertainment. It is a really special place to leisurely enjoy. If you have the time there is much more

to see in San Antonio, and it is a great time of year to visit. Make reservations, sign up and come. Tell other Trash Haulers you know about our Reunion and bring them along.

Lastly, our organization needs you!! We need you to become active in the management of TC/TAA. As George Dockery, our former CEO, said “You only get out of your Association what you invest in it, and there are many opportunities to serve”. What could be better than serving with your fellow patriots!!! Let us continue to make TC/TAA the outstanding organization that it is.

President’s Comments

We recently lost Mike Welch, our esteemed and beloved leader, who was a genuine trooper until the very end. Mike fought the good fight through multiple maladies these past several years. He even flew on a C-17 air refueling flight as recently as April of this year.

The Airlift/Tanker Association couldn't have made a better choice when they inducted Mike into their Hall of Fame in 2015. Under Mike's stellar leadership our organization has grown dramatically, and he brought us through the global pandemic with his usual style and grace. In fact, we were one of the few veterans organizations to hold a reunion in 2020.

And now, we must carry the torch forward with the 2021 reunion in San Antonio this 13-16 October. Let's all make an attempt to be there to honor Mike and our other comrades in arms who have made their last flight West this past year.

Let's continue to keep Mike's family in our prayers. The entire TC/TAA family grieves with them for their and our great loss.

See you in San Antonio, Bill Kehler

Member Losses

Sadly, we have lost a lot of our members in recent years, including several officers and board members. Three of our presidents have passed away, two while in office. We have also lost a former treasurer, a former vice president and several board members. I looked at the membership list and see that of the original 100 charter members, 21 have passed away. FIFTEEN of those who passed died as comparatively young men of diseases such as cancer and diabetes possibly related to herbicide exposure in Southeast Asia.

The first of our presidents to pass away was Dennis Ybarra, who died shortly after he assumed the office. Hector Leyva, our second president, died recently and now we have lost Mike Welch. Bob Ruffin, our first vice-president, passed away a few years ago and we lost former treasurer Tom Stalvey recently. The first of our board members to pass was Tony Girtman, who was also one of the founders, as was Bob Ruffin. In fact, I am the only founder still living. We have lost board members Bobby Gassiot, Sherman “Gomer” Pyle and Jim Elmer. Bobby had the distinction of being Member #1. Looking over the membership list and

seeing those who have gone on, most of whom I knew personally, brings tears to my eyes. We have no doubt probably lost others who we don't know about. I recently learned of the passing of Bill Hatfield, who was one of the first C-130 pilots after a career in C-119s, who passed away a couple of years ago. I happened to learn of his death by accident when I saw comments on a web site about The Four Horsemen. I think I also saw comments about Jim Akin, who was also a Horseman, having passed but I can't find an obit for him if he is gone.

What's really sad is that while some had lived long, productive lives, some of those who have passed were still fairly young men, and they died of diseases possibly related to herbicide exposure in Vietnam. Some died of some form of cancer. Some had been battling the VA for benefits. The VA claimed they weren't Vietnam veterans because they were assigned to offshore C-130 units. The VA insists on a veteran PROVING they set foot in Vietnam. I know Bobby Gassiott was having trouble getting a disability. I don't know if he ever did or not.

We miss 'em all!

Mike Welch



We are saddened by the recent loss of Mike Welch, our fourth president (and the second to die in office.) Mike passed away after almost three years struggling with a number of illnesses, including diabetes and cancer. He was hospitalized for 147 days in 2018 but had managed to live a full and active life. As Bill Kehler mentioned, he flew on a C-17 only a couple of months ago. I understand he was in Charleston attending a C-123s in SEA reunion. Mike joined the association not long after it was founded and was elected vice-president in the 2011 election. He was member #114. Sadly, Dennis Ybarra, who had just been elected president, died suddenly in his sleep and Mike automatically became president. Soon after assuming the office, Mike began using his Boeing account to set up teleconferences for officer's meetings and board meetings. During his time in office, he presided over the planning for the 2012 meeting in Warner Robins, Georgia; the 2014 meeting in Tucson; the 2016 meeting in Little Rock; the 2018 meeting in Dayton; the 2020 meeting in Branson, Mo; and he was in the process of presiding over the planning of the upcoming San Antonio meeting. Mike also presided over the planning, purchase and placement of the troop carrier/tactical airlift monument at the US Air Force Museum in Dayton.

A Rhode Island native, Mike enlisted in the Air Force in February 1964. He was trained as an inventory management specialist at the Amarillo, Texas technical school. Over the next four years, he was in supply with several units including the 6th Military Airlift Squadron and the 61st Military Airlift Wing at Hickam. After reenlisting, he was assigned to the 3350th Pilot Training Wing at Moody AFB, GA. He applied for cross training to the aircraft loadmaster field and after completing the loadmaster course at Sheppard, was assigned to the 3rd Aerial Port Squadron at Pope AFB, NC. After less than a year at Pope, he went overseas to the 606th Special Operations Squadron at Nakonphanom, Thailand where he was assigned as a CANDLESTICK loadmaster instructor/evaluator. (Although the 606th flew C-123s, their mission was special operations, primarily flying flare and night reconnaissance missions over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. At various times, the squadron included A-26s as well as C-123s and at one time also included U-10 Heliocouriers.) In February 1971 he was reassigned to Charleston AFB, SC where he joined the 76th Military Airlift Squadron as a C-141 loadmaster. He spent the remainder of his Air Force career in C-141s and in management and acquisition positions. After retirement, he was employed by McDonnell/Douglas as one of a team of loadmasters involved in the design of the C-17 transport. He became an employee of Boeing when they absorbed McDonnell/Douglas. After completion of the C-17 program, he was involved with the company's proposed AMP C-130 cockpit upgrade.

In addition to the TC/TAA, Mike was involved in a number of other organizations, including the Airlift/Tanker Association, Professional Loadmasters Association, 57th MAS alumni association, Air Commando Association, Distinguished Flying Cross Society and other non-military organizations. He had obtained a master's degree in management and supervision and a bachelors in education. In 2015 he was inducted into the Airlift Tanker Association's Airlift Hall of Fame along with five other C-17 "Pathfinder" loadmasters. His military decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with five oakleaf clusters. Mike was an avid softball player, a golfer and snow skier.¹

Tom Stalvey



We also lost another former officer and dedicated member when Tom Stalvey passed away on March 9. Tom had a myriad of problems related to diabetes due to exposure to herbicides, including systemic heart disease. Tom volunteered to be Association secretary at the 2010 convention in Galveston and served until he had to step down at the end of his term due to health problems. He and Roger Greuel put the 2012 Warner Robins convention together – and did an excellent job.

Tom's death was very personal to me because we were trailer mates at Clark in the 29th TAS in 1969. I met Tom

¹ Ken Abbott and Dean Robnett are visible in the photo behind Mike. Both Ken and Dean are now deceased.

immediately after my arrival at Clark along with Stony Burk, and we were friends until his death. (Stony preceded Tom in death.) Originally from North Carolina, Tom enlisted in the Air Force in October 1965 and went straight to loadmaster school at Sheppard. Upon completion of the loadmaster course, he was assigned to the 62nd TAS at Sewart AFB, Tennessee where he remained until he received orders to Clark. Tom reported to the 29th TAS, commonly known as F Troop, just in time to go in country on the first day of the communist Tet Offensive of 1968. He and his crew took shelter in the latrine behind C-130 Ops with bullets flying all around. He spent all but twenty days of the first four months of his Clark tour in country, much of it as duty loadmaster with Det One, 834th Air Division. He flew approximately twenty-five airdrop missions over Khe Sanh, then participated in the airdrops at A Loi in the deadly A Shau Valley in May and June of 1968. He was flying with 29th TAS commander Col. Bill Coleman over A Loi on the first day of drops when they received some 200 hits from ground fire, a mission for which Coleman was awarded the Silver Star. Another 463rd airplane was shot down with the loss of the crew plus a second loadmaster and two USAF photographers. He flew into Kham Duc during the historic and dramatic evacuation of the camp with Major Billie B. Mills. Mills was awarded the Silver Star for the mission. Tom got nothing for either mission although he was awarded an end-of-tour Distinguished Flying Cross.² He was also awarded the Air Medal with five oak leaf clusters.

