



# *The Airlifter*

Newsletter of the Troop Carrier/Tactical Airlift Association  
*Promoting and preserving the troop carrier/tactical airlift heritage*  
[www.troopcarrier.org](http://www.troopcarrier.org)

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## *Important!!!*

Per our bylaws, dues become delinquent during the first calendar month, January. Many of our members are delinquent. We will be sending out a notice in January showing those who are delinquent. Currently, dues are \$25 for a regular membership and are payable every two years. Ten-year memberships are \$100 and Life memberships are \$250.00. However, the board recently set a policy that previous 10-year members can upgrade their membership to Life by paying \$100. World War II veterans may become Life members for free.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Balance as of November 30 is \$30,902.16.

### **Chairman's Corner**

Greetings to you all. I hope all of you had an enjoyable Veterans Day. Where I live quite a few restaurants offer a complimentary meal to those who served. Assuming it is the same where you live, I hope you all were able to take advantage of that offering and enjoy a good meal as part of the Veterans Day celebration.

By the way, did you know that Veterans Day does not have an apostrophe. It is not Veteran's Day and is not Veterans' Day. No apostrophe!! After that, I thought I would review some interesting factoids about Veterans Day and Memorial Day to refresh our memories and eliminate confusion about the

difference. Veterans Day was originally called Armistice Day to commemorate the end of fighting or hostilities of World War 1. The Peace Treaty and official end of World War 1 was signed later. This day now honors the Veterans of all our Armed Forces, and is a celebration of our Veterans (you guys!!) for your patriotism, love of country, and willingness to serve and sacrifice for our people and our nation. In 1954, President Eisenhower changed the name of this holiday to Veterans Day to honor veterans of all our wars and conflicts. This day honors both the living and the dead. The flower associated with Veterans Day is the yellow poppy. In contrast, Memorial Day honors and is dedicated to only those who died serving our country in its conflicts and wars. This day was originally called Decoration Day and was dedicated to 620,000 who paid the ultimate sacrifice in our Civil War. Later the name was changed to Memorial Day to honor the dead in all our wars. This is the day that American flags are put on the graves of those military who died in the defense of our nation. The flower associated with Memorial Day is a red flower or red poppy.

It was great to see so many of you at our reunion in San Antonio. We hope all of you had a most enjoyable time. For those who were unable to come, we missed you and hope to see you at our next reunion in 2023. The Riverwalk was a terrific venue. Along with our former President, Mike Welch, our Texas members outdid themselves for us, particularly Ralph Bemis and the Vaquera's, to provide us with a memorable reunion. Many, many THANKS.

Our next reunion, in the spring of 2023, is planned for the Clear Lake area near Houston. You do not want to miss it! That area has many great places to visit including the Space Center, a great aviation museum and more. If you have the time you could even squeeze in a short cruise. While the exact dates have not yet been determined, keep that reunion on your radar. We will have a wonderful time and the best part is the getting together and renewing our friendships.  
**SEE YOU THERE!!!**

### **President's Comments**

Season's Greetings from your TC/TAA President:

WOW! What a couple of "interesting", probably not the right word, years we've just experienced. And "the experts" tell us it's not over. But just keep in mind that we were one of the very few organizations, military or otherwise, to hold reunions in both years! The numbers were down, but our 2021 San Antonio reunion had over twice as many attendees as the 2020 Branson reunion. And let me once again thank our reunion planners for such a great job. Haven't heard of any ill effects from either event.

Of course, we lost several members to the Covid virus and other maladies, and the biggest lost was Chief Mike Welch's passing in June of this year. Mike was quite a guy and a wonderful leader and friend. He is missed.

Mike and I had many discussions about our organization and growing it in the future. My emphasis in the near future is to reacquire most of our "inactive" members. I will be working with our

officers and board members to make this happen. We have a sizeable balance in our coffers that should allow us to get them restarted without any financial penalties (read we start collecting 2022 and 2023 dues and ignore previous year delinquent payments). Keep in mind we're looking for members not funds. More on this later.

We've already begun planning our April-May 2023 reunion in Clear Lake, TX. Sam McGowan who lives in the area, assures us there is plenty to do and sites to see in this area between Houston and Galveston. The 2023 date puts us back in our biennial schedule.

