

50TH TACTICAL AIRLIFT SQUADRON



1943 - 1968

"Celebration of the 25th anniversary of the 50th Tactical Airlift Squadron's first combat mission represents a significant milestone in our history. It focuses attention of the entire Air Force on us and on those who have gone before us. Our record is incomparable.

"Milestones face two directions. At this time we observe the past, and, with great pride, look to the future. We rededicate ourselves to the high standards of professionalism which the 50th has maintained and thus insure that those who follow us will carry on to the fullest extent of their abilities."



C.L. BALCH, COL., USAF
Commander

TRANSPORTS AID VICTORY
IN SICILY INVASION

KAIROUAN, Tunisia, 11 July 1943-----C-47 aircraft of the 314th Troop Carrier Group, including those of the 50th Troop Carrier Squadron, today launched the airborne invasion of Sicily.

Despite unexpected weather conditions and heavy antiaircraft fire, 29 of the 33 transports launched arrived at their destination and successfully dispatched their troops, thus disrupting enemy defenses well in advance of a massive seaborne invasion.

FROM KAIROUAN TO KATUM

If you were closely following the progress of the 50th Troop Carrier Squadron back in 1943, you might have read a newspaper story similar to the one on the previous page. You would have noted the success achieved by the Squadron in its very first combat mission. You would have further observed that the Squadron had been conceived only 13 months before and had been in the European theater less than one. Continued scrutiny of the 50th's record would have revealed, at a later date, a citation awarded by the President of the United States for the undaunted bravery and superior proficiency of the men who took part in that operation.

Today, we can study an even larger segment of the history of our 50th Tactical Airlift Squadron. In the past 25 years, Red Devil crews have aided in maintaining American security worldwide. They have served in France and Formosa. Poix, Vieques, Inchon and San Isidro are dissimilar names familiar to the Squadron. Recently, Vietnam has taken the spotlight as 50th crews and maintenance men work around the clock to support more than 200 combat sorties each week. From Kairouan to Katum, the 50th Tactical Airlift Squadron has done a big job, and the ribbons on her guidon testify she has done it well.

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On 15 June, 1942, the Squadron was activated at Drew Field, Florida as part of the 314th Transport Group (now 314th Tactical Airlift Wing, our present higher headquarters). The total

strength at that time was two airmen--one officer and one draftee. On 20 June the Squadron moved to Bowman Field, Kentucky where it received the remainder of its personnel. Here the 50th was equipped with C-47 aircraft and was given its mission:

a. "Air transportation for airborne forces into combat and to resupply such forces until they are withdrawn or can be supplied by other means.

b. "Medium range air movement of personnel, equipment and supplies, including air evacuation, within the theater of operation by the direction of the Theater Commander."

(It is significant to note that this mission is essentially the same as our Southeast Asia mission today. Of course, with long range C-130 aircraft, the 50th is capable of meeting a global threat, should need arise. The basic mission is thus expanded to meet the needs of the aerospace age.)

The 50th's third move in preparation for entering the war was to Sedalia Army Air Base, Knobnoster, Missouri, where mission training began. Final joint training with Army Airborne forces was accomplished at Lawson Field, Georgia in February 1943 shortly before shipping overseas.

May, 1943 found the 50th in North Africa. it was from Field "J," Kairouan, Tunisia that the first combat mission was launched; the air-drop of a battalion of 82nd Airborne troopers in the invasion of Sicily. For this mission, the 50th received a Presidential Unit Citation, the first of three such honors in its short but eventful history. The Citation read, in part,

"on the night of 11 July, 1943, 33 aircraft loaded with paratroopers took off the Tunisian base of this unit, bound for enemy-fortified Sicily. Unexpectedly, they encountered difficult weather conditions, but the crews, despite the absence of radio navigational aids, skillfully held to their course over the vast expanse of the Mediterranean Sea. Upon their approach to the coast of Sicily, heavy anti-aircraft fire was encountered which continued increasingly to the drop zone, destroying four airplanes. Notwithstanding this extreme hazard, the crews displaying heroic determination flew their unarmed and unarmored airplanes through the flak in close formation to the designated objective where they successfully dispatched the troops. The disruption of enemy defenses well in advance of the seaborne invasion by the United States Seventh Army was made possible by the undaunted bravery and superior proficiency of the officers and men of the 314th Troop Carrier Group (including the 50th Troop Carrier Squadron)."