After leaving the Air Force at the end of his enlistment in July 1969, Tom trained as a computer programmer and lived in Charlottesville, Virginia. He became involved in the apartment management business in 1981 and eventually settled in Atlanta, where he went to work for Sun trust Banks. He was vice president in charge of property management and traveled around the South overseeing properties. After retiring from the bank, he remained for awhile in Kennesaw, Georgia but had relocated to his hometown in North Carolina. Tom's obituary - [Obituary of Thomas Franklin "Tom" Stalvey | Pugh Funeral Home servi... \(pughfh.com\)](#)

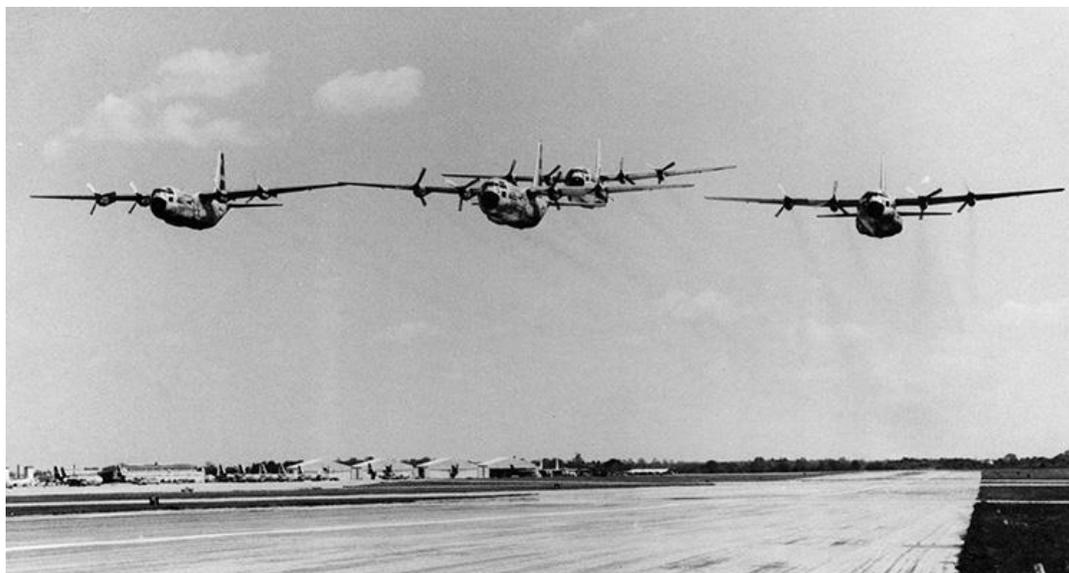
William H. "Bill" Hatfield



Bill Hatfield, who was one of our older members and a legend in the troop carrier world, passed away on April 10, 2018 at the age of 90. Bill, who was from Wheeler, Mississippi, was one of the ORIGINAL C-130 pilots and the slot pilot in the famous Hercules and the Four Horsemen aerial demonstration team. I interviewed Bill by phone when I wrote this article about The Horsemen - ["The Four Horsemen" Demonstrated the Power of the C-130 Hercules \(historynet.com\)](#) and we talked several times after that. Bill actually lived less than a hundred miles from where I grew up and once bought a car from one of my family's neighbors! Bill's life was very interesting. He hitchhiked from his home in northeastern Mississippi to Montgomery, Alabama to enlist in the Air Force and spent 27 1/2 years on active duty as a troop carrier, airlift and air/sea rescue pilot. He accrued over 11,000 hours flying time, 8,000 of which were on the C-130.

² I saw Tom's citation. It was written up as an "end-of-tour" award. Later, Seventh Air Force started requiring specific missions so squadrons picked a crewmember's "best mission" and submitted it for the award.

Bill was a pilot with the 774th Troop Carrier Squadron at Ardmore, Oklahoma when the 463rd TCW began receiving C-130s. He and three other crews commanded by Captains Gene Chaney, Jim Akin and David Moore decided to use up their allotted flying time practicing close formation flying one day at Fort Campbell after winds cancelled the planned drops. They came up with some intricate maneuvers and put on an impromptu airshow at Campbell Army Airfield. They got the idea to form an aerial demonstration team and convinced their wing commander to let them go to Sewart, which hadn't received its C-130s yet, and demonstrate the maneuverability of the new transport. They put on several shows at Air Force bases and applied for aerial demonstration team status, but TAC turned them down because the airplanes were needed for troop carrier missions.



There was also a shortage of qualified C-130 pilots and the crews started getting overseas orders. Bill went to Yokota to the “Sneaky Pete” ELINT squadron that was forming there. From Yokota, Bill went to Charleston, SC where he was initial cadre for the first C-141 squadron at Charleston, the 76th ATS/MAS. (There was some poetic justice in his assignment because he and his troop carrier buddies used to sit around a piano in O clubs when MATS crews were present and sing a ditty featuring the stanza “I’d rather have a sister in a whorehouse than a brother in MATS.”) From Charleston, he returned to C-130s to the HC-130H rescue version with the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service. After his retirement, he returned home to Mississippi where he continued flying until age 80, restoring Ford Mustangs and riding his Harley. Here is Bill’s obituary - [William Hatfield Obituary - Booneville, MS \(dignitymemorial.com\)](#). Be sure and watch the memorial video.

Four Horsemen film - [Hercules and the Four Horsemen — Video | VK](#) (This is the only version I can find on the Internet. It was apparently uploaded by a Russian. I can't find the one that was on You Tube.)³

New President Bill Kehler

Due to Mike Welch's untimely passing, Bill Kehler, who was formerly the vice-president, automatically assumes the role of president. Until a temporary vice president is named by the board, Secretary Brent Richburg assumes the role of VP. Per the bylaws, he will continue as secretary.

Close Formation



While researching on the Net trying to find The Hercules and the Four Horsemen video, I came across this article from the Little Rock AFB site - [Four Horsemen return > Little Rock Air Force Base > Article Display \(af.mil\)](#). The young officer's comment "this is crazy" caused me to laugh. Although the Horsemen's show was more intricate than normal flying, up until the 1960s close formation flying was part and parcel of the troop carrier world. I took these pictures with my little Instamatic camera one day while on a training flight at Pope. (Carl Wyrick may have been aboard; I flew with him several times while in CTS.) These photos illustrate flying in close formation was something troop carrier pilots did.

The Horsemen had been schooled in World War II flying and some were WW II veterans. In WW II bomber and troop carrier formations flew tight formations, often Vs-in-trail, in order to achieve mass – as many bombs on target or troops on the DZ as possible. As the following photograph demonstrates, troop carrier crews were trained to fly Vs-in-trail formation drops. Formation drops continued into the 1960s. As a young airmen working on the flight line at Pope before I was selected to cross-train and go on flying status myself, I use to thrill at the sight of a formation returning to land at Pope. They'd come over the base in a V then transition to echelon and pitch-out to enter the pattern and come in to land. TAC had also began CLOSE LOOK low-level training

³ The voices in the video are NOT the Horsemen. Instead of using actual voices, the producers hired actors to read the dialogue. All four Horsemen ACs were Southerners, from Mississippi, Tennessee and Texas. There is a close-up of TC/TAA member Billie Mills, who often flew with the Horsemen. There is a closeup of another pilot, a blonde with a crewcut, who I believe was later Lt. General Robert Coverdale. Bill Hatfield told me they were not happy with the finished film.

introduced by officers such as General William G. Moore who headed the project, but close formation training continued for some time.