That's about it from Central Arkansas, the Home of Herk Nation.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year,

### **Reunion Report**

Submitted By

Andy Vaquera

The 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion was put together by board members Andy Vaquera, Ralph Bemis and Michael Vaquera, with the exception of a few minor hic ups, the team was able to book the beautiful Holiday inn-Riverwalk only a few blocks from the Alamo, Michael was able to obtain 75 complimentary Barge passes and the association paid for fifty more after the final tally of guests totaled 98, a few members cancelled at the last minute due to unforeseen circumstances, Several of our tours were cancelled due to the Corona virus, however the team was able to reschedule speakers and we continued with the convention.

Most of the loadmasters who made airdrops at An Loc were in attendance including the Army Helicopter crew that rescued two of our members shot down while on final of their airdrop into the soccer stadium in An Loc. Lots of new faces attended along with some of the same old timers. Being on the Riverwalk is expensive and the association made a decision to pay part of the banquet meal, part of the parking fee and get the breakfast at a reduced price for our members. The banquet was attended by a full house with a great speaker, Aryn Lockhart who is one of Ray Snedegars Baby Lift survivors, Aryn was presented with a beautiful plaque at the end of her presentation. Banquet was also attended by Candace Welch and Mike Welch's son Mathew, after a tribute to Mike Welch Candace was also presented a plaque that was supposed to be presented to Mike Welch along with a check for \$500, Candace in turn presented the check to the PLA and Bill Weeper, editor of the Loader accepted the

check on behalf of the PLA, the money will be used to set up a scholarship in Mike Welch's name.<sup>1</sup> After the banquet an auction was held and several prized items were auctioned off including a Parka and a beautiful wood C-130 gunship donated by Roger Gruel. During the convention the board met and decided to present three locations for the 2023 convention and have the membership decide, at the regular membership meeting. The membership decided to hold the 2023 Convention in Clear Lake, Texas.

### Clear Lake

By

Sam McGowan

Although I was unable to make the San Antonio reunion, I was in contact with Ricky and Bill. I suggested having the next reunion at either Galveston or Clear Lake, Texas. We had our first reunions, conventions, gatherings or whatever you want to call them in Galveston at the Victorian Hotel, with the last one there in 2010. Things have changed in Galveston since then, particularly the relocation of the Lone Star Flight Museum, which we visited each time and where we had our banquet in 2005 and 2006, to Ellington Field. The board members present in San Antonio decided on Clear Lake. Having lived in Clear Lake when I first came to the Houston area, I believe it is a good choice for a number of reasons.

The Clear Lake area, which includes the towns of Webster, Seabrook, Nassau Bay, El Lago, Kemah and South Shore as well as Clear Lake itself, sits on the brackish water embayment of Clear Lake, a large lake off of Galveston Bay. The area's main attraction is NASA's Johnson Space Center and the adjacent Space Center Houston, a museum dedicated to manned space flight. The Lone Star Flight Museum is now at Ellington Field, which adjoins Clear Lake. Ellington was a navigator training base in the 50s and early 60s. An Air Force Reserve unit flew some of the first C-130As to go to the reserves and operated the A-model RTU in the late 60s and 70s. The San Jacinto Battlefield is about 15 miles from Clear Lake. In April 1836 Sam Houston's "Texian" army defeated a force of some 800 Mexicans under General Antonio Lopez de Santa Ana and literally changed the face of the Americas. A spire taller than the Washington Monument overlooks the battlefield. An elevator ride takes you to the top where the visitor has a birds eye view of the surrounding landscape, and the battleship Texas, which is presently moored across the highway from the battlefield, although it will soon be going into dry dock for leak repairs. (One of my favorite restaurants, The Monument Inn, is just down the road at the Lynchburg Ferry.) A monument to the 1<sup>st</sup> Aero Squadron is located at Texas City. Galveston is about 25 miles away down I-45.

