317th AIRLIFT SQUADRON

LINEAGE
317th Transport Squadron (Cargo and Mail), constituted, 25 Oct 1943
Activated, 28 Oct 1943
Disbanded, 9 Apr 1944

317th Troop Carrier Squadron, Commando constituted and activated, 1 May 1944
Redesignated 317th Troop Carrier Squadron, 29 Sep 1945
Inactivated, 28 Feb 1946

Constituted as 317th Air Commando Squadron, Troop Carrier, 6 Apr 1964
Organized, 1 Jul 1964
Redesignated 317th Air Commando Squadron, Utility, 15 Jun 1966
Redesignated 317th Special Operations Squadron, 8 Jul 1968
Inactivated, 30 Apr 1974

317th Transport Squadron (Cargo and Mail), 317th Troop Carrier Squadron and 317th Special Operations Squadron reconstituted and consolidated, 19 Sep 1985

Redesignated 317th Airlift Squadron (Associate), 20 Feb 1992
Activated, 1 Apr 1992
Redesignated 317th Airlift Squadron, 1 Oct 1994

STATIONS
Camp Griffiss, England, 28 Oct 1943-9 Apr 1944
Camp Mackall, NC, 1 May 1944
Alachua AAFld, FL, 7 Jun 1944
Dunnellon AAFld, FL, 21 Jun 1944
Camp Mackall, NC, 15 Aug 1944
Baer Field, IN, 29 Sep-Oct 1944
Sylhet, India (air echelon), 2 Nov 1944 (detachment operated at Tulihal, India, 10 Nov-c. 18 Nov 1944)
Bikram, India (air echelon), 30 Nov 1944 (deployed at Myitkyina, Burma, 5 Dec 1944-6 Jan
Kalaikunda, India, 16 Dec 1944 (detachments operated from Dinjan, India, 8-13 Jan 1945 and Bikram, India, 22-30 Jan 1945)
Palel, India, 7 Feb 1945
Kalaikunda, India, 13 Apr 1945 (detachment operated from Akyab, Burma, 29 Apr-1 May 1945 and Comilla, India, 3-20 May 1945)
Lego, India, 1 Jun 1945
Liangshan, China, 10 Sep 1945
Hsian, China, 25 Sep 1945
Kunming, China, 3 Nov 1945
Salua, India, 10 Nov 1945
Hijli, India, 18 Dec 1945
Titagurh, India, 12 Jan-28 Feb 1946
Eglin AF Aux Fld #9, FL, 1 Jul 1964
England AFB, LA, 15 Jan 1966
Eglin AF Aux Fld #9, FL, 15 Apr 1970-30 Apr 1974
Charleston AFB, SC, 1 Apr 1992

ASSIGNMENTS
Eighth Air Force, 28 Oct 1943-9 Apr 1944
2nd Air Commando Group, 1 May 1944
Tenth Air Force, 10 Sep 1945
US Army Forces, India-Burma Theater, c. Jan-28 Feb 1946
1st Air Commando (later, 1st Special Operations) Wing, 1 Jul 1964
4410th Combat Crew Training Wing, 15 Jul 1969
1st Special Operations Wing, 15 Apr 1970-30 Apr 1974
315th Airlift Wing, 1 Apr 1992
315th Operations Group, 1 Aug 1992

WEAPON SYSTEMS
Unkn, 1943
CG-4, 1944-1945
CG-13, 1944-1945
C-47, 1944-1945
C-46, 1945
C-123, 1964-1965
U-10, 1966-1973
C-47, 1966-1970
AC-47, 1967-1968
T-28, 1967-1968
UH-1, 1970-1974
C-123, 1972-1973
CH-3, 1973-1974
C-141, 1992-1993
C-17, 1993
ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT SERIAL NUMBERS

ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT TAIL/BASE CODES

UNIT COLORS

COMMANDERS
Unkn, 28 Oct 1943-9 Apr 1944
Maj Arthur Kaufman, 1 May 1944
Maj Wirt E. Thompson Jr., 31 Jul 1944
Maj Richard G. Edwards, 8 Dec 1944
Maj Wallace B. Black, 23 Sep 1945
Cpt Eugene H. Edison, 16 Nov 1945-probably 28 Feb 1946
LTC David W. Roderick, Jul 1964-Dec 1965
Not manned, Jan-c. 12 Jul 1966
LTC Russel R. Uhlmann, c. 12 Jul 1966
LTC Herman E. Luebbert, 26 Aug 1966
LTC Clyde C. Angley, 10 Apr 1967
LTC Jack B. Shattuck, 10 Mar 1969
LTC Marc S. Barthello Jr., by Apr 1970
LTC Robert E. Hubeli, 15 Jan 1972
LTC Charles E. McMillan, 12 Jan 1973
LTC William O. Schism, 11 Feb-30 Apr 1974
LTC Michael L. Smith, 1 Apr 1992
LTC Michael J. Lierley, 16 Aug 1992
LTC John G. Grones, 2 Apr 1995
LTC William R. Fingar
Lt Col Ricky E. Carter, 9 Nov 1997
Lt Col Theodore L. Truex, 11 Jul 1999
Lt Col Michael D. Kim, 4 Aug 2001

HONORS
Service Streamers
World War II
European-African-Middle Eastern Theater

Campaign Streamers
World War II
India-Burma
China Defensive
Central Burma with two Arrowheads
China Offensive

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers
None
Decorations
Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards
[1 Jul 1964]-Jun 1965
15 Apr 1970-15 Apr 1971
1 Jul 1993-30 Jun 1995
1 Jul 1995-30 Jun 1997
1 Jul 1998-30 Jun 2000
1 Sep 1998-31 Aug 2000
11 Sep 2001-10 Sep 2003
1 Aug 2005-31 Jul 2007

EMBLEM

On a disc Azure, on a pile throughout Celeste, a bend Argent charged with three bendlets Gules, surmounted by an oval, axis per pale White, bearing a compass rose Or, between two parachutes deployed chevronwise reversed of the third, all within a diminished bordure Yellow.

Attached below the disc, a Blue scroll edged with a narrow Yellow border inscribed "317TH AIRLIFT SQ" in Yellow letters.

Symbolism

Ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The pile shape is symbolic of the support provided by the Squadron to its parent command. Capability in counterinsurgency operations throughout the world is represented by the parachutes. The compass rose suggests a flare, and the red bendlets allude to a tracer stream and, together, imply air commando functions.


EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS
Airlifted cargo and mail for Eighth Air Force within the United Kingdom, 1943-1944. Between Nov 1944 and Aug 1945, airlifted troops and cargo in India and Burma, 11 Nov 1944-c. Aug 1945, including assault landings in Burma in Feb and Apr 1945. Provided aerial transportation

Unit Size: 79 Officers, 54 Enlisted

The mission of the 317th Airlift Squadron is to recruit, train and support combat ready aircrews in order to meet global taskings.

The squadron's major responsibilities are to maintain combat-ready aircrews in support of ever-changing global taskings such as contingencies, humanitarian relief, presidential support and exercises.

2007 was a productive and exciting year for the 317 AS. The squadron welcomed its new commander, Lt. Col. Russell Fingar on June 22nd. Support for Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom and the Global War on Terror continued to be of top priority. Squadron personnel made significant personal sacrifices to fulfill Air Mobility Command's worldwide contingency needs. Countless combat missions were flown safely into Iraq and Afghanistan and other points across the globe supporting the war effort.

The squadron flew numerous high-profile and specialty missions including numerous DV and aeromedical evacuation missions. Among the dignitaries transported were The Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, General Peter Pace, and USCENTCOM Commander Admiral Fallon.

The squadron participated in multiple operations and exercises, including Olympic Titan, New Horizons, and Fundamental Justice. The New Horizons exercise was a Joint Chiefs of Staff-directed exercise to deliver humanitarian and civic aid to the people of Nicaragua through exercise-related construction projects. It also provided basic medical attention for the local population. One C-17 record was broken this year. It involved carrying two special warfare boats with trucks from Navy North Island, California to San Juan International Airport, Puerto Rico. This was the first loading of two boats at one time. By the year's end, the squadron had airlifted 21 million pounds of cargo, transporting over 11,000 passengers and logged nearly 5,000 flight hours. The 317 AS also took on the role of training initial C-17 aircrews from Dover AFB, Del. and will prepare these aircrews for worldwide missions.