There are numerous photographs of V-formation troop and cargo drops going back to World War II and continuing in Korea and even in Vietnam, where USAF C-123s of Project MULE TRAIN and Vietnamese C-47s dropped troops. I'm not sure what kind of formations were used for the JUNCTION CITY drops but I suspect they were single-ship in-trail. I know the drops in the A Shau Valley and at Khe Sanh were single-ship. According to USAF historian Ray Bowers, TAC suggested a mass formation drop of supplies at An Loc in 1972 but the 374th TAW commander, Colonel Andrew Iosue, declined. He believed it would be "suicidal." (Although Iosue's tactical airlift experience dated back to 1963, his initial

experience was in Europe. He didn't join TAC until 1964 when the 317th TCW transferred from Evreux, France to Lockbourne and became part of TAC. By that time, V formation mass airdrops had begun to decline.

A possible reason for the discontinuation of the Vs-in-trail mass drops may have been a terrible accident that occurred over the Fort Bragg DZs in early 1964. I had been at Pope a few months. One day I was on the shuttle bus with some Sewart crewmembers who had just landed after a drop mission. They were talking about the terrible accident that had just occurred. Somehow, a trailing V flew into the troops that had been dropped by the formation in front of them. Years later, I knew a former 82nd Airborne trooper who was on the drop. One of my barracks buddies worked on the wash rack. He came in telling about the blood and gore he had washed off of one of the airplanes.⁴ He said there were footprints on top of one of the wings.

⁴ I can relate to this experience. A few years later I found myself washing blood and gore out of an airplane after an air evac flight.



While at Naha, I flew with pilots who had been at Sewart at the time and were on the mission that day. They said the problem was that the lead pilot in the affected formation had somehow miss-set his altimeter and was flying a few feet below where he should have been. The troops from the previous formation were right at his altitude and the formation flew through them, with disastrous effects. Several troopers were killed and others were injured. I can't say that the accident was the reason Vs-in-trail became passe. TAC may have already been planning to go to low-altitude "CLOSE LOOK" formations and discontinue Vs-in-trail. The accident occurred in early 1964. I went to the 779th to cross-train in August. I was in CTS later in the year when we got word that we were going to be trained for "pop-up" drops. The concept was for troop carriers to fly in-trail formations at very low altitude to avoid radar then "pop-up" to drop altitude of around 700 feet

just prior to reaching the drop zone. It was a tactic borrowed from SAC, whose nuclear bomber crews were trained to fly at very low level across the Soviet Union while on the way to their targets.

I had witnessed SAC crews in action when I was in eighth grade in West Tennessee. SAC set up one of their radar bomb scoring sites (the same radar we later used in COMMANDO VAULT) in the Milan Army Ammunition Plant, which is located about five miles west of our farm. Their target was apparently the town of Milan. There was a notice in the local papers that we could expect to see low-flying bombers. As it turned out, the route was right over our house! We started getting B-47s and B-52s – even B-36s – coming over our house at around nine PM and continuing until around ten the next day. I don't know what they were using as their pop-up point, but it may have been the road in front of our house since they seemed to start their pull-up when they crossed over it. There is also an FAA transmission tower about a quarter mile to the east and they might have been using it. Regardless, it was a spectacular sight to a thirteen-year old to see a massive six or eight-engine bomber come over at tree-top levels then begin climbing right over our house.

Once I was checked out and assigned to a crew, I was gone from Pope much of the time except for a couple of months in the summer of 1965 when we were between TDYs. During that time we flew training missions, including low-level in-trail followed by pop-ups as we approached the Fort Bragg drop zones. I don't believe we flew any close formation during that time.

San Antonio Reunion October 13-17



The 2021 members meeting and reunion will be held October 13-17 at the Holiday Inn Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas. Reunion details are on the web site at reunion2021.pdf (troopcarrier.org) and in this newsletter.

San Antonio is a great place for a reunion. It's a multi-cultural scenic city. It's one of the oldest cities in the United States, dating back to 1716, although Spanish soldiers and missionaries had visited the area before that. Like most Spanish towns in North America, San Antonio was founded as a Catholic mission and presidio and there are several missions around the city. The most famous is the Alamo, which stands in downtown San Antonio. In 1836 the Alamo was occupied by troops of Sam Houston's "Texian" army under the command of Lt. Colonel William Barret Travis and was besieged by the Mexican Army led by Mexican dictator General Antonio Lopez de Santa Ana. The much larger Mexican army – it consisted of perhaps as many as 6,000 men as opposed to the some 150-200 Texians – quickly defeated the Texians after a large-scale assault early on the morning of March 6, 1836. The defenders all died in the battle. As it turned out, Santa Ana's victory was short-lived. Only some six weeks later, Santa Ana was begging for

his own life on the banks of Buffalo Bayou outside of modern-day Houston after suffering defeat in one of the most important battles in American history. Although much of the grounds of the historic mission is now part of downtown San Antonio, the mission itself still stands and is open to the public each day.

The hotel is located on the Riverwalk, a pedestrian path running along the San Antonio River. There are numerous shops and restaurants along the Riverwalk and elsewhere throughout the city. There are also boat tours of the river, with the guide pointing out the various sights, hotels and other items of interest. El Mercado, a large Mexican market, is just off the river. El Mercado offers a collection of Mexican shops and restaurants. Some claim it's the site of the origin of Tex-Mex cooking. (Personally, I thought it originated down in the Rio Grande Valley.) San Antonio has hundreds, perhaps thousands, of restaurants with Mexican being the dominant form of cuisine. Texas barbecue is another favorite.



San Antonio has perhaps the most connections to military aviation of any town in the country. Kelly Field trained thousands of pilots in World War I, between the wars and again in World War II. Randolph was established as a satellite for Kelly and became an active base. Brooks Field was an active airfield until 1960. After that, Brooks was the center of Air Force medical research, development and education.

Then, of course, there is Lackland. Originally a training base for aviation cadets, it became a basic military training base in 1946 when basic training moved up from Harlingen. Prior to 1956, Lackland shared basic training with Parks AFB, California and Sampson AFB, NY. Basic training from both bases transferred to Lackland and it's been the "Gateway to the Air Force" ever since for enlisted airmen. Prior to 1993, Lackland was also the home of training of new officers who weren't graduates of a military academy or ROTC. Lackland is now the location of the basic "career enlisted aviator" school. Recruits are put through the basics of aircrew duty

before being sent to an advanced school for training in their respective field. For example, loadmasters go from Lackland to Little Rock for C-130 training or Altus AFB, Oklahoma for other transports. We will be visiting the school on Friday. The basic training parade field now includes a "Walk of Heroes" where the names of enlisted recipients of the Medal of Honor, Air Force Cross and Silver Star are listed. Go to the 37th Wing home page to see the names. (Not all enlisted Silver Star recipients are listed. If you know of someone who's not listed, let Ralph Bemis know.)

Here are the names of those signed up so far:

Andy Vaquera, Ricky Davidson, Mike Wright, David Padilla, Michael Vaquera, Ralph Bemis, David Clark, Ora Conlon, Jimmy Trampota, Amy (Baginski) Dodd, Arne Suvatne, Carolyn Hodge, John Mayson, Carl Penaranda, Ken McLear, Bill Kehler, Bill Goodall, Freddie Rodriguez, Tom Wark, Dennis Moody. Most will be accompanied by their wives or significant others. Others have also indicated that they plan to attend. It is my intention to come, hopefully accompanied by my wife.

We were last in San Antonio in November 2008 - [2008 \(troopcarrier.org\)](http://2008.troopcarrier.org)

Our Heritage and Early History

The troop carrier mission, which effectively ceased in 1974-1975 when Military Airlift Command assumed responsibility for all airlift, was one of the most important missions of the United States Army Air Forces and the United States Air Force from 1942, when the first Air Transport Command was established (the

designation was appropriated for a new command a few months later) through World War II, the Korean Conflict and Vietnam. General Dwight Eisenhower considered the C-47 to be one of the most important vehicles of World War II and troop carrier continued to play an important role in the Berlin Airlift, the Korean War and Vietnam.⁵ Far East Air Forces troop carrier squadrons were essential to United Nations efforts in Korea and were again essential in Vietnam, where troop carrier squadrons (they were redesignated as “tactical airlift” in the summer of 1967) allowed US Army and Marine Corps battalions to operate far away from the rear area airfields serviced by Military Airlift Command transports. Most of the founders of modern day airlift served in troop carrier at some time in their careers. This organization was formed to perpetuate the heritage of troop carrier/tactical airlift operations.