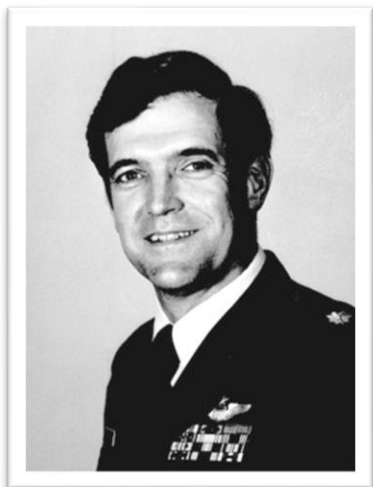
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<sup>1</sup> The PLA is the Professional Loadmaster Association, a 501c(10) fraternal organization for loadmasters of any nationality, civilian and military, founded by the late Bill Cannon in the 1990s. Mike Welch was heavily involved with the organization. The Loader is the PLA newsletter.

There are dozens of restaurants around the area offering everything from burgers to Grade A steaks. T-Bone Tom's has been featured on the program Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives. They have some of the best steaks around. Seafood restaurants, Mexican restaurants and Texas barbecue joints abound. The Kemah Boardwalk is just across the bridge over the connection to Galveston Bay. (I'm not a fan; to me, it's a tourist trap.) There are numerous seafood restaurants in Seabrook and along Galveston Bay in San Leone.

Getting to Clear Lake is easy. It's only a few miles from I-45 southeast of Houston and not far from I-10. Houston has some of the best airline service in the country into the two major airports, Bush Intercontinental and Houston Hobby. Hobby is the closest but Bush is only some 25 miles away. There may or may not be commuter service into Ellington. There are several hotels around the area. We're currently looking at the Clear Lake Hilton, which is located on Clear Lake across the highway from NASA.

#### Challenger Seven Memorial Park and Dick Scobee



DICK SCOBEE

Among the many things to see in and around Clear Lake is the Challenger Seven Memorial. The memorial is located in Challenger Seven Park on NASA 1 south of Clear Lake. The monument is dedicated to the crew of space shuttle Challenger, which exploded less than two minutes after launch from Cape Canaveral on January 28, 1986. The memorial has special significance because the shuttle commander, Air Force Lt. Colonel Francis R. "Dick" Scobee was one of us. Colonel Scobee enlisted in 1957 and trained as a propellor mechanic. He spent five years working on C-124s at Kelly before he was accepted into the Airman Education and Commissioning Program. After graduating from the University of Arizona in 1965, he was commissioned and went to pilot training. Graduating in 1966, he chose C-141s and went to Tinker for training then to Charleston. He went to Vietnam in 1968 to fly C-7 Caribous with the 535<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Squadron at Vung Tau. He returned from Vietnam in April 1969 and went back to Charleston and C-141s. He was picked for the new C-5A and was assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Military Airlift Squadron, the first operational squadron to fly the new transports.<sup>2</sup> He was selected for the test pilot program in 1971 and

<sup>22</sup> I joined the 3<sup>rd</sup> MAS in September 1970 upon returning from Clark. While the name is vaguely familiar and I seem to remember something about one of our pilots going to Edwards as a test pilot, I think I flew with him on at least one trip. I am almost positive he was the officer who chewed me out about being proud to be enlisted. He was one of the pilots on a mission, but not the senior officer. (we flew with augmented crews, with three pilots) The senior officer, a major at the time, and I were joking around. I made some comment about "the enlisted swine" and this other pilot, a captain, got really upset. He proceeded to lecture me about how I should be proud. He had been

flew the X-24 lifting body, a special aircraft designed to simulate the aerodynamics of the earth orbiters (space shuttles) then in development. He applied to NASA to become an astronaut and left Edwards for Houston in 1978. He and his family lived in Clear Lake while he worked at the Johnson Space Center and his wife taught school. Due to his C-5 experience, he was assigned to the 747 shuttle transport and flew around the United States and elsewhere carrying the orbiters piggy-back on top of his airplane. On one mission, he flew the 747 to Paris for the Paris Air Show and flew around the city to show the orbiter to the people of the city. His son was a first class cadet at the Air Force Academy when his father died. He spent his flying career in fighters and is now a lieutenant general. His wife June, who had obtained a doctorate at Texas A&M, became a lecturer and author and was instrumental in the founding of the Challenger Learning Centers where school children are exposed to space.

The following was submitted by member Dave Clark, a former loadmaster who lives in Vancouver, Washington. (REALLY???)