The Squadron continued to fly combat drop and medical evacuation missions until operations were moved to Saltby, England in March, 1944. From Saltby, 50th "Gooney Birds" conducted extensive operations into France. On the fifth, sixth and seventh of June, the 50th shared in another Presidential Unit Citation. On those dates it distinguished itself through "extraordinary heroism, determination and esprit de corps in a flawlessly coordinated group effort in which troop carrier airplanes spearheaded the Allied invasion of the European continent." (Wording from General Orders #85, War Department,

Washington 25, D.C., 3 November 1944.) Later in 1944, the Squadron played a key role in the airborne invasion of Holland, and from Poix, France, crossed the Rhine north of Wesel in gliders—the first glider combat mission of the war.

After V. E. day, the cleanup began. Quickly adjusting from the combat airdrop and medical evacuation mission, the Squadron went into the passenger business, shuttling occupational troops into Germany. Squadron strength dropped rapidly, finally reaching its original manning of one officer and one enlisted man. Both were assigned to 314th Group headquarters in Paris. In February, 1946, the Squadron was officially deactivated.

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Chapter two in the history of the 50th Tactical Airlift Squadron began at Smyrna Air Force Base, Tennessee in October 1949. The Squadron had absorbed the personnel, equipment and aircraft of the 20th Troop Carrier Squadron and begun to re-equip with C-119 B transports. During the Spring of 1950, most of the 50th's old aircraft were transferred to Europe.

Orders were received in July 1950 for a unit move to the Far East. Now fully equipped with "Flying Boxcars," the Squadron was in place at Ashiya, Japan by the middle of September. Combat missions in Korea began immediately.

It took the 50th little more than a month of combat to distinguish itself for the third time. A Presidential Unit Citation (General Orders #3, Dept. Air Force, Washington, 23 January 1951) stated that the 50th "displayed conspicuous gallantry and heroism while performing urgent resupply missions to encircled

troops of the First U.S. Marine Division and Seventh Division, U.S. Army, in the vicinity of Chosin Reservoir, Korea, during the period 28 November through 10 December 1950. When, on 29 November 1950, Chinese Communist troops estimated to number 70,000 had completely surrounded the United Nations' Forces at the reservoir, the Group (314th Troop Carrier Group including the 50th) was ordered to make aerial delivery of ammunition, gasoline, food, supplies and equipment. It was necessary for the Group to make para-drops at extremely low altitudes and very slow flying speeds to insure that the urgently needed material would fall into the hands of friendly troops and not to the nearby enemy. With complete disregard of the extreme dangers involved, the flight crews of the Group completed every requirement of the mission, thus contributing immeasurably to the successful withdrawal of the entrapped troops to the Eastern coast of Korea."

During the Korean tour, the 50th also took part in several other operations: combat drops at Suchon and Sunchon and in the Inchon invasion; evacuation of the Hungman-Hankung perimeter and the airborne assault and resupply of Nunsan-ni on the Imjin river. On 27 July 1953, the President of the Republic of Korea presented the Korean Presidential Unit Citation to the 50th to recognize significant achievement in Korean military operations.

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Peacetime operations for the 50th after Korea were hardly uneventful. In January and February of 1955, the Squadron was awarded an Outstanding Unit Citation for exercise "Snowbird,"

a joint Army-Air Force maneuver in Alaska. The Citation stated that the exercise was "conducted under simulated combat conditions, during adverse arctic weather and demonstrated the 'mobility' of a Troop Carrier Group and its ability to airdrop personnel under arctic climatic conditions." In December 1956, the Squadron participated in operation "Dew Line" to resupply Dew Line radar sites being built at the time.

The 50th's modern "global" capability came with the implementation of Air Force OPLAN 151-59, the C-130 conversion plan. The first Hercules was recieved on 18 May 1957; the last C-119 left in August. The Squadron became C-130 mission ready on 1 December 1957.

Beirut, Lebanon became a trouble area the following June and troop carrier units of Tactical Air Command, including the 50th, moved to the Near East.

Two months later, the globe-trotting Red Devils moved again, this time to Clark Airbase, Phillipines, having deployed the entire squadron to aid U.S. operations in the Formosa Straits. Nearly six million pounds of cargo and more than 4000 passengers were airlifted in the deployment. Redeployment back to Sewart AFB, Tennessee was accomplished in December. From that time until a permanent change of station to Southeast Asia in 1965, the Squadron participated in several training and weapons-system testing missions.