The organization came about as a result of the desire of retired Major Howard Seboldt to get his former crewmembers and buddies together the next time he was in the United States. After a career in SAC, Howie went to C-130s with the 29th TAS at Clark just as the Vietnam War was beginning it’s most turbulent period. I had the privilege of being his loadmaster in 1969-70. After retiring at Pope, Howie returned to Clark. He was employed by Bird Air until Vietnam and Cambodia collapsed. Howie came to the US once a year to check on property in Miami and to visit a VA hospital for a checkup. His last visit was in 2003. I had the privilege

of getting together with him in Miami when I happened to have a trip there and was there for a few days. He had sold his property and wasn’t planning to go back there. He was planning to come here and visit me the following year (2004) and wanted me to put together a reunion with his buddies. I agreed.

As it turned out, Howie passed away a few months later due to kidney failure. Several people suggested I get a reunion together anyway. Bob Ruffin, who had been involved with several Airlift Association reunions in the past, was probably the most insistent. He told me I should get something going and said he’d help. I live about 50 miles from Galveston, which offers beachfront hotels and a generally relaxed atmosphere. Bob’s son was a Southwest pilot and he had pass privileges. He got in touch with the Galveston convention bureau and flew down for a few days. I didn’t know Bob previously – his time at Clark was before mine – but we hit it off. We spent a night in Galveston and visited several hotels. Initially, we were planning to have a reunion of 463rd TCW/TAW personnel. We discussed expanding it to Vietnam C-130 vets, then TAC Troop Carrier vets. We finally decided to make it a reunion for anyone who was ever in troop carrier/tactical airlift, including TAC C-124s and other airplanes other than C-130s.

⁵ Although MATS and it’s successors try to claim credit for the Berlin Airlift, it was actually a troop carrier operation from start to finish. All C-47s and the C-54s that replaced them were assigned to troop carrier wings, including the Navy C-54s and MATS C-54s that were sent to Germany to augment them.

We had our reunion in Galveston at the Victorian Hotel over Veterans Day of 2005. There were over 100 in attendance, (around 120) and we all had a good time. Bob wasn't feeling well and spent much of the time in his room. We had our banquet at the Lone Star Flight Museum. (At one time, the museum featured a photograph of our group on their brochures.) We all got together Saturday morning for a discussion and auction. Ace Bowman suggested we form an organization and call it the Troop Carrier association, and everyone agreed.⁶ As we moved toward organizing, Bill Cannon told me we needed to incorporate in order to attract support from corporations such as Lockheed. (Bob had managed to convince Lockheed to pay for the caps that he had made up. A Lockheed rep also was in attendance and gave a presentation on the new C-130J – and seemed to convince the engineers and navigators that it was a good airplane.) Ernie Gassiott, who is an attorney, drew up the incorporation papers and submitted them to the Texas Secretary of State where they were accepted on June 26, 2006. (This is the official date of the formation of the organization, but it had really formed as an idea the previous November.) Ernie put Bob Ruffin, Tony Girtman and Sam McGowan (me) as temporary directors. I was named as executor.

We returned to Galveston to the Victorian for our 2006 reunion. Bob Ruffin was unable to attend. He suffered from PTSD and dementia and was having a lot of problems. Ralph Bemis had assumed the role of treasurer since Bob was unable to continue in that role. Ernie had expressed the need to file with the IRS for recognition as a veterans organization. Ernie met with me, Ralph and Tony Girtman to discuss the filing. Since I was handling the role of the secretary, I said I'd do it. After the meeting, we went to a local bank branch to have Ralph and Tony added to the bank account I had set up earlier that year for Association money.⁷ I went around and talked to a number of people and asked if they were willing to serve as officers and board members. We had our first meeting at our banquet that evening and had an election. Everything came off well and most people seem pleased. We agreed that we would come to Galveston every year from then on. Ernie Gassiott commented to me that we had everything we needed, a hotel and a caterer. All we needed to do in the future was set a time. Ernie also commented that he was glad we had formed an organization that he felt he was a part of. Unfortunately, an incident occurred the following morning. While we were gathered in the meeting room, our new president was doing something in the hotel lobby next door on his laptop. He left the laptop unattended and it "walked off." The hotel said it wasn't their responsibility. He refused to go back there again. He wanted a new hotel. Things started falling apart when the new president started doing things on his own without discussion with the other officers other than the VP.

I obtained the necessary documents to apply for recognition by the IRS as veterans organization and sent them off. I received a letter authorizing us as a 501C (19) veterans organization. The letter also granted us the status of a "wartime veterans organization," because 90% of our membership served in wartime, a status that establishes us as a charitable organization and allows ALL contributions to the organization to be tax deductible. This is a status many other organizations don't have. We had not adopted a set of bylaws yet. I had agreed that I would write them then present them to the membership for revision and adoption at our

⁶ There was a Troop Carrier organization of World War II troop carrier personnel but it had become defunct. We thought should continue their tradition.

⁷ Bob had opened an account with his bank in Arkansas to handle funds for the 2005 reunion, but it was a personal account and we needed a corporate account.

next meeting. I looked at bylaws of other organizations and developed ideas for our own. In view of the problems we were having with our president and VP, I saw the need to have a chairman and vice chairman to provide oversight. I wrote the bylaws so that the officers are responsible for day to day operations while the board is responsible for oversight in their role of management of the organization with the chairman of the board having ultimate management responsibility.

Later in the year, we learned that the president had decided to run for Congress, which put us in a pickle because of IRS limitations on political activity. Moreover, he had not informed the board of his plans. By rights, he should have stepped down as president when he declared his candidacy. When we called him on it, he got mad and demanded to be removed from the membership roll. Then he and the VP cancelled our upcoming 2007 reunion without discussing it with the board. This caused problems because people had purchased non-refundable airline tickets.

With the planned meeting when we were planning to finalize the bylaws cancelled at the last minute, I called a meeting at the Holiday Inn in Clear Lake, Texas. Nine members were present, including seven board members. We went over the bylaws and approved them with revisions, and elected a new slate of officers and board members. That meeting on February 2, 2008 is when our organization became formal.

At this point I want to make a comment. If there is one person in this organization who has been most involved, it is Ralph Bemis. Although Ralph and I were in the same squadron for a few months, I didn't really know him until we got involved with the reunions. Although Bob Ruffin did a lot getting the first Galveston reunion together, he became practically worthless after that due his medical problems. Presidents come and go but Ralph, who was awarded the Silver Star for a mission in Vietnam, has been an officer and board member of this organization since it started. When Bob Ruffin became practically incapacitated, Ralph stepped up and started taking care of the money. He has been an officer and board member since the organization's inception. He was replaced as treasurer for a couple of years after he failed to make the last Galveston reunion – his nephew was graduating from basic training – and Tom Stalvey said he'd assume the role. Ralph was elected to the board and became vice-president after Dennis Ybarra passed away. He returned to the treasurer's position when Tom had to step down due to health problems. In my opinion, Ralph is and has been the most important person in this organization.

E Flight

One of the most whispered about troop carrier/tac airlift missions of all time is that performed by a special unit inside the 21st Troop Carrier Squadron and often referred to as E Flight. Few in the unit even knew its origins and those who came along later didn't know what their predecessors had been responsible for. Although some consider E Flight to be connected to the famous World War II Flying Tigers, actually the American Volunteer Group, that connection is only indirect, as is the connection to the other World War II mission known as CARPETBAGGER. The predecessor to E Flight is actually rather unique in military annals.