## The Wing Walker

By Dave Clark



Would you leave the safety of a cockpit and climb out onto a wing? Wing Walking is thought of as a circus act only seen at air shows around the country performed by dare devil with nerves of steel, confidence in their pilots and the skills of surgeons. The wing walkers perform stunts that left the audience in awe and disbelief. Safety straps, don't be silly. For many years there were only a handful of daredevils around the world. There is the story of one woman who was called upon to help a plane in trouble.

During the 1920s a plane took off and lost its left landing tire. The dare devil woman strapped a spare wheel and tools to her back. The pilots then flew the plane's wing tip

to wing tip, she then climbed onto the wing tip and then climbed to the plane in distress. She then proceeded to climb down to the landing gear, while sitting on the axle she replaced the wheel. The plane then landed safely with her in the front seat.

Before he was a world class pilot Charles Lindbergh worked as a wing walker barnstorming in the Midwest and Great Plains. The world's oldest wing walker is Tom Lackey was 93 when he performed the stunt. First

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enlisted and went to AECF. At the time, I thought he had been some kind of tit-less WAF. I did not make a connection to him at the time of his death and it was only when I started working on this newsletter that I discovered that we were in the same squadron. Ed Knox, another 3<sup>rd</sup> loadmaster and a former C-130 LM at Sewart and CCK, says he knew him well and that they were watching the launch in the squadron at Dover when the shuttle exploded.

wing walker was in 1911 and they just stood on the wing. The first stunts performed by wing walkers was in 1918 with wing walker Ormer Locklear.<sup>3</sup>The first air-to-air refueling took place in **1923** between two De Haviland DH-4B Army Air Service airplanes and this was accomplished by wing walkers. During World War II, the Army Air Forces modified B-24 Liberators, so they became tankers that refueled the B-17 Flying Fortress, extending the bombers' range to 1,500 miles.<sup>4</sup>

During the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century wing walking fell off. Because the air shows/air circus were not as common. During the 70s air shows picked up and wing walking again became popular. The audiences to this day love watching the daredevils. Would you walk on a wing in flight? Since 1975 thru 2011 there were 3 deaths related to wing walking. One was a plane crash that killed the pilot and wing walker. Another was a wing walker who was transferring from a plane to a helicopter and missed falling 200 feet. To this day wing walking is very safe and happens most every day around the world.

In January of 2019 I found out about a wing walking school and informed my wife that's what I want for my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. She was not very fond of the idea but I persisted, 5 months later she agreed. The only wing walking school in the world, is Mason Wing Walking Academy located in Sequim Washington a couple of hours west of Seattle. On July 13<sup>th</sup> 2019 we drove up to Sequim checked into a hotel then went and found the air park. The plane was in the air and we could watch the plane doing loops, rolls, hammer heads; way cool to watch. When the plane landed the new wing walker was all smiles. The morning of July 14<sup>th</sup> I showed up for training and spent the next 5 hours learning how to climb out of a secure Stearman cockpit onto the wing of a plane at 4000 feet. Was not easy, I found that I was a bit too big and not limber enough to climb safely to the top wing. Disappointment was setting in. But I was able to climb out safely onto the lower wing and ride the javelin. That afternoon I got my flight. With the cameras set on the plane I strapped in and we taxied out to the private grass field. The Stearman lifted off and flew over Puget sound at 4000 feet I got the wing nod to become a wing walker. When I first stood up the prop blast and wind hit me and I said to myself "What did I get myself into?" Out on the wing I went for the ride of my life.. It was a thrill I will never forget. I will always recommend this as the ultimate thrill ride.

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<sup>3</sup> Editor's note – On November 12, 1921, Wesley May climbed down from a Lincoln Standard with a 5-gallon can of gasoline strapped to his back onto the wing of a Curtiss Jenny then made his way to the Jenny's front cockpit and poured gasoline into the fuel tank. <http://fly.historicwings.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/HighFlight-AerialRefueling6.jpg>

<sup>4</sup> Editor's note - I have read and written a lot about the B-24 – my dad was a B-24 aerial engineer and my uncle was a B-24 pilot – and have never come across this claim. B-24s were converted to tankers to haul fuel across the Hump between Burma and China and fuel to Patton's Third Army in France but I had never heard of air-to-air refueling. It turns out there was an experiment using a B-24 to transfer fuel to a B-17 at Eglin but it wasn't adopted.