Spring 1959---Exercise "Banyan Tree"--- deployment of airborne troops of the 82nd Airborne to Rio Hata drop zone in Panama.

Fall 1959---Operation "Pittsburg"---participated in the 200th anniversary of the founding of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.

1960---Operation "Mobile Yoke"---flown in support of President Eisenhower's visit to South America. "Fraternidad"---yet another operation in Panama that saw drop missions flown into Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

June and July 1963---Exercise "Tidal Wave"---a deployment to Thailand. Flying under realistic simulated combat conditions, the circular drop error for this mission averaged 19 yards in 24 drops, a phenomenal score.

Spring and Summer 1964---Operation "Polar Siege"---a joint airborne operation during which the Low Altitude Parachute Extraction System (LAPES) was developed. "Northwind"---another joint operation near Ulm, Germany. "Indian River"---the airlift of an Army division from Ft. Reilly, Kansas to Eglin AFB, Florida. "Polar Strike"---the largest Allied arctic maneuver on record. The exercise tested concepts of troop deployment for nuclear development in arctic regions. "Quick Kick VII"---the first joint Atlantic exercise to be held outside the continental United States. Involved dropping troops from the 82nd Airborne onto Vieques Island in the Caribbean after a 1000-mile in-trail formation over water.

In addition to code named exercises, 50th crews also performed regular rotations to two overseas bases; Evreux-Fauville, France and Howard, Canal Zone.

April 1965---With the outburst of hostilities in the Dominican Republic, the 50th joined with other Troop Carrier squadrons to

airland a peace-making force and then keep it re-supplied. Code-named "Power Pack," the initial operation began with a 150-ship formation from Pope AFB, North Carolina to San Isidro Airport, R.D.

An extended tour in Southeast Asia became imminent when the Squadron was picked for another 60-day temporary duty in the Phillipines in September 1965. Later that same month, notification of a permanent change of station to the Far East was recieved.

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Increased activity in the Vietnam combat zone brought the 50th to Ching Chuan Kang ROC AFB, Taiwan in January 1966, after spending four months at Clark AB awaiting assignment. The Squadron had already been flying combat missions over South Vietnam while on temporary duty at Clark. The move to CCK was made without missing a single commitment in Vietnam. Fiftieth crews immediately began to establish new airlift records in Southeast Asia. During operation "Green Light" (January 1966), 134 sorties were flown and 9500 troops and 300,000 pounds of cargo were moved for the 25th Division. Then during operation "Garfield," 50th C-130s were among those who flew more than 200 combat sorties lifting 2483 passengers and more than four-million pounds of cargo. All missions were flown from the 314th Troop Carrier Wing's (formerly Troop Carrier Group) Forward Operating Location at Vung Tau on the southern coast of Vietnam. By March 1966, the Squadron was at full strength.

April 1966---Major Gordon M. Jones flew 291 sorties in 29 days, the most by a Red Devil at that time.

22 February 1967---Operation Junction City---the first large scale personnel drop in Vietnam. Initiated a lengthy search and destroy mission.

April 1967---assisted in ferrying 2865 tons of cargo from Taipei to Tuy Hoa in support of the base expansion at that South Vietnamese airdrome. The 50th literally helped build what is now 314th Wing's primary Viet operation.

15-16 May 1967---airlifted Third Battalion, Fourth Marines from Naha, Okinawa to Dong Ha, Vietnam. Two-hundred-eighteen combat equipped Marines and 323,000 pounds of cargo were carried in 40 hours in that move.

June 1967---Operation "Horace Greeley"---the transfer of passengers and cargo from Tan Son Nhut to Kontum, Vietnam.

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By October 1967, Tuy Hoa had finished rebuilding and 50th crews moved in to begin shuttle operations there. From Tuy Hoa, the aerial resupply of more than four-million pounds of asphalt, pierced steel planking and equipment into Khe Sanh was initiated. Khe Sanh, a Marine outpost near the demilitarized zone in South Vietnam, was at the time considered a strategic base for checking the infiltration of enemy supplies from the North. History later proved this operation a tremendous success when, only four months later, the Viet Cong began their famous "Tet" offensive, laying siege on Khe Sanh for more than a month. The fact that the new runway had just been constructed using materials air-delivered by 834th Air Division aircraft, including those from the 50th TAS, greatly enhanced emergency resupply and medical evacuations into the outpost.