The National Security Act of 1947, which established the Air Force as a separate military organization, also established the Central Intelligence Agency. The new CIA was established to replace certain functions then being performed by the War and State Departments. One of the two major functions of the new agency was covert actions. A division was set up within the CIA called the Special Activities Division, or SAD, now called the Special Activities Center. Although it's gone practically off the radar today, the role of SAD was basically to destabilize countries the United States considered as enemies, including the Soviet Union, China and North Korea. One means of doing this was to setup and supply guerrilla forces fighting against their national government. Needless to say, air transportation was crucial to SAD activities.

There were two events that affected SAD and would eventually lead to activities related to E Flight. Both involved China. When Chairman Mao's communists defeated Chiang Kia-shek's Nationalist forces (KMT), Chiang's main army evacuated to Formosa but a large number of KMT troops, many of whom were ethnic Muslims, remained in China, particularly along the Burmese border. During World War II, Burma played a major role in the war in Asia. Chiang, who established his headquarters on Formosa, recognized the troops as part of his army and supplied them. This was made to order for SAD. The other event was the Chinese Red Army's occupation of the mountain kingdom of Tibet, a region lying on India's northern border.⁸ Tibet had a history of rotating independence and Chinese occupation but had been independent since 1912 when Sun Yat Sen established the Republic of China after the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty. Mao decided Tibet was part of China and should be part of his new communist regime. He forced the Tibetan government to sign a bogus document known as the Seventeen Point Agreement then sent Chinese troops to occupy the country. Many Tibetans chose to resist. CIA's SAD began operations to train and support Tibetan dissidents to wage guerrilla warfare against their Chinese occupiers. Air transport was integral to the supply of the KMT troops in Burma and within China itself as well as Tibet. The CIA had aviation assets of its own, including a handful of A-26 light bombers and at least one B-17 that it seems to have used for a variety of purposes, including using the Fulton Recovery

⁸ At the time, the region in the Assam Valley was part of India, but it later broke away and became East Pakistan. It is now Bangladesh.

System to pick up captured Russian weather equipment from an Arctic ice flow. It also had access to CAT, the civilian airline General Claire Chennault had established in China after World War II.

Contrary to popular belief, the CIA did not own CAT or its successor, Air America. The company was owned outright by the United States government; the CIA used them as contract carriers. After Chennault moved his airline to Formosa, he faced tremendous financial difficulties. He went to Washington and pleaded with the US State Department for loans. The CIA saw an opportunity. Instead of the State Department approving another government loan to keep the airline afloat, they (the CIA) engineered the outright purchase of the airline. The government covertly established a US-owned corporation in Delaware called Airdale Inc. as a holding company. CAT became a subsidiary, with the US government, through Airdale Inc, holding 40% interest. The other 60% belonged to Chinese investors. CAT then created a company under it called Asiatic Aeronautical Company and transferred all of the hard assets (airplanes, equipment, buildings, etc.) to it while the personnel were employed by CAT Inc. The US government also established Southern Air Transport, a US corporation, with two divisions, SAT Atlantic and SAT Pacific. The companies kept solvent by bidding on US government contracts. In 1957 Airdale became Pacific Corporation. Two years later in 1959 CAT became Air America, although a company called CAT continued operating as an airline service in the Far East.

US ownership of the companies was kept secret, including from its employees.⁹ CIA officials recognized CAT as a tremendous asset to its activities in the Far East. The airline was staffed by professional pilots, most with military backgrounds including many who had served in China during the war, and owned a fleet of military surplus C-46s and C-47s. They later acquired larger four-engine C-54s. Chiang also had airplanes he could use to deliver supplies, including long range B-24 Liberators that were left in China at the end of World War II. The CIA also had access to a handful of Air Force transports, C-54s and C-118s along with its B-17. Tibet, however, presented problems beyond the capabilities of CAT's fleet and the Air Force transports it controlled. They quickly realized that the Air Force's new C-130 would be a valuable asset for the Tibet operation and were eager to get their hands on some. As it turned out, the Air Force was in the process of establishing three squadrons of C-130As in the Far East. Although it was supposed to be a civilian organization, the CIA included a number of Air Force officers in various positions within the agency. Some were Air Force officers. They engineered a program to allow the Agency to have use of Air Force C-130s. They would have C-130s "baled" for CIA use with civilian crews employed by CAT to fly them. It was not the first such operation. CAT crews had been flying Air Force C-118s belonging to a classified Air Force unit at Kadena called the 581st Air Resupply and Communications Wing. The 581st had a couple of C-118s and a few C-54s for CIA use. At one time, the unit operated four black B-29s and had access to four C-119s. On missions where a US military presence was undesirable, the CIA used CAT pilots. CIA initially used 581st C-118s for

⁹ Although CAT, Southern Air Transport and Air America are often referred to as "CIA airlines," in reality CIA owned none of them. The companies were owned lock, stock and barrel by the United States government through the Airdale Inc. CIA was a customer. [Air America History \(air-america.org\)](http://air-america.org)

missions over Tibet, but the reciprocating transports proved inadequate for such missions. Hence the desire for C-130s.



In 1958 First Lieutenant Billie B. Mills was a new C-130 aircraft commander in the 774th TCS at Sewart AFB, Tennessee. Soon after his upgrade to first pilot, Mills and his crew went to Colorado Springs for what they had been told was a simple mission to take cadets at the recently established Air Force Academy for orientation rides. When they got there, they were met by men in suits who told Mills he and his crew were theirs. Mills called back to Sewart and was put on the phone with the wing commander who told him “do what they say, but don’t let them kill

you.” The men in suits had them flying drop missions, at night, over the Colorado Rockies dropping Oriental men into drop zones lit by campfires in the vicinity of Camp Hale, a former Army camp where mountain troops had trained during World War II. The men arrived at Peterson Field in blue busses with shades over the windows. Unknown to Mills and his crew at the time, the men they were dropping were Tibetans who had escaped from Tibet and were sent to the island of Saipan where the CIA had a secret base. They were flown to Colorado aboard 581st C-118s and transported to Camp Hale by bus.

The C-130A was new to the Air Force inventory and there were none in civilian service at the time. The CIA men drooled over the new transport and saw it as ideal for their efforts in Asia, particularly in Tibet. Mills and his crew so impressed the men in suits that they asked specifically for him and his crew to fly a C-130 to Japan to train civilian crews from CAT to operate the C-130. Billie once told me that he was in awe of the CAT pilots. They were World War II combat veterans with thousands of hours of flight time while he was a green lieutenant. When Billie and his crew went to Japan, no C-130s had yet been based in the Far East but the 483rd TCW at Ashiya, Japan was slated to get them. The 374th TCW at Tachikawa was in the process of inactivation since MATS was taking over all C-124s, including the wing’s 6th and 22nd TCS. A third Tachikawa squadron, the 21st TCS, flew a mixed-bag of transports including C-47s, C-54s and C-119s. The 21st, which has a history of covert operations dating back to the Korean War, provided its transports for CIA use. In fact, a code word used in the squadron for a classified mission was to refer to it as “an E Flight” mission. There was no E Flight as such, but crewmembers used the term as a code word

among themselves to let their squadron mates know they had been off on a classified mission.¹⁰ Rather than inactivating, the 21st had been chosen to also equip with the C-130A and transfer from Tachikawa south to Naha, Okinawa and continue their classified operations with the new airplane. The 21st would provide airplanes for CIA use, and the CAT crews Mills had trained would fly them. The airplanes were stripped of all markings and the CAT crews, who had flown to Naha on CAT airline flights, flew them to Takhli, Thailand where the CIA had a secret base.¹¹ CAT crews dropped personnel and supplies into Tibet. Just how long the operation continued is uncertain, but it continued at least until 1972 when President Richard Nixon visited China and agreed to discontinue support of Tibetan insurgents.

