

**AFEHRI File 100.108**

**Research Materials/Source Documents  
STUDENT PAPERS**

**FILE TITLE: History of the USAAF Combat Cargo Group's and the Enlisted Man's Contribution**

**AUTHOR: SMSgt Robert W. Huffman, SNCOA Student, 20 Feb 1996**

**Reviewed by:**

**AFEHRI Representative** G.R. Akin date 30 DEC 97

**EPC Representative** Jessie C. Lee date 9 Feb 98

**Scanner Operator** \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

**APPROVED BY:** Gary R. Akin

**GARY R. AKIN, CMSgt, USAF  
Director  
Air Force Enlisted Heritage Research Institute**

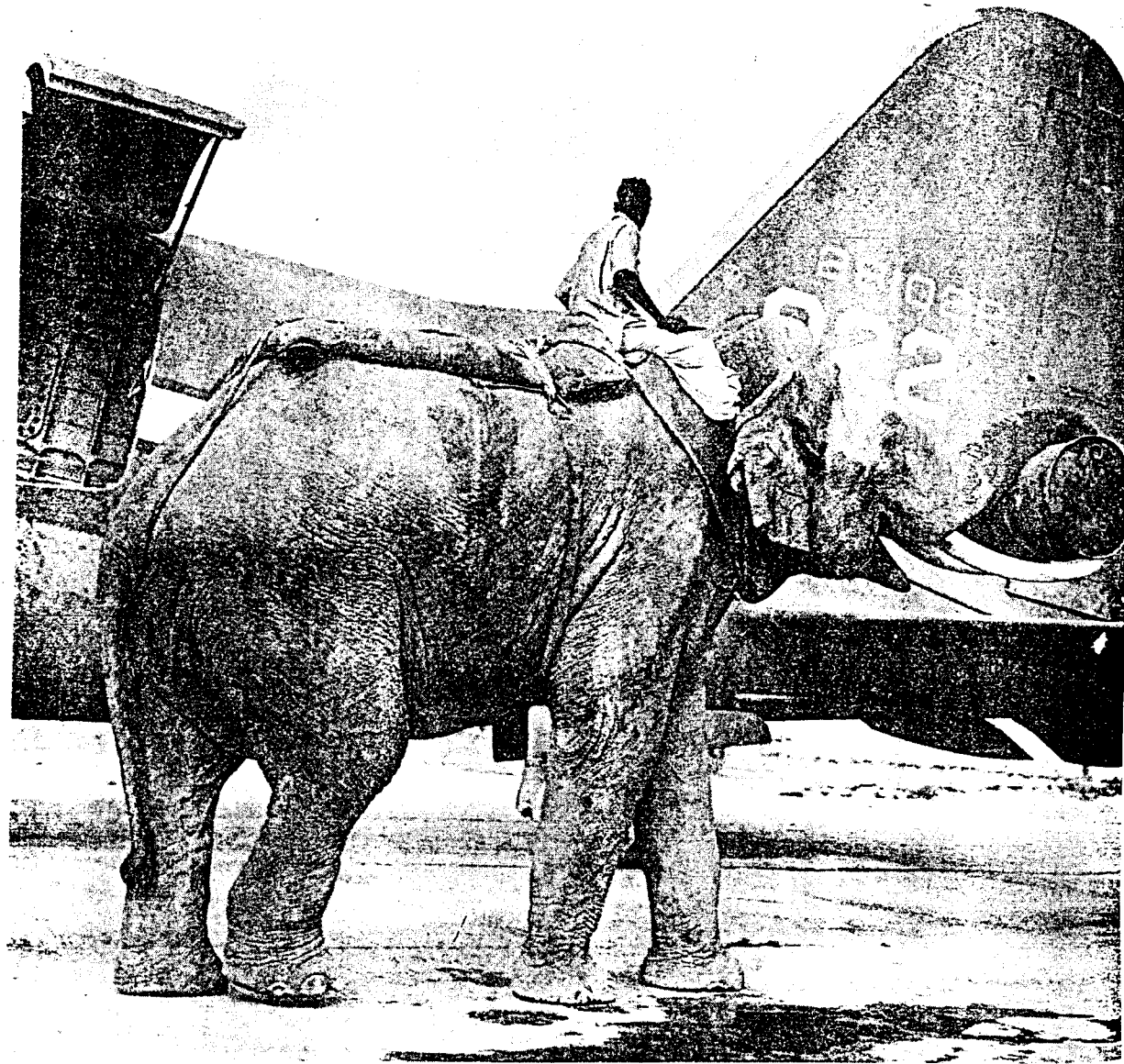
4/6 19-8-4  
J.L.B.