### **Bomber/Transports in WW II**

Although the famous B-24 Liberator was not used operationally to refuel B-17s, bombers were often used in the transport and troop carrier role, including some conversions of the B-24 into tankers and redesignated as C-109s. The first bomber/transports used by what came to be known as “troop carrier” were three modified B-24As that transferred from the Ferrying Command to the Far East Air Force Air Transport Command at the beginning of the war.<sup>5</sup> The B-24’s cavernous fuselage made it an ideal candidate for conversion to transport use. Soon after war broke out, the Air Corps ordered a version of the bomber designated as the C-87 but the first B-24 transports were eleven A-models that were converted to transports off of the assembly line. The converted bombers were assigned to Ferry Command to serve as long range transports. Shortly after the outbreak of war, three and possibly four Ferry Command B-24s were sent to the Far East. One was being used to transport Air Corps chief Major General George Brett in a world-wide inspection of Air Corps facilities. Brett went to Australia to take command of Air Corps operations in the

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<sup>5</sup> There was a squadron of B-18s at Clark Field at the beginning of the war. They were replaced by B-17s a few months before the war and were converted to transports. Most were destroyed by Japanese bombs at Clark Field. Two were flown to Australia with loads of dive-bomber pilots who were being sent there to pick up their A-24s, which had been aboard a ship that diverted to Brisbane, Australia when war broke out.





Far East.<sup>6</sup> The other three B-24s were sent to the Far East to transport .50 caliber ammunition that was being sent over in Pan American Clippers to the Philippines. The Clippers delivered their loads to Karachi, Pakistan where the three B-24s picked up their cargo and flew it either to Bataan or Mindanao.

The three bomber/transports transferred from Ferry Command to Far East Air Force. They performed heroically in the evacuation of Java. Two were lost to enemy action. The third continued

operations into the Philippines carrying cargo up and bringing passengers back to Australia right up until the fall of the islands. It made its last flight to Del Monte Field on Mindanao on the night of May 4-5 when it was sent up with a load of cargo. The crew were supposed to bring out a contingent of Army nurses who had been flown out of Bataan in a Navy PBY but were left stranded when the Navy crew took off without them after damaging their hull when hitting a rock and making hasty repairs.<sup>7</sup> The pilot, Captain A.J. Mueller, was unable to land due to the presence of thunderstorms and no receipt of a signal from the field that it was still in friendly hands. He followed a plan he had made with the other B-24 crew to fly south and land on an island. He ditched in the sea off the island and the crew was rescued by submarine but the brief career of the three B-24 transports came to an end.<sup>8</sup>

FEAF ATC also acquired some B-17Es that had been in the Philippines. Captain Paul I “Pappy” Gunn picked the first one up at Bachelor Field then promptly loaded it with bombs and flew missions against Japanese ships in the Straits of Borneo. He took command of the ATC when he returned to Brisbane. His crews flew missions to Mindanao with the converted B-17s. Other B-17s were converted into transports. A

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<sup>6</sup> “Air Corps” is the correct term. Although the Army Air Forces were established just prior to the war, their purpose was to train personnel and acquire equipment for the Army Air Corps, the statutory authorized US Army aviation arm. Even though the term Army Air Forces was commonly used, all of its aviation personnel were commissioned or enlisted in the Army Air Corps.

<sup>7</sup> There were two PBYs on the mission. The one with the nurses struck a rock after landing on a large lake near Del Monte Field. The nurses were transported to the airfield to wait while the sailors made repairs. Some PT boat crewmembers who had been stranded assisted the crew. Although they were able to make some repairs, the hull was still taking on water. The pilot decided they didn’t have time to wait for the nurses to be brought from the airfield and took off without them. The PT boatmen were aboard.

<sup>8</sup> There is no further mention of the B-24 carrying General Brett. By mid-1942 he was using a rebuilt B-17 that had been assembled from wrecks called “The Swoose.” He was allowed to take the airplane back to the States when he was relieved of duty at General MacArthur’s request. The airplane survived the war and was saved by its former pilot, Col. Frank Kurtz (who commanded the 463<sup>rd</sup> Bombardment Group.) The airplane was placed on display in Los Angeles then later transferred to the Air Force Museum. It is now at the museum awaiting restoration for display.