It doesn't appear that any special flight was set up within the 21st to handle the missions. Rather, any of the 21st's airplanes could be used on. That changed in 1961 after President John F. Kennedy was inaugurated and, after the embarrassment of the Bay of Pigs, determined to combat communism in Asia, particularly in Laos. Laotian Royalists were battling communist rebels known as the Pathet Lao with US support. North Vietnam and China were supporting the Pathet Lao. Kennedy authorized the use of Air Force C-130s to supply Vientiane if the need arose. At the same time, the new president authorized the expansion of the covert program used to supply Tibetan guerrillas to include Laos. By this time, Airdale had become Pacific Corporation and had created Air America and transferred its clandestine activities to it, while CAT continued to operate as a legitimate airline connecting cities in the Far East. In April 1961, four Air America crews flew four USAF C-130s to Takhli to fly CIA missions into Laos. The movement was in conjunction with a Kennedy directive to convert Meo (Hmong) tribesmen in northeast Laos into an independent army under the command of Lt. Col. Vang Pao.¹² By May, SAD had equipped a 5,000-man Meo army.

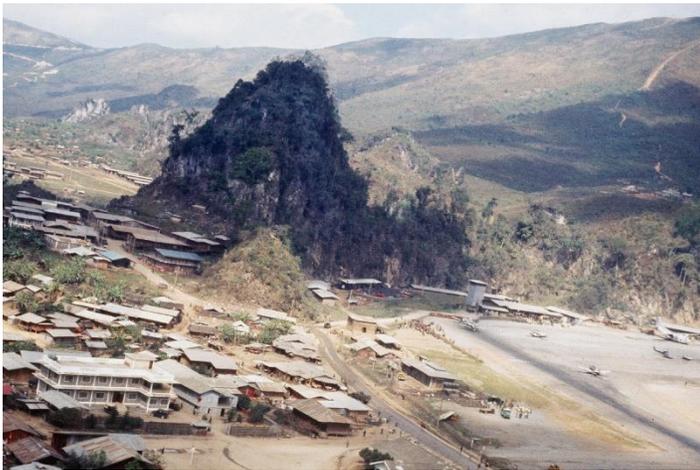
Although there had been strife in Laos since 1945 and the end of World War II, the Laotian Civil War began in 1959 when communist Pathet Lao supported by North Vietnam revolted against the Lao Royalists. The uprising was prompted by Hanoi, who no doubt sought to use the Pathet Lao to protect the network of trails they were in the process of constructing in eastern Laos to move supplies to communist insurgents in South Vietnam. A third party entered the conflict in August 1960 when Captain Kong Le, a US-trained Lao paratrooper, mounted a coup and took control of Vientiane. Le declared his intentions to end corruption in the Lao government and end the civil war, for which he blamed the United States. Royalist forces drove him and his followers out of the capitol to the Plain of Jars. Although the United States officially supported the Royalists, CIA's

¹⁰ This came from a now-deceased TC/TAA member who was part of the 21st.

¹¹ According to Aderholt, the airplanes were stripped at Takhli but the stripping later occurred at Kadena, perhaps because of the lack of facilities at Takhli.

¹² The decision to recruit the Meo was influenced by a CIA agent named Bill Lair, who initially created a special force in Thailand. He knew of Vang Pao and sought him out. Lair proposed that his Thai troops train Vang Pao's men and provide radio service and the United States would supply the weapons, funding and "strategic direction."

SAD sought to establish a FOURTH military force in Laos using the Meo. The Meo had no loyalty to the Royalists or the communists. There can be no doubt that SAD's intentions were to use them to wage war clandestinely against the North Vietnamese. In 1961, CIA agents began the construction of a remote airfield in the Laotian mountains and named it Long Tieng (also called Long Ching.) The new base would serve as a distribution point for supplies for the Meo. A city of some 50,000 sprang up around the "secret" base.



Sometime in late 1961 or possibly before, 315th Air Division established E Flight within the 21st TCS.¹³ By that time, the 483rd TCW had inactivated and the 817th TCS had moved down to Naha from Ashyia (the 815th transferred to Tachikawa.) E Flight's mission was to provide airplanes for CIA operations and train Air America crews. E Flight was unique among the Naha squadrons because it included maintenance personnel. Under existing Air Force policy, all maintenance personnel and airplanes

on a base were assigned to the host unit, which at Naha was the 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing. The 21st and 817th squadrons were assigned directly to 315th Air Division and "borrowed" airplanes from the 51st FIW for missions. Due to the nature of their operations, E Flight had its own airplanes and its own maintenance personnel.¹⁴ E Flight maintenance personnel were on flight orders as "Cat Zs," a term the Air Force used to identify personnel "not otherwise classified" on aircraft flight records.¹⁵ The mechanics started referring to themselves as "Cat Zs."

¹³ Some sources put the date as August 1961. (One source has August 1960 but this is most likely a typo.) I'm not sure the 21st even had flights. I was in the 35th and we were assigned to sections – pilots, navigators, flight mechanics, loadmasters – and scheduled individually. In my recollection, there were no flights. As far as I know, the 21st and 817th had the same arrangements.

¹⁴ Whether E Flight mechanics were responsible for all maintenance at Naha is uncertain. I know this much – the first mission I ever flew from Naha was in an E Flight airplane. It was no different than any other C-130A on the flight line.

¹⁵ I went round and round over this with the late Ralph Krach, who was very proud of having been an E Flight radar repairman. Ralph insisted Cat Zs were unique to E Flight, but we had Cat Z maintenance men in my C-141 squadron at Robins AFB, GA. Our squadron carried special weapons and Cat Z maintenance men flew with us to serve as guards. I also had Cat Zs on board on a special mission carrying British gold from Fort Knox to the UK, but that's another story.

Previously, in January 1960 Major Harry C. “Heinie” Aderholt had assumed command of the 1095th Operational Evaluation and Training Group at Kadena. The unit had replaced the 581st Air Resupply and Communication Wing, which had operated black B-29s out of Kadena and also had access to four C-119s that probably belonged to the 21st TCS at Tachikawa.¹⁶ Aderholt’s background included both airlift and covert operations and he was probably secretly assigned to the CIA. His unit had a handful of C-54s and C-118s, but its main function was as the go-between the CIA and the Air Force for operations in Asia. Heinie told me he did not “set up E Flight” as many maintain, but was its “customer”. He also told me there were similar operations in Europe.¹⁷ Aderholt’s office was responsible for putting the airplanes together with the Air America crews and overseeing operations at Takhli.¹⁸

Whenever an airplane was needed, it was flown to Kadena by an E Flight crew then was sanitized. All Air Force markings were removed, and the identification plate was replaced.¹⁹ The only markings were a bogus number on the tail. The Air America crew flew down from Tachikawa and joined the airplane at Kadena. The Air Force crew flew with the Air America crew as instructors during the flight to Takhli. At Takhli, the Air Force crews left the airplane and one of Aderholt’s airplanes flew them to Bangkok where they remained in a hotel until they were called to return to Takhli to take the airplane back to Okinawa.²⁰ There is no doubt that this was the case. Aderholt related to his biographer that the crews went to Bangkok as related by his biographer, Warren Trest, for his book AIR COMMANDO ONE. (I have a copy right in front of me.) While the flight crews went to Bangkok, the Cat Zs remained at Takhli to maintain the airplanes and provide other support to the mission. They dressed in civilian clothes and denied they were military. There are reports that they flew on missions as “kickers.” I know a former flight mechanic I knew at Naha who was in E Flight in maintenance in the early sixties. He recently told me that “the people in the cockpit were CIA but those in the back were Air Force.” The late Dr. William M. Leary, an Air Force Korean War veteran who became a military aviation historian, did extensive work on Air America as well as airlift. In an article about the Tibet airlift published in the Smithsonian Air & Space magazine in December 1997, Leary stated that the loadmaster functions were carried out by US Forest Service smokejumpers. It is a well-known fact that smoke jumpers went to the Orient to work for Air America in their offseason. They were trained riggers as well as parachutists and were experienced in aerial delivery techniques. Some Air Force personnel remained at Takhli to serve in functions such as coordinating operations. General Aderholt specifically mentioned then-First

¹⁶ The air resupply and communication units were descendants of the World War II CARPETBAGGER B-24s and A-26s that supported Army OSS operations in Europe. Officially part of MATS, their mission was CIA support.