HISTORY OF THE  
ARMY AIR FORCE  
COMBAT CARGO GROUP'S  
AND THE ENLISTED  
MAN'S CONTRIBUTION

BY

SMSGT ROBERT W. HUFFMAN

20 FEBRUARY 1996



For loading and unloading the "Hump" transports, elephants were found to be faster and more efficient than men. Here an elephant loads 55 gallon drums of gasoline from a truck to a C-46 in India.

U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO

The following story will tell about a select group of American service men who served in the Army Air Force (AAF) in WW II. Not in the skies over Germany or France, but in some of the remotest regions of the war. They were the enlisted men of the Combat Cargo Groups that served in the China, India, Burma theater. They supported the Allied forces effort to defeat the Japanese Army. I hope from this story you get a flavor of what it might have been like to be an enlisted man working on cargo aircraft. It certainly, was not the glorious job that a recruiter might try to sell. It was however a necessary job that the Allies sorely needed done. It is also a story of success, for the Combat Cargo Groups exceeded every requirement expected from them.(5:46)

Let's start now with the events that led to the Combat Cargo Groups inception.

In 1943 the Imperial Japanese Army was still on the offensive in Asia. They had closed the Burma road, effectively blockading China from the outside world.(5:5) Ultimately, they planned to take over the Chinese Government. The British Army had been fighting Japanese forces in this theater of the war since 1942.(5:2) They were in need of some help, particularly with forward air supply to their soldiers. In response the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) commissioned the Combat Cargo Group (CCG) Task Force.(4:-)

There would be four CCG's with four Combat Cargo Squadrons (CCS) in each group.(3:1) All squadrons would be streamlined flying units. "Specially adapted Squadrons of men and aircraft, able to keep in close and constant support of ground forces fighting the Japanese."(2:01) These units would be stripped of all personnel and equipment not essential to the actual flying of the aircraft. (2:1) In addition the squadrons could be shifted to any new air field, or a captured airfield in minimum time.(2:1) The two principal aircraft for the CCG would be the reliable twin engine C-47 Douglas "Skytrain" and a new aircraft, the C-46 Curtiss "Commando."(8:143) Initially, the squadrons were formed at two different locations. The C-46 squadrons went to Syracuse New York, and the C-47 Squadrons to Louisville, Kentucky. The reason for different

locations could be found in the production of the C-46. The aircraft were being built in Buffalo, NY and flown directly to Syracuse.(6:-) In the initial phase of organization, all squadrons shared the similar experience of a “Lack of experienced people, inadequate supply of parts, and poor servicing facilities.”(3:1) One unit history notes “ Ground personnel for the planes seemed to be at a premium, there was just no men to be had.”(3:2) This was particularly true with the C-46 aircraft. Because the aircraft was so new, mechanics had no work experience on it.(3:1) In addition, “The aircraft were inadequately equipped with tools and equipment, to remedy all of the troubles encountered.”(3:-) Additionally depot repair facilities were “bare of C-46 equipment, thus delaying the movement of aircraft.”(3:-) Compounding the problem was the fact that no technical manuals were available for the aircraft.(4th) Never the less, with all the problems encountered, moral remained high.(3:2) The fact that “most of the key personnel volunteered for the outfits” probably helped.(3:2) The few experienced mechanics available, like Sgt. Nudelman of the 4th CCS, “Worked all hours to keep the planes in operational order.”(3:2) Within a few weeks people began to feel more comfortable with the aircraft. The situation was helped along as additional personnel reported to duty.(4:2) While aircrews practiced the type of flying and missions they would have to do in theater, the ground crews did refresher courses.(4:2) Some of the courses taught were chemical warfare, malaria control, sanitation, and first aid.(3:2) As one Squadron put it “any subject that may have slipped their minds since basic training was covered.(2:1) In addition “All personnel practiced pitching camp, firing the .45 cal. pistol, and making forced marches. “All to prepare them for the ordeal to come.”(3:-) Aggressive aircraft maintenance courses were taught about instrument, fuel, hydraulic, and electrical systems.(2:2) Besides training needs, men were issued clothing and “Each individual left the states with as complete of issue of equipment for a man to possibly have.”(3:1) Like everyone else, Don Huffman, a private in the 4th CCG, was confused as to why he was issued cold weather clothing

for India. "Everyone knew it was hot there."(6:-) It would not be long until he found out what those "warm clothes" were for.