317th TROOP CARRIER SQUADRON

Operations of the 317th Troop Carrier Squadron during the eight-month period from 1 November 1944 to 30 June 1945 were covered in a mimeographed booklet issued at the end of that period by Capt. John R. Ferraro, intelligence officer of the squadron. The following information about the unit has been taken from that report, and therefore does not include activities of the squadron after June 1945.

In eight months of operations overseas, from November through June 1945, the 317th Troop Carrier Squadron accomplished every type of tactical transport operation possible.
Horses, mules and Chinese troops were flown over the Hump. Supply drops were made over difficult terrain, and wounded evacuated. Two Indian infantry brigades were air-landed at Thabut-kon and Meiktila airstrips in Burma. Gliders of the squadron were in action at Lewe, Burma, and paratroopers were dropped on Rangoon.

The squadron thus materially aided in driving the Japs from Burma, and in preserving China from further Jap contact.

I. Battle of the Chindwin Valley - November 1944.

The 317th entered the Burma theater at a time when the British were just beginning to push the Japs down the Chindwin Valley. British infantry units were attacking over rough and dangerous terrain with poor lines of communication. With only a few forward airfields available in the North Chindwin Valley, a great amount of the supplies had to be dropped to these troops. These drops together with air landings at forward airfields, and the evacuation of many wounded greatly aided the ground troops in turning the tide of the campaign.

The squadron was awarded a battle star in its campaign ribbon for this mission.

II. Battle of China - December 1944 and January 1945.

During December the 317th was concerned with the supply of troops, animals and equipment to China. At this time the Japanese had captured Kweilin and were advancing rapidly toward Kweyang, the capture of which would have put them in an excellent position for simultaneous drives on Kunming and Chungking. The lifeline to China was being seriously threatened. Kunming and Chungking were terminal points for the Burma Road and Hump flights, so capture of these cities would have materially cut down supplies for China. It was decided to meet this threat, and it was proposed to move to China, as soon as possible, a complete Chinese division and all of its equipment. Several transport squadrons operating in Burma were diverted for this mission. The 317th was one of them, and all of December was spent in transporting Chinese troops, horses, mules and equipment to China over the Hump. The threat to China's lifeline was met and the Japanese were pushed back.

The squadron during December also flew supplies to forward strips south of Myitkyina in support of ground troops.

Commendations were received from Major General George E. Stratemeyer, Commanding Army Air Forces, India Burma Theater, and Major General Howard C. Davidson, Commanding 10th Air Force.

On January 6, 1945, the 317th completed its China mission. During the remainder of the month the squadron transported supplies to Myitkyina, Burma, and together with the glider section trained British glider pilots at Bikram, India.

III. Battle of Central Burma - February 1945.
The battle for Central Burma was in full progress, and the enemy intended to hold the Irrawaddy River at all costs. If this natural defense barrier was crossed the Japanese knew they could not stem the advance of the British, as the terrain is flat and dry and suitable for armored thrusts. They fought bitterly in the Mandalay area to the north and west of Mandalay to hold the Irrawaddy line. British and Indian troops advanced steadily toward Mandalay and threatened to push across the river. Other allied units in strength advanced on the west bank of the Irrawaddy toward Myitche. The 317th flew supplies daily to these troops at such forward airfields as Sinthe, Allagappa, Onbauk, Myitche, Sadaung and Mandalay North.

The squadron also participated in the mission "Multivite." In this mission the Meiktila airfields were the objective. Squadron gliders, loaded with engineering equipment, were ready at Sinthe for the mission. The British made a surprise and spectacular dash across the Irrawaddy and seized Thabutkon airstrip. The field appeared serviceable, so the glider mission was cancelled. One 317th glider piloted by Capt. Watson Smith did land at Thabutkon to check on the strip. A 317th transport landed shortly thereafter, and it was the first powered aircraft to land. In the next few days the unit airlanded an Indian infantry brigade at Thabutkon. These men were flown from Palel, India, in record time. The Japanese offered some resistance while planes were landing and taking off. However, the mission was successfully accomplished.

IV. Battle of Central Burma - March 1945.

During March the squadron continued to aid front line troops pushing their way toward Mandalay and Meiktila. Ammunition, guns, rations, clothing and gasoline were flown in daily to such forward airfields as Singu, Ondaw, Ywabo, Nyangu, Mandalay North, Tada-u, Chaunggwa and Meiktila.

The 17th Division succeeded at the outset of March to capture Meiktila Main airfield and the Thabutkon airstrip was abandoned. This sealed the doom of the escaping Japs from the Mandalay area, for their only escape route was cut. However, the retreating Japs regrouped north of Meiktila and attacked the town and airfield from the north. Simultaneously, Jap reinforcements were rushed from Rangoon, and these units attacked Meiktila from the south. Meiktila was surrounded by Japs. At night they infiltrated British lines and captured the main Meiktila airfield. This was the ground situation when it was decided to fly into Meiktila immediately another Indian infantry brigade and ammunition to hold the airfield and town. Loss of Meiktila might possibly have stopped the British drive to reach Rangoon before the monsoons.

The air landings were severely contested by the Japanese. Despite the enemy resistance, the brigade was landed intact and the airfield was held. It served as an excellent base for the subsequent drive to Rangoon.

The squadron received commendations for the February and March operations from Major General Cowan of the 17th Indian Division, Brigadier General F. W. Evans, Commanding Combat Cargo Task Force, General Messervy, General Slim, Commanding General of the
14th Army and General Stratemeyer. The squadron received a battle star for the operation.

V. Battle of Central Burma - April 1945.

The 317th Troop Carrier Squadron continued to supply the 33d, 4th and 15th Corps at forward airfields such as Myotha, Myitche, Dwehla, Ondaw, Taungtha and Ramree. Large quantities of gasoline were ferried to Meiktila from Palel. Squadron gliders were towed from Palel to Meiktila, where they were committed for action at one of the Pyinmana airfields.

In the first few weeks of April, the British broke out of Meiktila and began a sensational drive south, quickly taking the Pyinmana airfields. On April 21, eight 317th gliders were towed to Lewe airfield loaded with engineering equipment. This equipment was unloaded and put to work immediately in leveling the field. On April 22, eight Jap "Oscars" attacked Lewe airfield and destroyed five of the squadron gliders.

From April 15 until the end of the month the transport section of the squadron was brought back to Kalai-kunda for formation flying day and night. Then for two weeks the squadron flew numerous hours of formation and made a practice paratroop drop in preparation for the Rangoon paratroop mission.

VI. Battle of Southern Burma - May 1945.

In the opening days of May the British column, which had broken out of Meiktila in April, was closing in on Pegu, about 50 miles north of Rangoon. In less than a month they had covered 300 miles. With Rangoon being threatened from the north it was decided to seal the doom of the Rangoon defenders by attacking Rangoon from the south in an air and seaborne invasion. To insure the success of this invasion it was necessary to clean out Jap gun positions in the mouth of the Rangoon River at the entrance to Rangoon harbor. Gurkha and Indian paratroopers were selected for this and on May 1 the 317th dropped numerous Gurkha paratroopers and hundreds of thousands of pounds of equipment at Elephant Point. The Gurkhas immediately destroyed Japanese gun positions there. The next day the giant invasion armada steamed into Rangoon, and Rangoon was occupied shortly thereafter.

This was the first paratroop drop in Asia and it was described as an excellent drop. Only five out of a thousand Gurkha and Indian paratroopers were injured, and these only slightly.

The remainder of the month was spent supplying the 14th Army troops driving south toward Rangoon with rations, petrol and ordnance at Payagyi and Myingyan airfields.

For the Rangoon mission the squadron was commended by the following: Major General E. E. Down, C.B.E., of the 44th Indian Airborne Division, Lt. General Sir Oliver Leese, Commander in Chief of the Allied Land Forces in Southeast Asia, General Stratemeyer, Lt. General Messervy, 4th Corps, and General Evans.

VII. Supplying the North Burma and the Battle of the Shan States-June 1945.
In June, the squadron was concerned with flying fresh meats, pipeline, gasoline and ordnance to Myitkyina, Lashio and Bhamo airfields. During the month a great amount of supplies were dropped in the North Burma area to isolated Burmese villages and outposts. South of Lashio the squadron dropped a great deal of supplies to troops pushing the Japs out of the Shan States. All operations in June were made despite inclement weather; the monsoon rains were always a threat to the safe return of a plane. Despite the weather, more hours were flown in June than in any other previous month overseas.

