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FILE TITLE: Background Paper on WW II Crew Chief Training

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BACKGROUND PAPER
ON
WORLD WAR II CREW CHIEF TRAINING

"Kick the tires and light the fires." Being a 'crew chief': the poor schmuck who stands in the rain to work on an aircraft, or stands out front of the plane, in the snow, awaiting the pilot's signal to start. While it may seem incredible, there is training required to perform these tasks, as well as a heavy dose of masochism. Training has changed over the years, yet the basics have pretty much stayed the same.

In this paper, I would like to look at a specific time in our country's history; World War II. The airplane was no longer a novelty, but technology was beginning to have a greater impact. The idea that people needed to be trained to work on planes, that this knowledge was not acquired by some form of osmosis, was a fairly recent revelation. I would like to address the 'what' first; just what sort of training was being done for, and to, crew chiefs in World War II (WW2). Then I'll consider the 'who', the people involved in the training, not only those receiving, but also those giving. Finally, since 'perfection is monotonous', we'll look at some of the problems that occurred. The 'problems' area will take up most of the paper, since it's a well-known fact that a chimp can be a crew chief, and even he doesn't take much

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training.

Training. The more it changes, the more the it stays the same. It was fundamental to success, yet in the way it was accomplished, success was sometimes in question.

One of the two ways that training was accomplished for crew chiefs in WW2 was through the normal government process. Crew chiefs were assigned to a Air Force Technical School for 'air mechanics' that lasted approximately four months. (3:-) While in school, they fell under the command of a 'Technical Training Command Administrative Officer', normally a young officer who couldn't find his way to the war. (3:-) The government training worked well, as far as it went. A trip report written in 1943 stated that the TTCAOs "had their shoulders to the wheel and were working in unison to make the program a success." (3:-) While working in unison might be fine for a choir, the crew chiefs "were not well instructed in handling the necessary paperwork" (3:-), and we all know how vital paperwork is. The TTCAOs were falling down in their responsibilities to the crew chiefs, and the remedy was " each facility is being assigned another officer listed as an Engineering Officer whose task is to supervise the activities of the Crew Chiefs; ..the question of adequate supervision and disciplinary control over them has become an important one ." (3:-) It's said that boys will be boys, and it's obvious that crew chiefs will be crew chiefs, unfortunately.

Another concern was that there weren't enough facilities for training, as well as a general lack of qualified instructors. The solution? Civilian training.

The advanced training required for the newer military aircraft was already in use in the civilian sector. In 1942, a letter was written to the Air Transport Association of America "inviting proposals from the airlines for the use of their overhaul shops for the advanced training of enlisted men." (4:-) Areas in which the government needed help included aircraft engine overhaul, propellers, electrical instruments, gyro instruments and general aircraft overhaul.

How did the civilians respond? Airlines that included Continental, Northwest, American, Braniff and Colonial Airways were quick to jump on the 'national defense' bandwagon. (7:-) Unfortunately, the Army Air Corps required a lot more than the civilians were willing to give. In a letter addressed to Gen. 'Hap' Arnold, the Assistant Secretary of War for Air characterized the response as "...very disappointing." (7:-) It might be brought up that the airlines were going to receive remuneration, to the tune of thirty eight and a half cents per student hour for instruction and \$12.50 per week for room and board. (4:-) How could they possibly turn down such *largesse*?

While looking for places to accomplish the training, finding people to train was also a problem. The crew chief candidates were not always willing volunteers. Why?

"..arriving students...indicated that they are more interested in aerial gunnery training because they will more quickly receive a Staff Sergeant's rating, or admitted that they are not the least interested in aeronautics." (1:-) Somehow making rank made the prospect of being shot at more palatable, rather than waiting safely back on the ground, wrench in hand.

The problems faced by trainees were varied, and not always unique to just that era. "The more things change, the more they stay the same."

Quality of life was not a big concern for those in charge of the crew chief training. At a school in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the housing consisted of a "..wood structure erected by the Corps of Engineers during the building of the Tulsa plant which was not dismantled or removed and which lacks adequate sanitary facilities." (3:-) In a conversation between a Col. Gross and a Col. Davasher it was said that "G:...they have a detachment at Great Falls, Montana. You know that they can't sleep in any tents there at this time of year. -D:They sleep in tents in Alaska. - G:You got me licked there." (5:-) It's always heart-warming to see the concern of those assigned over us...

Give a crew chief a meal, and you have a happy man. Sometimes it took some personal initiative..."There are still some commercial concerns who trusted enlisted men for payment of meals who haven't received compensation therefor." (6:-)

Even when crew chiefs had completed their training, pilots weren't always sympathetic to their plight.. "Some of the Ferry Pilots do not seem to be sufficiently aware of their responsibilities to the men. One man had missed nine meals, because his Pilot would tell him to remain with his airplane and then be gone several hours during the meal period." (8:-) In this day and age, it's hard to understand someone being willing to accept such abuse, but that was WAR!

As an old saying goes "Idle hands are the Devils workshop", and some crew chiefs seemed to have a lot of time on their hands. "No one here at Salina seems to know why we're here, what we're supposed to do, nor does it seem that any of the airdromes want us." (2:-) "Arriving here nobody knew just what part I played. I haven't worked on the airplane I came with and so far I'm just doing nothing. I tried to find out just what orders were received here and nobody can tell me a thing." (2:-)

Lost crew chiefs and the quality of life were not the only issues. Tools seemed to be a big problem, especially for training. "The apprentice crew chief's tool kit...has been deleted from aircraft. At no place during the course are the men assigned to such equipment. It is, therefore, impossible for the men to perform the installation work when they do not have the necessary tools." (1:-)

The nice thing about looking back at history is that we already know what the ending was. The question that is

interesting to pose is "What did the men think of the program WHEN it was starting/happening?". I'm afraid all was not skittles and beer....

"The Crew Chief Program is of little practical value and actually causes a serious lowering of morale" (2:-) is a comment by a Major General in the Army Air Corps. The Factory (civilian) Training Program didn't rate much higher. ".the job was done on paper, but as far as accomplishing what General Arnold wanted, it actually as a flop." (6:-) It's a wonder that the program wasn't allowed to die a quick and painless death, but it was a time when any answer was better than no answer. One never knew when the dreaded Nazi U-boat would show up to invade Coney Island, or a Zero would be spotted circling the Golden Gate Bridge.

Training the crew chief in WW2 was not an easy task. We've looked at the obstacles presented by the lack of facilities, lack of qualified instructors and the general lack of enthusiasm on most peoples' part. These were not easy to overcome, yet they were, sometimes through great personal sacrifice on the crew chiefs' part.

The heritage that they, the 'tire kickers' of WW2, have passed down to us is a vital, growing thing. Someday, someone will look back to 1992 and wonder how we persevered, and we can only hope they'll be seeing us through the same 'eyes of pride' with which we view our forebears.

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