With things seemingly as ready as possible, it was time to depart. There would be one more stop on the way overseas for some advanced "simulated combat operations."(1:1) But within a month the squadrons arrived in India. It will be noted, that a trip overseas in 1943 vintage aircraft was long and difficult.(4:-) To both the aircrews and mechanics credit, no aircraft were lost.(3:-) Arrival in India was a similar experience for all squadrons. The 4th CCS began their stay in Sylhet, India, and as expected the heat was intense. One NCO said "Its so hot in the daytime they have to feed hens chipped ice to keep them from laying hard boiled eggs!"(7:98) The daytime heat gave no clue as to what would come that first night. The location of the base was near the foot of the Himalayan Mountains. That night it became extremely cold. As Don Huffman said, he "Put every bit of warm clothing he had on and still could not get warm." (7:76) In time, the men would get used to the climate. The immediate concern now, would be the mission.

A typical story was that of the 2nd CCS who arrived at Sylhet, India on 27 August 1944. On the 28th their aircraft and crews were evacuating casualties from fighting in the Imphal Valley. By November, the 2nd had moved to Imphal, India to "Evacuate casualties and air supply the British 14th Army in their offensive against the Japanese."(1:-) After a brief stay of 2 weeks at Imphal they again moved. This time to Tsuyung, China where their "Main mission was to haul gasoline and troops to the front lines of Eastern China."(2:-) In a few short months, the "Hard use of the aircraft, bad weather, and long hours were already taking their toll on both aircraft and men." (2:-) The duty day was 12 hours on and 12 hours off. Aircraft would fly 15 to 19 hours a day.(6:--) In April of 1944 the 3rd CCS operating out of Burma reported 2,497 missions flown with a total of 3,816 tons of cargo hauled. Work involved on the aircraft was extensive. For

instance, a C-46 aircraft used 11.5 gallons of engine oil a hour and burnt 256 gallons of fuel an hour.(4:7) Some men were dedicated to the job of "Oiler." They would simply service oil in each aircraft after a mission.(6:-) Don Huffman related that when they first arrived in India, they had to refuel aircraft "Over the wing out of 50 gallon drums using a hand operated fuel pump."(6:-) Aircraft engines needed overhauled after 500 hours of operation.(4:-) Records show that in March 1944 line chief Ed Henning of the 4th CCS was recognized by his Commander. The reason being, his Engineering Department kept 96% of the aircraft flyable in spite of inadequate equipment and materials.(3:2) This is a enviable mission capable rate, even by today's standards. The supply situation "Remained a constant problem."(2:-) It should be recognized here, that the enlisted force were not all maintenance people. Enlisted flight engineers flew on every mission. TSgt Fruth, a 4th CCS engineer was recognized for 212 flying hours for the month of March.(2:-)

For the ground crews, the amount of maintenance would depend on the theater action at the time. In May of 1945 for instance, the British were on an offensive to retake Rangoon, the seaport capital of Burma.(1:-) Both the 2nd CCS and the 4th CCS were busy transporting hundreds of British soldiers and their equipment to the front. The 4th CCS alone was flying over 60 sorties a day. (3:-) During this effort a contest started between the 4th and the 2nd CCS's titled "Rangoon before the monsoon." The idea being to increase the tonnage carried per day with the knowledge that flying during the rainy season became precarious at best. Much to their credit, Rangoon fell to the Allies. The CCS's continued to supply the British Army while they "mopped up the Japanese."(4:-) For that one month alone, the aircraft of the 2nd CC.S flew over 5,000 hours with over 3,000 tons of cargo delivered.(1:-) Besides the heavy flying mission, another reason for much of their maintenance was due to the environment. Dust was in everything, and

caused much extra work. Engines with low operating hours that normally would have ran much longer developed clogged fuel carburetors and stopped up fuel lines.(3:1) Besides dust, monsoon season caused tremendous problems.(3:1) All squadrons mention "Troublesome mud." At times entire airfields were moved due to mud.(3:1) In addition to these problems, human error also contributed. The British government hired civilian labor to load cargo on the aircraft. "Due to poor truck handling or inexperience, truck drivers were constantly backing into aircraft."(3:2) Besides causing frustration, the accidents created extra sheet metal work for the mechanics. Another task needing done was setting up a suitable camp. While in China the 4th CCS "Despite terrible dusty conditions, with no fresh water, little food, and no tents" worked day and night to set up a permanent camp.(3:-) Once they got things under control, they built showers, a decent latrine, and even ran electricity to their tents. At times a forward operating locations would be set up. This would prevent a entire squadron from having to move. The 4th CCS did this in Chittagong, India by leaving a "Snack bar and refuel crew" there for a month, "To continue the mission."(3:2) At some locations movies, a club, or even a library could be set up.(3:-) Don Huffman said his outfit got an ice machine "Jerry rigged" in India, and it was the only one around for hundreds of miles.(6:-) If things got dull they would find some diversion to keep entertained. This was the case with a 4th CCG Squadron in Burma. The Commander of the squadron noticed that clinic reports showed at least 6 of his men with either a broken arm or leg. The reason incredibly enough, was due to motorcycle accidents. There had never been motorcycles issued in Burma, this was a clear violation of standard operating procedures. His investigation found that some of the men had located an abandoned British dump site with discarded motorcycles. The motorcycles were in perfect operating condition, and the men hated to see them go to waste. The Commander put a immediate stop to the use of motorcycles. Fortunately, they were able to keep a truck they found.(6:-)