On November 10, 1944 the air echelon of the 317th Troop Carrier Squadron, Commando, arrived in India and was immediately committed to combat, dropping supplies in the Chindwin Valley, and ferrying urgently needed Chinese Troops from Nan Sin to Kunming and Chan Yi and later transporting critical airfield and road materials to Myitkyina. The Squadron sustained its only serious casualties of the campaign during this period, losing 4 ships and 3 crews.

The 317th Troop Carrier Squadron got the jump on the rest of the 2nd Air Commando Group as far as early entrance into combat is concerned. The air echelon arrived in the theater on 10 November 1944 and was immediately assigned to dropping supplies in the Chindwin Valley and to the vital mission of ferrying Chinese Troops from Nan Sin to Kunming and Chen-Yi. Completing this mission, the C-47's were switched to the task of flying asphalt to Myitkyina for the Ledo-Burma road.

On 4 February 1945 the Troop Carrier Pilots, led by Major Richard Edwards, began the airlift of the two Fighter Squadrons and the 327th Airdrome Squadron to Cox's Bazar and immediately thereafter went to work transporting troops and equipment for the 14th Army in its preparations for the drive against Meiktila. The Glider section was employed to bring heavy engineer equipment from Northern Burma down to Sinthe. It was anticipated that a bridge would have to be built across the Irrawaddy and an airfield constructed near Meiktila. Neither of these steps were necessary and only one glider, piloted by Captain Watson A. Sudduth was employed to bring runway control equipment into Thabutkon Air Strip on 26 February 1945. From 27 February to 2 March 1945 the 317th Troop Carrier provided airlift for the 99th Brigade into Meiktila where they reinforced the 17th Division. This was an extremely hazardous and exhausting task, many pilots making as many as three round trips daily from Palel to Meiktila. They were constantly endangered by Japanese artillery fire from the hills around Meiktila, and it is remarkable that the entire lift was accomplished without injury to personnel of the Squadron. For weeks afterward the 317th continued its sorties into the Meiktila area flying precious supplies to the 17th Division. Between the 15th and 18th of March the 9th Brigade was flown to Meiktila as additional reinforcement for the IV Corps.

On 12 April 1945 the Troop Carrier planes returned to Kalaikunda, the Group rear base, to prepare for an ambitious paratroop drop in the Rangoon area. The 23rd Battalion Group of the 50th Parachute Brigade, 15th Corps also came to Kalaikunda where joint maneuvers were conducted for a week. On April 29th the C-47's flew with the Paratroops to Akyab and on May 1, one day before an amphibious task force was to strike Rangoon, the 317th, operating with the 1st Air Commando Group, executed a perfect drop on Elephant joint which was reportedly occupied by the Japanese defenses of the Rangoon River estuary. Again supplementary supply missions were flown, and then on May 4th the Squadron went to Comilla where under the
Combat Cargo Task Force they continued the vital activity of air supply. During the months from December to June, the 16 planes of the 317th Squadron amassed an amazing total of hours flown, and cargo and passengers carried.

Without the Troop Carrier planes the Group could not have operated successfully since in addition to combat missions the 47s were in constant use hauling supplies for the Fighter and Liaison Squadrons and materials for the maintenance of the Group’s several bases.

Naturally with such concentrated and extended activity the pilots of the Squadron led by Major Richard Edwards piled up massive totals of individual combat hours and distinguished themselves by bravery and gallantry in action.

The Group took sober pride in the record of the 317th, remembering the unfortunate loss of four crews during the first missions from Myitkyina. Within 20 days 9 men were killed or missing in action, including Major Wirt E. Thompson, Commanding Officer of the Squadron. The fatal hazard was the malevolent weather of the Hump route to China.


On 5 December 1944, C-47 #698 crashed into the mountains at Kuging District, China. 27 killed. 1st Lt. WILLIAM CLEGGi Pilot. Killed. 2nd Lt. GEORGE BOLTON, Co-pilot. Killed. T/Sgt. JOSEPH WINDISHMAN. Killed. S/Sgt. EMMET MARRS. Killed. Passengers were Chinese soldiers.

Also on 5 December 1944, C-47 #821 was missing on flight from Myitkyina to China. Aircraft never found. 29 missing.

317th Troop Carrier Squadron commander Maj Richard Edwards

The Second Air Commando Group was activated April 22, 1944 by special orders issued by Air Force General H.H. "Hap" Arnold. Colonel Arthur R. DeBolt was Appointed Commanding Officer. Colonel DeBolt was given unlimited choice to select and obtain personnel and equipment to formulate his group. First he had to establish a Group Headquarters Staff.

Needed were two fighter squadrons to fly P-51. Each of these squadrons had an attached Airdrome Squadron to do "heavy" aircraft maintenance, construct living and eating facilities, establish a motor pool, and guard duty, construct air strips, and any other assignment needed to assist the fighting squadrons in the air.

A troop carrier squadron, flying C-47 aircraft, was needed. A glider contingent was added. This squadron also had an Airdrome Squadron assigned for its needs.
Three squadrons of liaison aircraft flying L-5s had in he assembled. These squadrons had one Airdrome Squadron to service their needs.

The C-47 pilots and crews of the 317th Troop Carrier Squadron flew their airplanes from the United States to South America, across the Atlantic and Africa, then across the Near East to India. This group arrived so far in advance of the boat people that they were sent into combat operations before the rest of their squadron arrived in India. All squadrons arrived without equipment, supplies, and planes except the 317th Troop Carrier Squadron. They flew their planes over from the States, arrived a month before the rest of us, were committed to help the British-Indian units in combat in the Chindwin Valley Campaign, and transported a Chinese division and animals from Myitkyina to China over "the Hump". Most of the ground personnel for the 317th came on the boat. They too had to set up operations at Kalikunda in January.

As the month progressed, equipment and supplies arrived gradually. Airplanes were ferried in, serviced, checked out, and flown. By the first week of February, combat operations were near, and the massive airlift to Cox's Bazaar for the operation of the fighter squadrons began. The 155th Liaison Squadron moved to Central Burma, the 127th to Akyab, the 317th Troop Carrier to Palel, and later the 156th Liaison to Central Burma - all moves were efficiently carried out while the four airdrome squadrons were taken where they were needed. A concept of the work and planning involved in this short time is obtained when one considers that the Second Air Commando Group arrived in Kalaikunda, India, on December 14, 1944 and the fighter squadrons flew their first combat mission out of Cox's Bazaar February 16, 1945. From this time until the Group disbanded, elements were distributed all over parts of China, Burma, and India - a true representative of the CBI.

While fighters were striking in one direction, the 317th Troop Carrier Squadron (Commando), under Mai. Richard Edwards of Carson City, Nevada, was doing the heavy and dangerous aerial trucking of the campaign. Three round trips a day, each over 600 miles, were commonplace. In Feb., March and April alone, the hard working pilots of the 317th carried over 8,000 troops and 8,500,000 lbs of cargo, frequently over enemy territory. At the end of April the glider pilots of the squadron saw action at Lewe and Toungoo air fields, to which they transported bulldozers, scrapers, and other heavy construction equipment. The engineers had to work fast to put the fields into service for the C-47 planes to follow. At Lewe four gliders were destroyed during a Japanese sneak attack, but the precious engineering equipment was saved, and no lives were lost.

On May 1st the 2nd Air Commandos helped to strike the blow that rang down the curtain on the Central Burma Campaign. The 317th Troop Carrier Squadron, cooperating with the 1st Air Commando Group and planes of the Combat Cargo Task Force, flew an Indian Parachute Battalion through heavy weather to the mouth of the Rangoon River. The Paratroopers were dropped without losing a single man or plane and the rugged Indian soldiers quickly overran the river defenses, and cleared the sea approaches to Rangoon.

317TH TROOP CARRIER SQUADRON COMMANDO
Dale Brook - C-47 Pilot
This account of the history of the 317th Troop Carrier Squadron Commando is a supplement to that prepared by John Ferraro and a committee for WWII AIR COMMANDOS. It was prepared by Dale Brook, a C-47 pilot.

Formed as the 309th Troop Carrier Squadron, 443rd Troop Carrier Group in Alliance, Nebraska, January 1944. Training, initially, was limited to learning how to tow the CG-4A gliders and formation flying. Weather was the limiting factor. On or about 30 March 1944, the unit moved to Camp Mackall, North Carolina, where intensive training in dropping paratroopers, formation flying, and towing gliders began. All of the training was done at low levels day and night. Bivouacking and unannounced night maneuvers with elements of the 82nd and 101st Airborne units were included. On 3 April, 1944, a mass deployment of those units for a demonstration paradrop on Long Island was made. During April mock invasions, conducted jointly with units from Fort Bragg, culminated with a massive paradrop at Fort Bragg.