In November, operation "Wollowa," an emergency resupply mission near Da Nang took place. In that operation, the Container Delivery System (CDS) was used successfully. Later in November, Major Gilbert Kirchoff, a 50th instructor pilot, narrowly escaped death when a hostile mortar round hit his aircraft on the ground at Dak To II airdrome in the Central Highlands. Fiftieth crews provided a large share of the resupply to that area when it came under heavy enemy attack.

10-20 November 1967---Lt. Col. George D. Trusty, another Red Devil pilot, was chosen to shuttle Hubert Humphrey during the Vice President's tour of Southeast Asia.

December 1967---The Squadron held a money and clothing drive for its "adopted" TaYa Orphanage, located in TaYa City just outside of CCK. The orphanage, now also a home for blind children, was adopted by the 50th earlier in 1967. As a special treat during Christmas, the children were given a tour of a C-130 aircraft.

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"Tet," the Vietnamese lunar New Year, was celebrated in February 1968 by enemy shelling of nearly every major allied installation in South Vietnam. Airlift became premium and every C-130 squadron, including the 50th, was taxed to its maximum. Although allied forces contained the enemy in most action, hostile troops were able to surround Khe Sanh, creating the necessity for aerial resupply to hold the position. Weather was bad at times, but 50th crews managed to share in lifting 12,000 tons of cargo into the besieged base. Also during February, a 50th crew, commanded by Major Philip D. Borsik,

was honored by Brig. Gen. Burl W. McLaughlin, 834th Air Division Commander, for their professional airmanship in the face of hostile fire while conducting airdrops near My Phouc Tay. When an extraction chute malfunction and intense ground fire prevented Maj. Borsik from dropping his load on the first run over the drop zone, he elected to make another pass to drop the emergency cargo that was vital to ground operations. Subsequent hits by ground fire wounded his loadmaster and deflated two of his main gear tires. Maj. Borsik and his crew, Capt. Victor D. Bouquet, Maj. Worth D. Howard, TSgt. Earl R. Fonderwhite, Amn. Karl M. Rosenberg and Amn. William A. Leger were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for their actions.

Capt. Edwin A. Jenks and crew, Capt. James A. Fulk, Capt. Otto L. Osborne, TSgt. Earl W. Gassaway and Sgt. James L. Hillabrandt, were recognized by Gen. McLaughlin when they remained three days at Khe Sanh to repair their aircraft that had been severely damaged by hostile fire while approaching the runway. The crew flew the aircraft out of Khe Sanh with a barest minimum of essential controls to save it from sure destruction by enemy mortars.

In March, the 314th Tactical Airlift Wing flew a record 10,000 hours, largely in support of continued Tet cleanup. On an approach to Khe Sanh, Lt. Col. James R. West, 50th scheduling officer, was informed by his loadmaster his right wheel well was hit and burning. With a load of emergency resupply cargo, Col. West made a quick decision to continue his approach. After a perfect maximum

effort landing on the narrow runway, Col. West and his crew began fighting the fire with portable extinguishers. A 50th flight engineer, Sgt. Robert Downs, remained at Khe Sanh to help repair the aircraft.

May 1968---Lt. Col. William Boyd and his crew risked their lives to save more than 100 Vietnamese soldiers and their families and United States infantrymen when they landed at Kham Duc in the face of heavy ground fire that had brought down a C-130 departing ahead of them. Although they recieved numerous hits the crew nevertheless was able to carry their load back to a safe area after a maximum effort takeoff on the shell-torn runway. In the words of an F-4 pilot who was providing fighter cover for Col. Boyd as he made his approach, "the small arms and automatic weapons fire over the approach end of the runway was unbelievable. In addition, the entire area was saturated with numerous aircraft of every type. Each crew had to be responsive to the situation and accept the high possibility of mid-air collision. Acceptance of this responsibility in addition to performing an extremely difficult mission under heavy ground fire was the most outstanding example of airmanship I have observed in over 115 combat missions in South and North Vietnam. The courage, professionalism and accomplishments of (Col. Boyd's) crew reflect the greatest credit upon themselves and the United States Air Force. As a tactical fighter pilot, I am extremely proud to say I am on the same team." Other members of Col. Boyd's crew were: Maj. John W. Reed, co-pilot; Capt. Felix D. Powers,

navigator; TSgt. Earl R. Fonderwhite, instructor flight engineer; SSgt. Harlen Johnson, flight engineer and Amn. Samuel Kerro, loadmaster.