¹⁷ A secretive unit at Sembach, Germany operated a fleet of airplanes including C-97s doing such things as running guns to Africa.

¹⁸ I flew Aderholt a few times in 1965 when he was based at Clark with the 6200th Material Wing. He made frequent trips to Thailand and Vietnam, which fell under Thirteenth Air Force at the time. My aircraft commander knew him.

¹⁹ No, E Flight airplanes did not have removable markings. They had the same decals as every other C-130 on the ramp and the decals were removed during the sanitization then replaced before the airplane returned to Naha.

²⁰ I was shocked when one of the guys I knew in E Flight told me they spent the time on a mission around the pool in a hotel in Bangkok. I thought he was lying.

Lieutenant James Baginski as a capable young officer who was in charge of coordinating activities at Takhli. General Baginski's Air Force biography states that he was in TMC at Naha. Aderholt said that he requested that Baginski be sent TDY to Takhli.²¹ Baginski later served under Aderholt as a colonel when he ran the Cambodian Airlift out of U Tapao, Thailand.



I once witnessed an E Flight/Air America operation. When I went TDY to Kadena in the spring of 1965, we were told in our orientation briefing that we might see strange things and if we did, not to talk about them. Later that year while TDY to Mactan, my crew spent two weeks on the Bangkok Shuttle. We went into Takhli late one afternoon with a load of “hot” cargo and offloaded in the hot cargo area on the far side of the runway away from the main base. We had outbound cargo for Bangkok, but the aerial port people told me we were going to have to wait because a high priority mission was ahead of us. The flight mechanic, Don Sweet,

and I sat on the ramp waiting for our load. A blue Air Force flatbed pulled up and parked behind us. It caught my interest because it was loaded with small airdrop bundles of a type I had never seen before. A silver A-model with no markings pulled in and parked next to us. The only markings were numbers on the tail. I was surprised because there were no A-models in civilian service and the only ones in Asia other than USAF were Australian.

The strange A-model was met by several men wearing shorts, T-shirts and combat boots. Most of them were wearing the same Air Force issue sunglasses I had, the ones only issued to aircrew personnel. They certainly looked military! The A-model crew got out. They were dressed just like the ground people. The flatbed backed up to the A-model. The paratroop doors were open, and I could see that it was equipped with skate wheel conveyors rather than the Dash One dual rails all A-models were equipped with. One of the ground crew came over and started talking to us. He asked the usual questions – where we were based and so on. He had a Baltimore accent. While we were talking, the aerial port people were pushing the bundles into the airplane and hooking up the

²¹ TMC stood for Transportation Movement Center, an office on TAC and PACAF airlift bases responsible for coordinating between the squadrons and the shipper, usually the Army. TMCs were successors to cargo control squadrons that were set up in the Pacific during World War II. They became TMCs in 315th Air Division during the Korean War. TMCs oversaw detachments referred to as TMDs at non-airlift bases. TMCs were replaced by Airlift Control Centers (ACC) and TMDs by Airlift Control Elements (ALCE) in the mid-1960s.

static lines. It was obvious they were going to drop them somewhere and my guess was it would be in Laos. There was no doubt strange things were going on in that part of the world. I'd seen T-28s armed with bombs and carrying Royal Laotian Air Force markings, but the pilots were not Oriental! When the last bundle was aboard, the crew got back on the airplane and began starting engines. Our new friend shoved himself off the ramp and started walking to the airplane. He walked a few feet then turned around. He said, "Oh, by the way, you didn't see what you just saw," then turned around and walked back to the mysterious A-model.²² When we got back from that TDY, I went on leave. The night I got back our squadron clerk told me I had orders to Naha. Less than 90 days after we witnessed the strange airplane being loaded, I was given a classified new arrivals briefing about the 6315th Operations Group and the missions each squadron had, including E Flight, which was just referred to as "classified." The other squadrons also had classified missions, but all the briefing officer said about E Flight was that they flew classified missions although he described the others – leaflets, HALO, flares. I knew people in E Flight. Yet it wasn't until years later after I left the Air Force that I read Chris Robbins' book AIR AMERICA and read his description of the Air America C-130 operation that I realized I had witnessed an E Flight mission in progress!

While the Air America crews flew drop missions, not only with C-130s but other aircraft as well, their main mission seems to have been airlifting cargo into Long Tieng where the CIA had established a base. The photograph at the beginning of this article is of an E Flight airplane taking off there. Long Tieng had been constructed in a "karst" area, meaning it is limestone and there are limestone hills and towers in the valley, including right off one end of the runway.²³ One of the Air America crews flew into a hill in early 1970. E Flight crews temporarily took over operations into Long Tieng until a new crew could be trained. Air Force crews also operated into Long Tieng while the Air America crews were busy supporting Vang Pao's troops on the Plain of Jars. Whether they were E Flight or other Air Force crews is uncertain.

Later E Flight personnel claim that the airplanes were identifiable because they weren't camouflaged. That is only true after 1966. Prior to late 1965 when the Air Force began camouflaging tactical aircraft – MAC transports weren't affected – ALL C-130s were unpainted. There were few, if any, camouflaged airplanes on the Naha ramp when I got there in early February 1966. Some had been painted with a gray corrosion-resistant paint, but most were unpainted. My first missions were in unpainted airplanes.²⁴ Not long after I got to Naha, I took an airplane to Gifu, Japan for paint and brought a camouflaged airplane back. Some were painted while in the States for IRAN inspections. There were still unpainted C-130s in PACAF and at Naha as late as August 1966, as evidenced by photographs in the 315th Air Division newspaper. Four airplanes were left unpainted for CIA use.

²² I later determined our mysterious acquaintance was Ralph Krach, a radar repairman at Naha. Ralph's photograph is in a 315th AD AIRLIFTER. Ralph admitted to me that it was him.

²³ Karst is a Yugoslavian term referring to a region characterized by limestone towers and caves.

²⁴ My very first mission out of Naha was in an E Flight airplane. The crew chief was with us and was wearing his red 21st TCS baseball cap with E Flight embroidered on the side. Other crew chiefs wore 51st FIW caps at the time.

When they were not on E Flight missions, E Flight personnel flew the same missions as other wing crews, including the flare mission at Ubon, Thailand. Some E Flight veterans claim that the flare mission started out as “an E Flight mission” but this is untrue and stems from later missions when E Flight Cat Zs were assigned to flare crews as kickers. Initially, loadmasters threw flares out the paratroop doors the same as AC-47 gunship crews did. The first flare mission was flown by a crew from the 35th TCS. There were two C-130As involved and the other crew may have been E Flight. Harry Sullivan, a 21st TCS flight mechanic who was in E Flight, told me when we were in Galveston for our first reunion that the flare mission started a lot sooner than most people thought it did. E Flight crews were made up of instructors, and when they weren’t on E Flight missions, they instructed other squadron personnel.