Major Arthur Kaufman was the first Commanding Officer, but was replaced in late April or early May by Major Wirt Thompson. On 10 May 1944, the unit was redesignated as the 317th Troop Carrier Squadron, Second Air Commando Group.

The technique of glider "Snatching" was introduced about this time as a retrieval system. On one night glider mission there was a premature release and a glider landed in a peanut patch. The next morning it was retrieved by the Snatch method and the glider plot brought about half the peanut crop back with him on the nose skids.

In early June the 317th TCS was deployed to Dunnellon, Florida, for training in Commando tactics and survival training with all the other elements of the Second Air Commando Group. All the gliders were towed to Alachua Field, Gainesville, Florida. Glider pilots were given training in night "Blitz" type landings. This technique involved the locating of a drop zone with a pre-positioned "Rebecca" set, supposedly set up by an agent. The fields were lit only by two flare pots to indicate the landing direction. You could not tell the wind direction. The first flare pot was used to land on or near, the second to keep alignment of the field to park the gliders. Under totally blacked out conditions the glider pilots positioned themselves behind the towing aircraft by the exhaust flame from the engine. When they cut loose from the tow craft, the pattern was maintained solely on the flare pots.

About the third week in September the squadron was recalled to Camp Mackall for a massive maneuver and final training of the 82nd and 101st Airborne units prior to their deployment overseas. A number of daytime drops were made. On the night of 26 September a massive night drop was made under totally blacked-out conditions - no navigational or formation lights. Trouble developed when some planes could not maintain position because of the darkness. One unidentified element arrived over the drop zone at the same time as the lead element of the 317th TCS from a slightly different angle. Paratroopers from that element got entangled on the number three aircraft of this first Vee, causing it to crash with no survivors. Lt. Wayland Rose and Sgt. Victor Graves and unknown crew members died in this crash.

On 29 September, 1944 the 317th TCS departed to Baer Field, Indiana, to pick up new aircraft for the deployment overseas. The new planes were equipped with long range tanks. At Morrison
Field all tanks were purged as a precautionary measure and refueled with filtered gas. All of the pilots found the new aircraft a dream to fly. The planes had excellent landing characteristics.

The first leg of the overseas journey was to Borenquin Field, Puerto Rico, 10 October 1944. Unlike Florida, there were no restrictions on tobacco items or rum. Many crew members took advantage of this. The squadron progressed on schedule and generally in formation to Trinidad and then to Georgetown, Guiana. Out of Georgetown a "Rake" type search pattern for downed aircraft had to be flown, purportedly for B-17s and most notably, Tom Harmon's. In flying the "Rake" pattern out of Georgetown, some aircraft flew an easterly heading before turning south to a landfall on the Amazon River, then to Belem, Brazil. Others flew southerly headings, while others had to fly westerly headings, turn south to the Amazon and back east to Belem. Those flying the southerly and westerly headings flew over dense tropical rain forests, all swamplands. Unless search aircraft were directly overhead, downed aircraft would be impossible to find.

The last over-land flight in the Americas was from Belem to Natal. Here aircraft were dispatched individually over the Atlantic to Ascension Island. Departure was midnight, 15 October 1944. From this point, because of many factors, the aircraft began to spread out. At no time was the last plane more than four days behind.

Navigators placed aboard at Morrison Field to augment the four squadron navigators were put to work doing celestial and solar navigation. Ascension Island was supposed to transmit a homing beacon at specified times to home in on by radio compass. Many aircraft were not able to pick up this signal until very close in. At approximately one and a half to two hours before ETA, aircraft would let down below the overcast to perform a landfall. All of the squadron aircraft seemed to hit Ascension dead ahead.

For many the next stage to Accra was the first stage of cultural shock. The heat, humidity, body odors and fetid odors of all descriptions from the environment had to be physically overcome. The next leg was to Maiduguri, Nigeria. To beat the heat of the Sahara all crews were up early and off to El Fashir. On this portion of the route the lower region of Lake Chad was traversed. Truly there is nothing more desolate or forlorn. Again everyone was off to an early start. A few miles from the Nile Delta signs of humanity began to show. By the time the Nile was reached it was a lush green belt as far to the north and south as one could see. At Khartoum crews were quartered in the dormitories of the Khartoum University.

The next leg from Khartoum to Aden Protectorate passed over the Eritian Mountains near Asmara, Il Duce's favorite haunt, then down part of the Dead Sea to Aden. Aden was pretty much a bustling seaport town, metropolitan in nature, and some of the crews got a chance to see it. Masirah, elevation two feet, was a British air base.

At Karachi Major Thompson was located and the long range tanks were removed. On 26 October Major Thompson and Captain Edwards departed for Dum Dum Airport, near Calcutta, via a refueling stop at Agra. Arriving late in the afternoon they were diverted to Barrackpore. The next morning both attended briefings at the Bengal Air Depot and departed for Sylhet, near the Shillong Hills on 27 October. Quarters at Sylhet were bamboo shacks called "Bashas". Beetles...
chewed into the rafters like termites leaving everything covered with a fine dust called "Lac". The smell of mildew got into everything.

The 342nd Airdrome and orderly room personnel traveled to India by way of boat and infamous rail to Kalaikunda. During their absence, their functions were doled out to various flying personnel. First Lt. Joseph Billings became the Intelligence and Weather Briefing Officer.

On 12 November the unit moved to Tulihall in the Imphal Valley. The first drop was on the Chindwin River below Kohima where the British had made a successful break out. During the next week, many drops were made progressively along the Chindwin down to Homalia, Thaungdut, Sittang, Kalewa, Tiddim and Fort White.

On the second day here one plane had a chute open inside. As the load fell out, the chute hung up on the cargo door. This caused severe buffeting and slowed the ship down. Lt. Wayne Bishop reached out to cut the shroud lines and free the load. He fell, or was pulled out of the plane, but held on to the shroud line and continued slashing at them until the load fell free. Crew members pulled him back inside.

Accommodations at Tulihal were meager. All slept on litters under the wings of the aircraft. On nights that were cold and foggy the crews moved into the planes. Several crew members came down with dengue fever caused from flea bites. The unit moved back to Sylhet the last week of November.

On 4 December the unit moved to Myitkyina. It's first mission was to move troops of the Chinese 4th Army back to China. Major Wirt Thompson led the formation and Lt. William Clegg flew on his right wing. Lt. Howard Bennett, leader of the second element, saw as soon as he was airborne that a heavy cloud cover was over the first ridge east of Myitkyina. He also noticed that Major Thompson made only one turn over the field for Lt. Clegg to form up before heading directly out enroute. The minimum safe altitude on "Dog" route was 14,000 feet. Lt. Bennett made several turns over the field until he reached approximately 10,000 feet and then headed out. All other planes followed his pattern. Weather was encountered over the first ridge and lasted to Yunnanyi where planes broke out over a cloud deck. There was a large hole over the lake south of Kunming. All aircraft in the area were making their descent through this.

Lt. Bennett was the first to land at Kunming. After all landed, Captain Gus Edwards, Operations Officer, gathered us together and asked if anyone had seen Major Thompson or Lt. Clegg en route. All replies were negative. Captain Edwards then ordered us to return to Myitkyina. When we returned, it was confirmed that Major Thompson, Lt. Clegg, and their crews were listed as Mission in Action. Soon after, Captain Richard (Gus) Edwards was promoted to Major and designated Commanding Officer. Captain Robert Tyrell became Operations Officer.

When we moved to Myitkyina, our ground support elements joined us from Kalaikunda. At last tents and a mess hall were provided.

After making four or five trips over the "Hump", our mission changed to also include hauling horses out of Sahmaw to Chanyi. On the second day of this mission weather over Chanyi forced
instrument let-downs. Lt. Reusche, while in a procedure turn, lost his artificial horizon and went down on his back with a load of horses. Recovery was made on needle and ball, and he went to Kunming to land. Upon return to Myitkyina it was found that mud dobbers had built a nest over the filter of the gyro.

At the time horses were being hauled to China the route changed from "Dog" to "Easy". This was a dog leg bend from Myitkyina to Paoshan, then to Kunming. The minimum safe altitude on this route was 11,000 feet. With a load of horses and no Turbos in the "A" model C-47s, this was a welcome relief.