June 1968---Lt. Fletcher A. Hatch successfully landed his burning C-130 at Tay Ninh after it had been hit by hostile ground fire on departure from Katum, north of Saigon. A fire had developed in the left wing and all emergency procedures had failed to extinguish it. Checking with his navigator, Lt. Jon R. Alexander, Lt. Hatch decided on Tay Ninh as the best emergency field since it was relatively close by and had an adequate runway and crash equipment. Complications developed when SSgt. Joseph R. Basilisco, the flight engineer, tried to lower the landing gear by an emergency method and found that only the left main gear would extend. With the left wing melting rapidly, Lt. Hatch elected to make a crash landing with the right gear up rather than attempt to remain airborne. As the aircraft touched down near the end of the runway, the left wing melted in half making directional control impossible. The aircraft skidded off the runway and stopped 2100 feet from the approach.

Lt. Hatch and his crew were recommended for decoration for their performance. Of special significance was the fact that three members of the crew were born the same year the 50th flew its first combat mission in Sicily and their mission to Katum occurred only a few weeks before the 25th anniversary of that event. Other members of the crew were Lt. Britt Blaser, co-pilot and A1C Jerry T. Willard, load master.

July 1968---Twenty five years after Sicily, the 50th celebrates the anniversary of its first combat mission. To properly salute this occasion and to assert Red Devil influence in Southeast Asia combat operations, 50th crew members will fly maximum utilization in the combat zone during the first half of July.

Then, on 11 July, they will begin to pull back to CCK to observe 25 years of Air Force progress in which the 50th has contributed a significant share.

SUMMARY OF 50 TAS AWARDS
(through April 1963)

I. Presidential Unit Citation: Awarded for extraordinary heroism in action. The unit must have displayed such gallantry, determination and esprit de corps in accomplishing its mission under extremely difficult and hazardous conditions as to set it apart and above other units participating in the same campaign. (Comparable to the Air Force Cross to an individual)

Awarded:

Sicily---11 July 1943

France---5,6,7 June 1944

Korea---28 November-10 December 1950

II. Air Force Outstanding Unit Award: Awarded for exceptionally meritorious service or exceptionally outstanding achievement which clearly sets the unit apart and above similar units.

Awarded:

11 January 1955-14 February 1955

6 May 1953-20 September 1954

1 January 1960-31 December 1961

1 September 1962-15 April 1963

III. Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation: Awarded by the President of the Republic of Korea to recognize significant achievement in Korean military operations.

Awarded:

1 July-27 July 1953

IV. War Service Streamers with Campaign or Expedition Credit: Awarded for participating in a specific operation within a designated

theater. (Similar to an individual's service ribbons with battle stars or arrowheads)

Awarded:

Central Europe---22 March-11 May 1945
Naples-Foggia(air)---18 August 1943-
21 January 1944
Normandy---6 June-24 July 1944
Northern France---25 July-14 September
1944
Rhineland---15 September 1944-21 March
1945
Rome-Arno---22 January-9 September 1944
Sicily(air)---14 May-17 August 1943
UN Defensive---27 June-15 September 1950
UN Offensive---16 September-2 Nov. 1950
Chinese Communist Intervention---3 Nov.
1950-24 January 1951
First UN Counteroffensive---25 Jan.
1951-21 April 1951
Chinese Communist Spring Offensive---
22 April-8 July 1951
UN Summer-Fall Offensive---9 July-
27 November 1951
Second Korean Winter---28 Nov. 1951-
30 April 1952
Korean Summer-Fall---1 May 1952-30
November 1952
Third Korean Winter---1 December 1952-
30 April 1953
Korean Summer-Fall---1 May-27 July 1953

V. Assault Landing Credits:

Awarded:

20-23 October 1950--Parachute jump
at Sunchon, Korea.
23-24 March 1951--Airborne attack
at Munsan-ni, Korea.

Edited by:

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Acknowledgements:

Clayton L. Balch
George P. Tarr
Donald A. Dallenbach
James W. Fulk
John E. Goodwin
William R. Stamler