B-17 flew General Douglas MacArthur and his staff and family out of Mindanao. A B-17 was converted to a transport for his personal use after he arrived in Australia. When Lt. General George Kenney took command of Allied air forces in the Southwest Pacific, he decided to replace all of the B-17s in his theater with B-24s.<sup>9</sup> Some B-17s were converted to transports. The practice of transferring older-model bombers, B-24s as well as B-17s, to transport use continued at least until 1943. The top turret and waist guns were left in the bombers and the crews often strafed Japanese positions after delivering their loads by parachute. The converted bombers were passed around among the troop carrier squadrons, with newly arrived groups turning in their brand new C-47s and receiving worn out transports and converted bombers in return. Later in the war, converted B-17s dropped supplies to Australian commandos operating in enemy occupied territory near the port city of Rabaul, which the Allies decided to bypass and blockade. B-25 squadrons were also sometimes tasked with “biscuit bomber” missions dropping supplies to front line Allied troops. There were several conversions of wrecked B-25s and A-20s into transports in the Southwest Pacific. Repair crews assembled new airplanes using parts from wrecks then they were used to transport supplies (including booze and other items outside of the normal supply chain) to combat bases in New Guinea.



EIGHTH AIR FORCE B-24S DURING MARKET

In Europe, Eighth Air Force set up the 27<sup>th</sup> Transport Group. Operating castoff bombers, particularly Martin B-26s, the group delivered supplies to the dozens of airbases in England from the depots. When Ninth Air Force moved to England in advance of the Normandy Invasion, it set up its own transport group, the 31<sup>st</sup> Transport Group as part of IX Air Service Command. After the invasion, the two groups were assigned to the 302<sup>nd</sup> Transport Group and after being beefed up with former Air Transport Command domestic C-47s and personnel, flew cargo into France from the UK. Due to the demand for air transport, the wing was supplemented by Eighth Air Force B-24 groups. The B-24s flew “trucking” missions carrying cargo into newly captured airfields in support of the rapidly advancing ground forces,

particularly General George S. Patton’s Third Army.<sup>10</sup> B-24s delivered supplies by parachute to the British and American airborne troops of MARKET, the airborne assault on the Dutch city of Arnhem. The B-24 crews were supplemented by IX Troop Carrier Command dropmasters, enlisted quartermasters who had been given special training and assigned to aircrew duty to dispense airdrop bundles prior to the Normandy Invasion. Due to an overabundance of B-17s, Eighth AF B-24s were frequently assigned to transport

<sup>9</sup> It is commonly believed B-17s were withdrawn from the Pacific for duty in Europe. This is not true. As far as is known, NONE of the B-17s in the Pacific served in Europe. Some were converted to transports and reassigned to troop carrier squadrons.

<sup>10</sup> The author’s uncle, Captain Delmar D. McGowan, was a B-24 pilot in 1944. His crew flew several trucking missions. He said the trucking missions were more dangerous than bombing missions, which is saying a lot since his squadron suffered heavy losses on a mission a few weeks before. His bomber was shot up on a trucking mission into an airfield near Caen, which had been bypassed leaving a large force of German troops defending the city.

missions. The reverse was true in the Mediterranean theater where B-24s were the preferred bombers.<sup>11</sup> Fifteenth Air Force included one wing of B-17s. The bombers were often used as transports, dropping supplies to insurgents in German-occupied Yugoslavia. They also picked up freed prisoners in POW camps that had been liberated by Allied troops.