The day after Christmas on a return trip from Chanyi, a crew spotted wreckage of two planes at about 11,500 foot level on a ridge east of Myitkyina near the village of Sadon. They circled as low as possible and identified tail numbers. The wreckage was reported to Lt. John Ferraro, Intelligence Officer. The serial numbers turned in were those of Thompson and Clegg. The unit moved back to Kalaikunda the last week of December.

On 2 January, 1945 three ships were delegated to tow gliders for the British at Bikram. In the heat and humidity of the plains during the day, it was a tiresome and grueling task for the crews. Twelve tows were made the first day, six the second day, sixteen the third, and twelve each on the fifth and sixth days. It was back to baked beans on toast and tea for breakfast at the British mess.

The rest of January was spent mainly getting the fighter units set up for their move to Cox's Bazaar. This meant many trips to the supply depots daily. Some of our aircraft were also detailed to support the British in their move down the Irrawaddy. An air landing was made at Bhamo. All aircraft were immediately under small arms fire from the retreating Japanese. None were hit. The next day an air drop was made in the small valley of Mu-Se, a prelude to the taking of Mandalay and Lashio. This marked the end of our air drops here. All future troop support missions were in the central valley on hastily prepared strips from the rice paddies.

Through February, flying time was divided between support for the fighter squadrons and the British 14th and 4th Army units. Our unit moved to Palel on March 5 as the British moved down below Mandalay. Diversions of returning flights were frequently made to haul prisoners or wounded to Comilla, Momywa, or Ondow. Supporting the British Army units on short airstrips of 1,000 to 1,200 feet which were hacked out of rice paddies was a challenge. Landing twelve to sixteen C-47s into these short strips while British lorries were scurrying about unloading planes became frenetic.

Tragedy struck after arriving at Palel. Captain John Gilmore and 1st Lt. George Blanchard lost power on take-off. Heavily loaded, the plane crashed into a rice paddy dike off the end of the runway. Captain Gilmore died instantly. Lt. Blanchard's feet and legs were horribly mangled. The aircraft broke in two and threw the rest of the crew out. All were immediately flown to Calcutta for treatment.

By March 15th the British were driving to capture the Thabutkon airstrips. A glider piloted by Watson Sudduth was flown into Meiktila the day after capture to evaluate the feasibility of air
landings. Usually the Japanese would take the strip at night, but by 10:00 A.M. the British would re-take it. The entire squadron was ordered into Meiktila, but before the last plane left Palel, it was learned the British had not taken the field back that morning. The last plane in the air had to relay this information to the squadron leader that all ships were to proceed to an alternate field at Nyangu. The first planes made it to Nyangu as directed, but found the Japanese moving in on this field also. They had to scramble back into the air under heavy ground fire. This caused confusion as the planes scrambling out were meeting planes coming in. From explosions around the strip, the planes in the air got the message and orbited until all were back in the air. Major Edwards then gave the word to proceed to Meiktila, At Meiktila the strip was under heavy artillery fire. Plane #744, flown, by Lt. Roy Burger, received a hit directly in the cargo door area, broke in half, and caught fire. The crew evacuated through the escape hatch in the pilots compartment. The engines were running at the time. It was a good twenty foot drop to the ground. Lt. Arthur Steddom received a fractured ankle from the leap. All other ships made it into the field and discharged their loads. Some ships received small arms fire in the fuselage, luckily not in the wings. The second day was much the same. On the third day as more troops were hauled in, cargo doors were put on to prevent Indian troops from leaping out enroute. A second plane was hit and heavily damaged on take-off on this day but made it back to Palel. A crew member on that flight went berserk and had to be evacuated to Calcutta in a straight jacket.

About this time a glider mission into Lewe was made carrying engineers' equipment. Once on the ground the pilots had to dig in as the field was strafed by Zeros. Five gliders burned. The personnel were evacuated safely the following day.

From the 19th to the 31st of March military activity seesawed across the valley. Monywa, Tadua, Myitche, Sadaung and Ygzago were scenes of activity. Two trips a day were the rule, occasionally three, to five landings a day were normal. Dr. Gordon Seagraves, the famous Burma surgeon, was picked up and taken to Ledo or to Comilla on two occasions. The first few days of April saw the British move into Dwehla, Ondaw and Nanjing. The only relief crews got during this time was to fly the "M & M" (Meat & Mail) runs. The flight would leave Palel, fly to Cox's Bazaar and Palel. On days meat was available the route was extended to include a run to the depot at Tezagon.

Through May and early June the squadron flew support missions and moved troops for the British Army units in their move toward Rangoon and then moved back to Kalaikunda.

On 13 June, 1945 the squadron moved to Ledo to be nearer the depots and RTOs supporting the invasion of lower Burma. The monsoon season was in full force. Navigation became a real problem.

The former British air base was used for air evacuation of wounded personnel. The double walled tents were still there, but had to be pulled up and restaked. Several warehouse bashas were available for storage of equipment. Two of these were demolished one day when one of the replacement pilots made a low approach, hit the top of one and went through the second on landing.
Four aircraft and all the squadron navigators were placed on detail with "Operation Salad" in Rangoon. The missions were flown at midnight to avoid Japanese intervention in Indo-China. Supplies to OSS and British agents were airdropped in mountain valleys which were difficult to find.

With older crew members rotating to the States and loss of personnel on details and transfers, the squadron seemed to slowly disintegrate. One crew was detailed to fly the Repatriation Team to release Allied prisoners of war in Bangkok on the 26th of August. Shortly thereafter the Japanese surrendered and the squadron moved to China.

The activities of the 317th Troop Carrier Squadron in China after the Armistice are well detailed in the first WWII AIR COMMANDOS book, the last base of operations was in Xian, China. When its mission was completed, it left Xian November 4, 1945 for Kunming, left its airplanes there for the Thai Air Force, and returned to Kalaikunda, India, for shipment home.

The 317th was the first squadron of the Second Air Commando Group to begin operations in the CBI and the last to leave. Its record was enviable. Recommendations and commendations from military commands attest to this.

The officers and enlisted men in the 317th Troop Carrier Squadron Commando who gave their lives in the China-Burma-India Theater are listed at the end of the Volume I account.

The 317th Troop Carrier Squadron was originally the 309th Troop Carrier Squadron, 443rd Troop Carrier Group. This squadron was trained in glider towing. It was located at Camp Mackall, North Carolina. The glider component had yet to be added.

Ben Bland was one of three hundred glider pilots stationed at Lubbock, Texas. Six from this number were ordered to Camp Mackall. The first three glider pilots to report were First Lt. Watson Sudduth, First Lt. Morris Alleyne, and F/O Ben Bland. Others soon joined them, glider pilots and mechanics, to form the 317th Glider Component. ON May 10. 1944 this assembled group of specialists was officially designated the 317th Troop Carrier Squadron Commando. The tow pilots were referred to as POWER PILOTS by the glider personnel.

Extensive glider training started immediately. The Glider Snatching Retrieval System was introduced at this time by which a glider on the ground could be "snatched" by a low flying C-47. The tow plane had a drum and braking system within the plane, similar to a fishing reel, to which the tow rope was attached. The glider tow rope was stretched between two poles. The plane's tow rope engaged this in a very low pass over and between the poles. This method had been used successfully in Burma on occasion by the First Air Commando Group.

Early in June the squadron moved to Dunnellon AAF Base, Florida. The gliders were towed to Alachua AAF at Gainesville, Florida. Here the glider pilots were given training in "Blitz" type landings. The technique was designed for glider landings in enemy territory when an agent had prepositioned a Rebecca Set to indicate the landing location. The selected field was lit only by two flare pots to determine the landing direction. This type of training was done at night and was difficult.
Glider maneuvers were held at Alachua AAF Base. Paratroopers were dropped from C-47s. The squadron was ready when orders were received to deploy overseas. The C-47s were flown to India with their air crews. All other 317th personnel including the glider contingent sailed on the U.S.S. General John Pope with the rest of the Second Air Commando Group on November 8, 1944 from Los Angeles - destination India and the CBI.

Several months before the Second Air Commando Group sailed for India, the opportunity to complete its Air Commando Mission was doomed. The only British advocate of this type of operation was Brigadier General Orde Wingate whose Chindits worked with Col. Phil Cochran and Col. John Alison of the First Air Commando Group. On March 24, 1944 General Wingate was killed in an airplane crash. No other British advocate came forth for this type of warfare. The Second Air Commando Group was acceptable in India and Burma only if its separate units (fighters, troop transport, and L-planes) would be assimilated into existing military organizations. With this development the need for the glider element of the 317th Troop Carrier Squadron virtually vanished. The gliders were in the pipeline. They eventually were delivered to Kalaikunda. Some were later towed to Palel for military purposes. All gliders left in Kalaikunda were totally destroyed in the tornado that hit the airfield March 13, 1945. They were not replaced.