As with any war there were some unusual incidents that happened. In May of 1944 the 3rd CCS reported that a Chinese soldier was found hiding in the “Incredibly small space of a C-47 main wheel well after landing.(3:-) It was never determined how he survived the long flight.

Although the CCG’s maintained enviable safety records there were losses.(1:D) Crews that flew heavily loaded, unarmed cargo aircraft through the Himalayan Mountains, had little chance of bailing out if problems developed. If they did manage to survive a crash, survival on the ground was almost impossible, many crews simply disappeared.(8:139)

In 1945 everyone knew the Japanese were having “A rough time of it.” But the Japanese were tough fighters, and surrender did not come easy.(6:--) Never the less, in August 1945, a simple entry entered in the 2nd CCS unit history reads “ The general reaction to the Japanese surrender was one of relief at a distasteful job finally accomplished.” It goes on to say that “Thought’s turned homeward” and “The sweating it out of getting home began.”(3:1) Don Huffman said that he was on night shift and “Didn’t know about the end right away.” A returning aircraft was firing flares to celebrate, and that’s when “He realized it was over.”(6:--) One of the most unusual problems encountered with the end of the war was what to do with all the aircraft. Incredible as it seems now, many aircraft were simply “Taken to the end of the run way and set on fire!”(6:--)

Unfortunately today, there is little information written about cargo carriers of WW II. There can be no doubt however, of there invaluable contribution.(7:46) Fortunately historical records do hold some remembrance of there contributions. These are in the form of congratulation letters. Some are from Allied countries and others from American Generals. Many letters contain specific recognition to the contributions of the enlisted force. One such letter from British 14th Army Commander, General Slim says “ Particularly am I impressed with the record of the USAAF transport squadrons and their days of practically continuous flying without losing a single sortie because of maintenance difficulties.”(3:-) From General Sir Oliver Leese,



Commander In Chief, Allied Land Forces “ We pay a great debt to Combat Cargo Task Force, in flying under all weather conditions and their high standard of maintenance.”(3:-) Perhaps the best complement came from the Japanese Army. They failed to realize how reliable and efficient the AAF had become at resupply.(5:46)

I hope now that you have some idea of what the enlisted men of a Combat Cargo Squadron did. After hectic training, they deployed overseas. Once there, they immediately went into action. Whether putting up with bad weather or deep mud, they supported the Allies needs. With no good roads in that part of the world, they were the only reliable form of transportation. They kept their aircraft flying from any airfield. They were the life line of the allied forces and led the way for our modern military airlift.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Army Air Force 2nd Combat Cargo Squadron, 2nd Combat Cargo Group, Unit History 1944-1945 Syracuse, New York.
2. Army Air Force 3rd Combat Cargo Squadron, 1st Combat Cargo Group, Unit History April 1944 to October 1945 China, India, Burma theater.
3. Army Air Force 4th Combat Cargo Squadron, 1st Combat Cargo Group, Unit History, April 1944 to November 1945.  
October 1945 Bowman Field, Louisville Kentucky.
4. Army Air Force 5th Combat Cargo Squadron , 2nd Combat Cargo Group, Unit History, May 1944 - 1945 Syracuse New York.
5. Dupuy, Trevor N, *Allied Victories in China and Burma*. New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1963.
6. Huffman, Don L, Private, 1944 4th Combat Cargo Group, Phone Interview 4 February 1996 Resides in Niagara Falls, New York.
7. Litoff, Judy Barrett. *DEAR BOYS World War II Letters From a Woman Back Home*. University Press of Mississippi. 1991.
8. Sunderman, James F, *World War II In The Air*. Chapter titled Over the Hump, War Correspondent Eric Sevareid. New York: Franklin Watts, Inc.