TSGT GENE AUTRY

Although the use of B-24s as aerial refuelers was never adapted, the Army Air Forces did procure a number of B-24s that had been converted into tankers and redesignated as C-109s. Fuel tanks were installed throughout the fuselage and the airplane's wing tanks were connected so they could also be used to transport fuel. The pilots didn't like them. They were cumbersome and operating at maximum takeoff weight over mountains higher than the Rockies. They were primarily used in the China-Burma-India theater to transport fuel, mainly gasoline for Fourteenth Air Force fighters and bombers, from ATC bases in India to bases in China. However, one squadron went to England to fly fuel to France. Famed cowboy actor and singer Gene Autry flew C-109s in the CBI.<sup>12</sup>

Bombers were commonly used to transport fuel and supplies from India to the Chinese interior for the fighter and bomber squadrons assigned to Clair Chennault's Fourteenth Air Force.<sup>13</sup> Bomber groups used their own airplanes to bring in the fuel, ammunition and bombs needed for planned missions. When XX Bomber Command B-29s began flying missions over Japan from stage bases in China, several of the huge bombers were converted for

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<sup>11</sup> Although the impression is given by historians and aviation enthusiasts that B-17s were the preferred bombers in World War II, this was only true in Jimmy Doolittle's Eighth Air Force. B-17s opened the war in the Pacific but they had been withdrawn by 1944. The Army Air Forces seems to have intended to replace all B-17s with B-24s and shut down B-17 production so the factories could produce B-29s. However, Doolittle insisted on using B-17s and tried to convert all of his heavy bomber groups to B-17s using the surplus that had accrued in the US. The war in Europe ended before he could carry out his plan. Ironically, Fifteenth Air Force, which operated out of Italian bases, was made up primarily of B-24 groups. B-24s were still in production when the war ended. A World War II Air Corps veteran I knew was a B-24 crew chief on Okinawa. He told me about seeing a brand new B-24 with only ferry time on it shoved into a ravine at Yomitan Airfield and covered over by bulldozers.

<sup>12</sup> Famed actor and western singer Gene Autry enlisted in the Army Air Force's entertainment division. He had a commercial pilots license and several hundred hours in his logbook. He somehow managed to be commissioned as a service pilot in the Air Transport Command. His initial assignment was flying Lockheed Lodestars out of Dallas. He was reassigned to ATC's India-China Ferry as a C-109 pilot.

<sup>13</sup> Although China was in Japanese hands, Japanese troops were concentrated mostly along the coast. The interior regions including Chungking were not occupied but were only accessible by air. Chennault's bases were in the interior.

transport use, including as tankers. In 1945 after Burma fell to the Allies, Major General William H. Tunner, who had gone to India to command the India-China Ferry, now known as the “Hump Airlift”, insisted that the B-24s assigned to the 308<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group would be used more efficiently if they were given to him for transport duty. Tunner also had the troop carrier groups assigned to him.<sup>14</sup> With the additional airplanes and crews, Tunner was able to achieve the record tonnage he crowed about in his memoir.

All types of bombers were used in the transport role in World War II, but the B-24 was the type that seems to have been preferred. Some B-17s were converted in the Pacific early in the war. Boeing proposed a transport version of the B-17 designated as the C-108 but Army Air Forces engineers decided the B-24 was better suited for the role. Consolidated Aircraft began producing a transport version of the Liberator as the C-87 at their Fort Worth factory. The four-engine transports became the mainstay of the Air Transport Command until the Douglas C-54 entered service in large numbers. They flew world-wide missions carrying passengers and high-value cargo.<sup>15</sup> A squadron of C-87s flown by American Airline crews were the first ATC transports to operate over the Burma “Hump” between India and China. C-87s and C-109s were the primary Hump transports.<sup>16</sup>

### A Christmas Story



The movie A Christmas Story is one of my family’s favorite films. We watch it every year. I have my own Christmas story to tell and I’ll tell it right now.

It was Christmas Eve 1966. I was an airman first class loadmaster with the 35<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron at Naha, Okinawa. I was on an in-country shuttle on a crew commanded by Lt. Col. Kevin Montgomery, a crusty officer with a background as a maintenance officer. The flight mechanic (they hadn’t been dubbed “flight engineer” yet) was Airman First Class Willy Patrick, a likeable black guy from

Detroit. We didn’t have hard crews at Naha but I had flown with both Willy and the colonel on several

<sup>14</sup> The “term” airlift didn’t come into use until after the famous Berlin “Airlift”. When the Berlin operation commenced, air transport operations were called “ferries.” However, the transport staff in Germany (or somebody) decided “lift” was a better term. They added the word “air” and it became the “Berlin Air Lift,” two words. The two words were later combined into a new term, “airlift.”