When it became evident that the British-Indian 14th Army would have little need for gliders, 317th glider specialists were assigned different functions. F/O Lee Crothers was sent on detached service to Comilla with the Command Staff as engineering officer. The staff had six airplanes. F/O Wyman Holt was in charge of the water system at Kalaikunda. F/O Steven Kacen assumed responsibility for the military police. Another glider pilot became motor pool officer. Other glider pilots were assigned to different squadron functions such as Intelligence, Communications, and Engineering. At one time Lt. Tracy Cowan became Operations Officer at Chittagong. Glider pilots also flew the squadron's L-5s on various duties. Some glider pilots trained as co-pilots on C-47s, but these pilots were not rated.

There was a period of time when glider personnel trained British glider pilots on the operation of the CG-4A. All in all glider personnel were disbursed to areas where there was a need. Some glider mechanics became "kickers" on C-47s making paratroops to British-Indian troops. There was no over-all plan for the glider personnel. They were sent where and when they were needed. Combat opportunities for the 317th glider pilots were very limited. On March 15, 1944 the British were in the beginning stages of capturing an air field at Meiktila. A Glider flown by Lt. Watson Sudduth landed there to ascertain the feasibility of C-47s using this strip. It took the British a while to clear out the Japanese.

During the time between April and May 1945, the battle of southern Burma began with the objective of liberating Rangoon. It was necessary to secure airfields south of Meiktila to supply 15th Army troops on the march south. Many of the airfields were unserviceable. One such strip was at Lewe, Burma, located about one hundred fifty miles north of Rangoon.

Eight gliders from the 317th Troop Carrier Squadron were towed from Palel to Meiktila and were readied for action. In anticipation of the terrible conditions the airfield would be in, gliders
were loaded with a bulldozer, scrapers, other heavy equipment and gasoline. On April 21 these gliders were towed to Lewe, Burma. The equipment was unloaded and put to work immediately leveling the airfield. The C-47 planes of the 317th T.C.S. began arriving with supplies as soon as the field was serviceable. All gliders were unloaded except Ben Eland's which carried gasoline. On the 22nd of April Japanese airplanes attacked the field. Ben Eland's glider exploded in flames which spread to adjacent gliders. As a result of the strafing and fire, five gliders were totally destroyed. Fortunately there were no casualties. The glider pilots were returned to Chittagong in a C-47. The remaining CG-4As were left at Lewe.

Some of the glider pilots who flew gliders to Lewe were: Tracy Cowan, Julius "Red" Owen, Joe Revelli, Al Mott, Neill Scott, Ben Bland, George Balog, Jim Crisman, Frankie Campbell, and Paul Van Valkenberg. Dale Brock, a power pilot who had been checked out in a CG-4A, piloted a glider with a bulldozer.

317TH T.C.S. AND THE HUMP Dale Brook
In November, 1944 the 317th Troop Carrier Squadron supported British-Indian Army forces on their offensive in the Chindwin Valley. On December 4, 1944 the squadron was ordered to Myitkyina, Burma - the mission, to transport Chinese Army troops, horses, and mules from this sector of Burma over the Hump to China. Japanese forces in China were on the offensive. Unless this was stopped, Kunming and much territory would be lost, a crushing blow for the Chinese Armies.

The 317th flew to Myitkyina, a small town on the Irrawaddy River. The elevation was 4,476 feet. To the east were the mighty Salween and Mekong Rivers with their gorges. The tops of these gorges were called the ridges. The first ridge was 12,250 feet high. To the north of Myitkyina, the ridges became higher. To the south, their elevations decreased somewhat. Kunming's elevation was 6,220 feet.

Another obstacle to flying east was Mt. Tali, a 22,000 foot monolith with a sheer 10,000 foot face on its eastern side. Mt. Tali was east-northeast of Myitkyina and nearly half way to Kunming, a deadly trap in poor weather for planes not on course.

The C-47s flown by the 317th did not have blowers or turbo charges to generate additional power. This lack of power limited their altitudes to about 14,000 feet with a full load and gas tanks filled. Oxygen was available for crew members but not for passengers.

Hump flights made by Combat Cargo Command were made in C-46s or larger planes. These planes could fly at 18,000 feet or higher. The Assam-Bengal-China Chart shows that much of their flying was to the north of Myitkyina and most originated from air fields in the Brahmaputra Valley. With all 317th flights originating in the Irrawaddy Valley in the vicinity of Myitkyina, adaptations of Dog and Easy Routes were made. These required a minimum of 12,000 feet elevation as they veered to the south.

Winds were a factor that had to be reckoned with. The prevailing winds were from west to east. The British referred to these as Burans. Americans called them the jet stream. Wind velocities
approaching two hundred miles per hour occurred. The trip east on some days could be made quickly. The four hundred mile trip to Kunming in under two hours. The return trip could be hazardous and pilots often went farther south to avoid the jet stream. Up and down drafts occasionally were sudden and terrifying. Some pilots experienced drops and lifts of approximately, 7,000 feet. In this situation pilots could only fight to keep their planes level and pray. There was no other control of the aircraft. Experiences like these gave meaning to the expression "THE ALUMINUM TRAIL".

Another hazard to these missions was the practice of draining down the gas tanks of C-47s at their China destination. Only enough gas was left in the tanks to return to Myitkyina. On days when the jet stream was active and mighty headwinds buffeted planes, the fear of running out of gas before reaching Myitkyina was always there. A few planes ran out of gas upon landing.

At the beginning of the airlift Chinese troops were flown to Kunming. It was at this time that Major Wirt Thompson and Lt. Clegg crashed their planes east of Myitkyina near Sadon. Soon the planes were also hauling horses and mules from Sahman, an airfield in the Irrawaddy Valley to Changyi, northeast of Kunming. A round trip to Kunming usually took seven and one half to eight hours. Flying horses occupied the squadron for about seventeen days. Some planes flew out of Myitkyina until January 15. At the conclusion of this mission the squadron returned to Kalaikunda.

Many interesting tales exist about happenings on this assignment. Other flights over the Hump were made on special assignments, but as a squadron, the last big flight over the Hump was made after the war ended when it was ordered to China for special assignments.

TALES FROM THE 317TH TROOP CARRIER SQUADRON
Donavan N. Riffe
REFUELING ON HUMP FLIGHTS
When flying the Hump, the question of refueling came up. We didn't.. We filled up before we left Burma and when we got to China, they drained the "surplus" out of our tanks for the locals to use. At least twice they underestimated our needs, and we barely made it back. Once was when we spotted a B-24 on the ground in the valley between the third and forth ridges. I made a couple of passes and George Fraser shot some green flares and then we headed out. We ran out of gas upon landing and had to be towed on in. I expected to go back in an L-5, but Gen. Davidson wanted to see me about a major in Luliang and Burger got to go. He had a great adventure.

THE MAJOR IN LULIANG
On the "Jack Rabbit" operation, we were told that we did not need permission to land or take off. We only had to announce that we were Jack Rabbit 822 and say what we were going to do. On a day when the weather was worse than usual, we landed in Luliang to drop off our Chinese troops. The Operations Office, a Major, met the plane and told us they did not have any room for the Chinese and for me to take them to Chanyi. I said, "Major, you are a major and I am a First Lieutenant so I'm going to try to get them to Chanyi." We took off, but the ceiling became lower and lower the closer we got to Chanyi. We did a 180 and went back to Luliang. I landed, kicked the Chinese out of the plane, and took off for Myitkyina. I reported what had happened and Bob
Tyrell reported to 10th Air Force Headquarters. Gen. Davidson was there bright and early the next day, and after he talked to me, took off in his B-25 for Luliang. The next time I was in Luliang, that Major was so nice to me he almost saluted me. We never had any trouble after that. General Davidson was a very nice man, but he had a fine education in how to explain things in easily understood words.