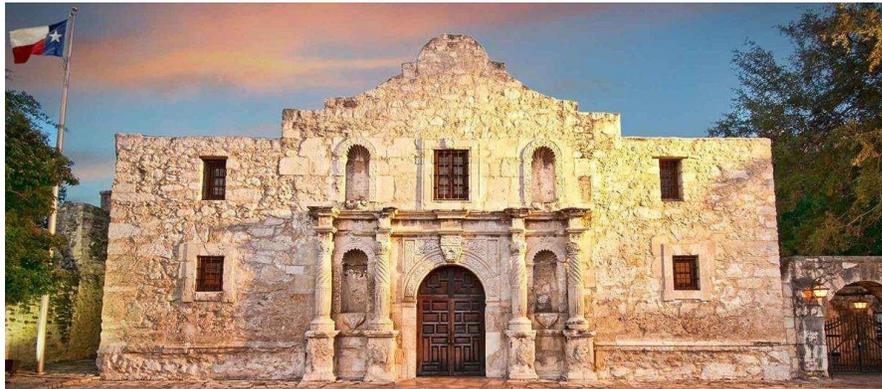
Although the initial CAT/Air America pilots and flight mechanics were civilians, there is reason to believe some were sheep-dipped Air Force. Air America had an office in its small terminal on Naha Air Base and they invited C-130 personnel nearing the end of their tour to come down and talk to them. I won’t go into details, but someone told me that a pilot at Pope filed a lawsuit because he felt the Air Force had lied to him. He’d been a pilot in one of the 315th AD C-130 squadrons and had been recruited by Air America. He fulfilled his contract then went back into the Air Force and was assigned to Pope. He claimed the Air Force guaranteed he’d maintain his date of rank and be promoted when he returned to military service.²⁵

By 1971, things were in a state of flux in PACAF. 315th Air Division had deactivated in early 1969 and the Naha wing had transferred into Fifth Air Force. The C-130As and Bs were slated to transfer to the Guard and Reserves and Naha had come up on the close list. (Just why is unsure, since CCK’s C-130 wing would transfer to Clark in less than three years.) In a shuffle of units, Air Force had decided to transfer the 314th Tactical Airlift Wing from CCK to Little Rock and redesignate the CCK wing as the 374th TAW. (They call it transfers but it was all on paper.) Allegedly, the CCK squadrons were to initially be redesignated but for some reason the Air Force decided not to transfer the squadrons back to the wings from which they had come. However, possibly due to its history, the 21st TAS would remain active and transfer to CCK to replace the 346th TAS. E Flight went with it.

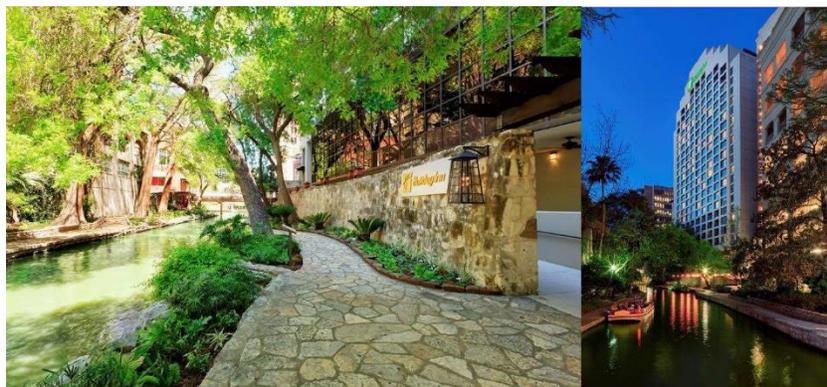
²⁵ Sheep-dipping is a term for moving military personnel off the books and using them clandestinely in other roles. It seems to have been a common practice in the 50s and 60s. My first wife was sheep-dipped. She was a young (and gullible) WAF who wanted to be a spy. She was recruited by OSI to work undercover for them as an informant in their drug investigations before we met. They falsified her personnel record to show that she was working in the CBPO at McChord when she was actually at Travis living in the BOQ and working for the OSI. The ONLY documentation she had for what she was actually doing was the citation for the Meritorious Service Medal she was awarded for her work. She had problems when she returned to her normal duties because she hadn’t attended a tech school and hadn’t attained a five-level even though her records show that she’d been working as an admin clerk. I talked to my squadron commander about the situation, and he recommended I go to the IG. I did and the OSI people were not happy! OSI and IG are now combined – which is like the fox guarding the hen house.



San Antonio 2021



The Troop/Carrier Tactical Airlift Association (TC/TAA) will hold their 15th Anniversary reunion in San Antonio, TX October 13-17, 2021. It will be held at the Holiday Inn Riverwalk, 217 N. Saint Marys St. San Antonio, TX 78215 - \$129@ Night+ Taxes, Breakfast \$12 @day (normal \$ 25) , Parking \$10 @day (normal \$25 @ day).



The hotel offers a hot breakfast, free Wifi, refrigerator, coffee maker, microwave, flat screen TV in every guest room. The hotel has a full restaurant with a view of the Riverwalk plus and a cafe for your dining pleasures. Guests can enjoy a swim in the heated pool. A 24-hour front desk and modern fitness center are available for guest convenience.

Located on famous San Antonio Riverwalk where there are numerous restaurants, bars, entertainment options throughout. Take a river taxi throughout the Riverwalk area. The famous Alamo is only 3 blocks or 10 minutes away from the hotel.

DRAFT AGENDA

Wednesday - 13 October

Registration and Hospitality Suite Open 1800 - Midnight

Thursday - 14 October

Breakfast

Registration and Hospitality Suite Open 0900 - Midnight

Board Meeting 1000 - 1200

General Membership Meeting 1300 - 1430

Riverwalk Boat Cruise 1500 - 1800 or On Your Own/Shopping

Friday - 15 October

Breakfast

Hospitality Suite Open 0900 - Midnight

Lackland AFB Basic Loadmaster School & C-5M Tours 0900 - 1500

On Your Own or Shopping 1600 - Midnight

Saturday 16 October

Breakfast

Hospitality Suite Open 0900 - Midnight

C-5 Baby Lift Crash, C-130 An Loch, C-17 Afghanistan Operations and Black World Operations Presentations 0900 - 1300

On Your Own/Shopping 1300 - 1600

Photos 1700 - 1800

Banquet at Holiday Inn Riverwalk 1800 - 2100

Auction Items 1900 - 2000

Keynote Speaker Ms. Aryn Lockhart, C-5 Baby Lift Crash Survivor

Sunday - 17 October

Breakfast and Good byes

Registrations

Hotel Registrations done by calling hotel at 210-224-2500 mention group "Troop Carrier TAC Airlift Assn" or the following link:

[https://www.holidayinn.com/redirect?path=hd&brandCode=HI&localeCode=en®istrationCode=l&hotelCode=satrw& PMID=99801505&GPC=tct&cn=no&viewfullsite=true](https://www.holidayinn.com/redirect?path=hd&brandCode=HI&localeCode=en®istrationCode=l&hotelCode=satrw&PMID=99801505&GPC=tct&cn=no&viewfullsite=true)

Reunion Registration please send completed forms to Ralph Bemis, 248 Valley View Dr., Kerrville, TX 78028, Email rtbullwinkle@yahoo.com, Cell 501-993-6934

Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association Web Page: troopcarrier.org

15th Anniversary



The Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association

"Promoting and preserving the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Heritage"

2021 Reunion Registration, October 13 - 17, San Antonio, Texas

Name: Spouse/Guest _____ Mailing Address: _____

Phone: _____ City, State: _____ Zip: _____ Cell: _____

Email: _____

Number Attending: Registration Fees:

Member..... @\$40 = \$ _____

Spouse/Guest @\$30 = \$ _____

Non-Member* @\$65 = \$ _____

Self Parking @\$10 Per Day..... = \$ _____

Oct 13-17 - Hospitality Suite **FREE**

Oct 16 - 6PM - Banquet@ Holiday Inn Riverwalk #___ @\$45 = \$ _____

Number of Steak, _____ Chicken _____ Vegetarian _____

Member Tee Shirt **FREE** Size _____

Total Submitted = \$ _____

—

Non-Members may join the TC/TAA (2 years/\$25) and pay the reunion Member fee of \$40. Please download a membership application at www.troopcarrier.org/membership.html and submit to the address on the form. But pay all fees to Reunion Coordinator below.

Hotel - Holiday Inn Riverwalk, 217 N. Saint Marys St, San Antonio, TX 78215. Hotel reservations must be made by September 10, 2021 to obtain the \$129 rate. Call 210-224-2500 for reservations, mention group rate "Troop Carrier Tac Airlift Assn" or use this booking link:

<https://www.holidayinn.com/redirect?path=hd&brandCode=HI&localeCode=en®ionCode=l&hotelCode=satrw&PMID=99801505&GPC=tct&cn=no&viewfullsite=true>

Registrations and checks must be sent to Ralph Bemis, 248 Valley View Dr. Kerrville, TX 78028, E-mail rtbullwinkle@yahoo.com, Cell 501-993-6934