<sup>15</sup> My dad came back from England after flying his missions in a C-87.

<sup>16</sup> Although the C-54 was a hit with ATC, they had poor high altitude capabilities and were unable to operate over the Hump. They were finally able to enter service to China when the Allies drove the Japanese out of Burma and lower altitude routes became available.

shuttles. Famous entertainer Bob Hope was in the region with his annual Christmas show and was supposed to be at Cam Ranh on Christmas Day. My roommate in the barracks, Denny Carroll, was in Bangkok on the shuttle and his crew was picked to carry Hope's baggage, band and second tier entertainers around while Hope himself flew on an E-model. Denny would come back to Naha with an autographed Anita Bryant album.

While Denny's crew was flying Hope's entourage around, my crew was on the typical Cam Ranh shuttle. We had moved along on the schedule until we were on the night schedule, although we started out in the afternoon. One of our legs was from Tan Son Nhut to Binh Thuy, an established base south of Saigon in the Delta. I off-loaded our cargo and we were preparing to depart empty as I recall, but when Col. Montgomery pressed the button for #3 starter, nothing happened. Col. Montgomery called the ALCE and they said they'd have one sent in from Tan Son Nhut. Binh Thuy was a "permanent" base with a concrete ramp and runway; they even had transient alert! But they didn't have transient maintenance. Binh Thuy was an airbase but the airplanes based there were A-1s and AC-47s, no turbine aircraft. Willy, however, was a qualified C-130A flightline mechanic before he went on flying status. I was also a qualified C-130 mechanic. I'd worked on the flightline at Pope before cross-training to loadmaster a couple of years before. Willy would change the starter with my help, but we first had to have one.

I'm not certain of the sequence but I believe we removed the old starter before we did anything else. The transient alert guys warned us there was a VC sniper around. He sometimes took potshots at people working on the flight line. That was not something we wanted to hear! We had a couple of hours to kill before the replacement starter would be in. The officers had already caught a ride to the O club. Willy and I went to the Airmen's Club – since we were airmen first, we weren't eligible for membership in NCO clubs in PACAF even though we were considered to be NCOs. We ordered supper. It was Christmas Eve and everybody was in a celebratory mood so we decided to ignore 55-130 policy and have a drink, just one. We finished our meal and drink and decided it was time to go back to the flight line. The B-model with our starter would be in soon. The starter was coming from Tan Son Nhut; T-56 starters were interchangeable between C-130 models. Soon after we returned to the airplane, the B-model came in from Saigon. I don't think they even shut down engines. Aerial port took it to transient alert and they brought it to me and Willy. We got back up on the stand and attached the new starter, wondering all the time if a bullet was going to smack us. Fortunately, the VC sniper must have been Catholic because he wasn't on duty that night.

When we got back to Cam Ranh, we all went to one of the trailers that had been set up for night crews. An entire crew, officers and enlisted, were assigned to the same trailer. By the time we got up the next day, it was too late to go to the chow hall for one of the turkey dinners Stars & Stripes was claiming everyone in Vietnam would be able to have and make it to the flight line for our show time. No Bob Hope show for us! I had a turkey dinner alright, a turkey C ration.



**DFC Society Seeking Stories for Newsletter**

We're seeking DFC event stories featuring the C-130 for next summer's issue of the *DFC Society Magazine*. One or two pages in Word about the event leading to the DFC award, plus a high-quality, unique photo if possible. Send to [jmiller@dfcsociety.org](mailto:jmiller@dfcsociety.org).

My Name Is Jim Dwyer 21st TAS CCK 1971-1973  
I'm Working On The Second CCK Reunion For April 2022 in Las Vegas.  
The CCK FaceBook Page Is: CCK AIR BASE TAICHUNG TAIWAN  
The Reunion will be held at the Golden Nugget Hotel 19-21 April 2022.

Contact Jim Dwyer at [JimDwyer@Earthlink.net](mailto:JimDwyer@Earthlink.net) or 714.425.1317



**Sam McGowan Books**

I ordered several copies of my books to take to San Antonio to sell, but I wasn't able to go and I have them cluttering up my garage. I'm sending out a price list with the special reunion rate and ordering instructions with this newsletter. All books will be autographed!