MYITKYINA AND POINSETTIAS
It was about four hundred miles from Myitkyina to Kunming, normally a little over two and one-half hours flying time. Sometimes we would catch the "jet stream" and make it in a little over an hour. Coming back, we would have to figure out an altitude where the jet stream would not hold us back or we would not make any forward ground speed. We also, in instrument conditions, had to try to avoid the horrible down drafts and up drafts, if you got in one, and we all did, it was like riding the fastest express elevator in the world. The first time I got into one we suddenly started down, very, very fast. The rate of climb indicator would hit the peg. We went down four or five thousand feet. All we could do was sit there and try to keep her straight and level. I remember thinking, "We're dead". When we hit the up draft, it was just the reverse and we ended up at our original altitude. The high brass had declared, "There is no weather over the Hump." Many, many planes were lost, so many that the Hump route became known as the "aluminum trail".

At Myitkyina, we got our drinking water out of the Irrawaddy River. I remember getting a queasy feeling when I had just finished taking a drink of water and then seeing a dead Jap floating down the river.

We were doing most of the Hump flying in November and December, 1944, and around Christmas, poinsettia bushes six or eight feet high put on their red colors. They were in hedges or rows, and they were beautiful.

RESCUING A B-24 CREW
Roy T. Burger - 317th Troop Carrier Squadron
On a return trip from China, I flew as a copilot with Don Riffe and his crewmen Frank Snow and George Frasier. We were coming home late to our base at Myitkyina. The shadows of evening were starting to black out the beautiful long and narrow valleys that had 9,000 feet plus ridges. I was my turn to fly and I was doing a lot of looking. Those valleys always interested me. There had to be people down there and it would be interesting to know what kind of life they had.

It was a good thing I was looking down that night because I saw a flare in one of the valleys. T had my eyes focused on that spot, otherwise it would have never been seen at 11,000 feet.

Turning the plane we flew over the area and in the dim light we saw a shape that looked like a plane. We shot out a flare to indicate that they had been spotted.

We had to resume our trip because of a shortage of gas. The air fields in China had been ordered to take out some of our fuel when we were returning to Burma or India. It was fortunate for us that we did not stay long at the crash scene because we ran out of gas as we turned off of the runway.
The next morning I was told to guide an L-5 to the crash site. We found the plane but had difficulty locating a landing area. Finally, the L-pilot brought the plane down on an extremely short stretch heading directly for a very large boulder. Just before crashing into it, he spun the plane around with a ground loop. Crowds of Chinese appeared quickly. Apparently the crash of the B-24, a converted plane to haul gasoline to China, brought people from the entire area to see this rare happening.

The American crew was not at the plane. The Chinese thought they intended to walk out. Chinese runners were sent to locate the Americans and bring them back to the planes. When the Americans did return, it was determined the radio operator had a broken leg. The L-pilot decided to take this man back to Myitkyina and to send L-5s for the rest of us.

While waiting for the L-5s to come for us, we walked into the very beautiful Chinese village. All of the buildings were made of stone. The bridges were of stone with arches held together with keystones. There were no motor vehicles there. The women had bound feet.

An older lady came out and invited us into her house by bowing and pointing to the door. She made tea for us. We learned that she was the wife of the village mayor who was away at this time.

After looking around the town for a while, it was decided a better landing strip should be found for the returning L-5s. A better location was found, and the strip was outlined with brush.

About five L-5s returned for us. When it was time to take off, there must have been thousands of Chinese in the vicinity of the strip. As the engines rev’d up, they pushed forward to see and formed a long V which became so constricted that we couldn't take off. After several minutes of crowd control, there was enough room for us to take to the air.

We learned later that the engines on the B-24 just quit. Running out of gas was an option. The plane bellied in and bounced into a rice check. Fortunately there was no fire. The opportunity to visit this remote Chinese village in its beautiful mountain setting was a wonderful experience for me.

I gained a lot of respect for liaison flying from this, and I would have enjoyed this type of flying.

CHINESE TROOPS AND MISSOURI MULES
Arthur R. Camp - 317th Troop Carrier Squadron
Among the many flights that we made over the Hump, carrying Chinese troops and Missouri mules was but one of the kinds of cargo we had on board. We had to move two divisions of Chinese, along with their equipment and their mules, from Myitkyina in Burma back to China to stem a Japanese advance. These trips were accomplished by attaining altitude, establishing our heading, turn on the automatic pilot and sit and wait. Five mules were flown in a C-47 by being tethered to bamboo poles forming makeshift stalls.

During one of these flights, the plane seemed to stop in midair and then lurch forward. This was repeated several times while we checked all instruments without, a clue to the cause. Finally the
crew chief came forward to tell us that a mule went berserk and was kicking everything in reach, including the air heating duct in the ceiling. The mule quieted down just prior to the Chinese muleteer getting ready to shoot him.

ACTION IN THE MEIKTILA-THABUTKON AIR STRIP
Dale Brook - 317th Troop Carrier Squadron
Lt. Roy Burger, pilot, and Lt. Art Steddom, copilot, were flying a small field gun, a jeep to pull it, and fifteen British-Indian Army troops into this hotly contested airstrip. The plane had hardly touched down when it took a direct hit in the tail. Because other planes were in the tight landing pattern, Lt. Burger applied full power for 300 feet to get to a taxi-way and off the runway. Just as the plane turned into the taxi-way, there was a tremendous explosion. The rear fuselage was so twisted the troops in the rear couldn't exit the side door.

A top hatch was pushed open, and all the troops plus Burger and Steddom followed because the props were still turning, making a front exit too dangerous. Steddom cracked a bone in his leg when he dropped and received the Purple Heart Medal. Roy Burger lost lots of flesh on both arms and refused the medal. The plane then really flared and burned. #774 met its end.

A few days later while on the second mission of the day, we were the last plane to land before the British holed-up for the day. My co-pilot at the time was Lt. Glen Matousek. We had a problem off-loading as the Indian troops on board made a fast exit leaving their gear aboard. On this mission the cargo doors were in place to keep the troops from bailing out on their way into combat. The gear was then thrown out the cargo door, piled up on the ground. As soon as the last duffel bag was thrown out, I went back to the cockpit and prepared for takeoff. It was unknown to the crew chief and to me that Lt. Matousek had jumped off the plane to remove some of the duffel bags piled in front of the tail wheel.

I heard a door slam and thinking all was ready, poured on the coal to raise the tail wheel over the duffel bags that had been in front of the tail wheel. Immediately I heard banging on the cargo door and the crew chief hollered to stop. Looking back, I saw Matousek hanging on to the latch, beating and kicking as hard as possible to get on board. I cut the engines and applied brakes long enough for the crew chief to help haul Matousek into the cargo area.

Without waiting for my co-pilot, I applied power heading for the runway. The shells were coming in at a rapid pace at that time, and soon we took a hit between the main wing and the tail stabilizer, directly opposite the cargo door on the right side. The blast tore a sizable hole in the fuselage and leading edge of the stabilizer as well as cantering the plane about forty-five degrees to the runway. With hard left rudder, I was able to recover and bounced down the takeoff run with only one wheel on the runway. After bouncing a couple of times, I was able to get back on the runway and with flaps, finally became airborne at about 78 mph. After Lt. Matousek returned to his right seat, I returned to the rear to assess the damage. There was a big hole where the latrine had been and some other damage. It was quite an experience for all of us as we had been in a very "hot spot."

MOUNTAIN CLIMBING IN A C-47
John Wadell - 317th Troop Carrier Squadron
While we were in China, Don Cassavant and I were sent north to pick up some fighter pilots who were suffering from combat fatigue. We were to take them over the Hump to Ledo, India.

After picking up the pilots, Don and I switched seats. He was flying as co-pilot. We had hardly gotten off the ground when we were on instruments. We climbed to about 10,000 feet and headed south. The highest peak shown on our route was about 7,000 feet high. The remaining area and peaks were shown as "unexplored" and were well to our west.

Everything was going smoothly when suddenly the clouds parted and I saw a brown wall ahead of us. As far as I could see, clouds topped the wall. It was too risky and too close to the mountain to attempt to climb straight ahead. Our only hope was a 180 degree right turn and in a 90 degree bank. Since Don was in the right hand seat, he yelled, "I've got it!" and proceeded to rack the old C-47 in a tight turn to the right. Small trees or bushes were smacking the wings and props as he completed the turn and rolled out in a sharp climb heading north.

We headed south again at about 13,000 feet and made it to Kunming. Our passengers came forward and told us that they were going to "c-catch another p-p-plane" over the Hump to India. We couldn't blame them, and we explained what happened.

A QUIET DAY IN CENTRAL BURMA
Dale Brook - 317th Troop Carrier Squadron
At Bhamo one day we were pinned down by rifle fire for almost an hour. One of our planes came in too hot and had to ground loop to miss all of us sitting at the end of the strip. The first pilot was Lt. Lou Budroe and the co-pilot was Lt. Glen Matousek.

Not only did we have trouble getting in that short field because of the heavy loads we carried, but getting off was just as bad. Bob Reusche and I used half flaps to make it back out over the trees. Those who landed last had the shortest length of runway to use in getting off. We barely cleared the trees at an IAS of 85 MPH. Those behind us had the same difficulty, I'm sure. Bhamo set the pace for aerial landings for the rest of central Burma Campaign, except for a few drops around Lashio and Muse.

Perhaps it would have been nice to be a fighter pilot, but there are few of them who will ever know what a chore it was to get those heavy "Goonies" into short fields and out again, particularly in hot weather and in the heat of the day. Other harrowing experiences were the paratrooping supplies on top of mountains, in narrow valleys, and the bone shaking landings in real rice paddies. In addition, there were the rough rides with heavy loads during the monsoon season both day and night.

317th TROOP CARRIER SQUADRON COMMANDO 1944-1945
On 10 May, 1944 the well-trained 309th Troop Carrier Squadron of the 443rd Troop Carrier Group was transferred to the 2nd Air Commando Group and redesignated as the 317th Troop Carrier Squadron Commando. During June 1944 the squadron was moved to Dunnellon, Florida to continue their glider training and initiate 1000-mile cross country flights and in September, recalled to Camp MacKall, N.C. for training under complete blackout conditions, here they suffered their first casualties losing Lt. Wayland Rose pilot and crew chief Victor Graves when their plane crashed.
At the end of September, 1944 they flew to Baer Field near Fort Wayne, IN where they exchanged their planes for new C-47’s which later in Morrison Field in West Palm Beach, FL the planes were fitted with 275 gal. fuel tanks in the cargo compartment in preparation for trans-Atlantic flights and the pilots given final physical exams. On 10 Oct. they flew to Borenguen Field in Puerto Rico and en route they opened their sealed orders and found they were headed for India.

We flew first to Trinidad, then Georgetown, British Guiana; then after a fruitless search for a plane downed in the jungles, they flew to Belem, Brazil, then Natal then across the Atlantic via Ascension Island to Accra, Gold Coast, Africa where the extra fuel tanks were removed. Then across Africa to Khartoum in Anglo Egyptian Sudan via Kano, Nigeria, Fort Lamey. French Equatorial Africa, and El Fasher, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. After Khartoum came Aden, Masira Island in Oman, then to Karachi, India; then Agra India; then Kalaikunda, India our destination. We had flown a total of 13,500 miles or more than half way around the earth at the equator. Kalaikunda was to be our main base in India. The ground personnel were sent to Los Angeles where they left for India with the personnel from the rest of the 2nd Air Commandos on the Troop Transport USS General John Pope to Bombay, India then by train to Kalaikunda. On Christmas Eve, 1944 they joined the rest of the 317th TCS at Myitkyina, Burma.

In November 1944 British troops began pushing the Japs back down the Chindwin Valley in western Burma attacking over rough and dangerous terrain with poor lines of communication which called for the 317th to drop supplies for the Anglo-Indian armies and to evacuate many wounded soldiers. They received a Battle Star on their campaign ribbon for this work. During December the 317th TCS along with other Troop Transport Squadrons flew supplies, troops, animals and equipment to the Chinese. The Japanese had captured Kueilin [Kwei-lin] and Kueiyang [Kweiyang] in southwestern China, important stepping stones to the capture of Chungking and Kunming which the Chinese had to hold to survive. A completely equipped Chinese Division including horses and mules were flown over the "Hump" and the Japs were halted and pushed back.

The squadron also flew supplies to Allied Troops in Myitkyina and trained British Glider Pilots at Bikram, India.

During February the 317th TCS was kept very busy in the campaign to recover central Burma from the Nips. The Japanese fought bitterly as they knew that if the Allies succeeded in crossing the Irrawaddy River defense line that they would not be able to hold Burma. The Allies forged steadily ahead being supplied through the air while at the same time the Fighter Squadrons Commando were attacking the Japs on the ground and in the air. Fields used by the Commandos in this campaign were: Sinthe, Allaguape, Onbauk, Myitche, Sadaung, and Mandalay North.

The 317th Troop Carrier Squadron also participated in Mission Multivite formed to capture the Meiktta Airfields. The British Army made a successful dash crossing the Irrawaddy and seizing Thabut-kong and its airfields which were useable and negated a planned glider mission. One 317th glider piloted by Captain Watson A. Sudduth had landed at Thabutkong airfield and ascertained the field was suitable for landing of C-47’s and one landed safely soon after. During
the next few days the Squadron landed the 99th Indian Infantry Brigade from Palel. Japanese resistance was restricted to sporadic shelling so the mission was successful despite flying twelve hours a day.

During March the squadron continued bringing supplies to the frontline troops flying to Singu, Ondaw, Ywabo, Nyangu, Mandalay North, Tada-u, Chaunggwe, and Meiktila.

The British 17th Division captured the Meiktila main airfield early in March. This sealed the escape route of the Japs fleeing from Mandalay. The Japanese troops rushed in reinforcements and these were able to attack Meiktila from all sides. It was decided to fly in the 9th Indian Infantry Brigade using the 317th TCU. The air landings were strongly resisted; six planes were hit by ground fire; one aircraft was completely demolished, but no one was seriously injured. The Ninth Brigade was successfully landed and Meiktila was held and served as an excellent base for future drives to Rangoon. The Squadron received a Battle Star for its Theater Ribbon for the Battle of Central Burma.

During April the 317th continued carrying supplies to the 33rd, 4th, and 15th Corps at forward airfields: Myetha, Myitche, Dwehla, Taungtha, and Ramree. Large quantities of gasoline were ferried from Palel to Meiktila as were the 317th's gliders.

At the beginning of April the British broke out of Meiktila and drove south rapidly, soon taking the Pyinmana airfields. On 21 April 18 317th gliders loaded with engineering equipment which was put to work immediately leveling the field. On 22 April the Japanese attacked with eight Oscars destroying five of our gliders. The transport section of the squadron practiced formation flying and made practice paratroop drops in preparation for planned action against Rangoon. During the opening days of May the Allied columns which had broken out of Meiktila in April were closing in on Pegu about 50 miles north of Rangoon. It was decided to attack Rangoon from the South in air and seaborne attacks. First the Jap defenses at the mouth of the Rangoon River were cleared out by Gurkha paratroopers dropped on Elephant Point by the 317th TCS — 440 Gurkhas plus 141,100 lbs of equipment. Following this successful maneuver the naval borne troops steamed into Rangoon which fell shortly afterwards. This first para-troop drop in Asia was very successful; only five out of a thousand paratroopers were injured in the drop and these only slightly. The squadron, during the rest of May, supplied the 15th Army driving south towards Rangoon with rations, petrol, and ordinance using Payagyi and Myingyan airfields.

During the Rangoon Mission the 317th acted under the command of: Major General E.E. Down, C.B.E. of the 44th Indian Airborne Division, Lt. General Sir Oliver Leese, Commander in Chief of the Allied Air Forces in Southeast Asia, Major General George E. Stratemeyer, Commanding AAF, IBS, Lt. General Mesearvy, 16th O.C. 4th Corps, and Brig. General F.W. Evans Commanding CCTF.

BATTLES OF CHINA AND SHAN STATES

June found the squadron in China. Missions were down carrying Chinese troops, missions flew mainly fresh meats, gasoline, and ordinance to Myitkyina, Lashio, Bhamo, laihka, laawksawk, and Pangtara airfields. A great amount of supplies were dropped in the Northern Burma area to isolated Burmese villages and outposts. South of Lashio a great deal of supplies were dropped to
troops pushing the Japs out of the Shan States. All operations in June were flown in inclement weather; the monsoon rains were always a threat to the return of planes, but more flights were flown in June than in any other month overseas.

STATISTICS: NOVEMBER 1, 1944 to June 30, 1945:

- HOURS FLOWN 14,314
- TROOPS CARRIED 19,300
- WEIGHT CARRIED 9,374 tons
- TROOPS TO CHINA 1,850
- WEIGHT TO CHINA 562.4 tons
- HORSES TO CHINA 353
- MULES TO CHINA 272
- WEIGHT IN GLIDERS 63.2 tons
- PARATROOPERS DROPPED 440
- CASUALTIES EVACUATED 600.

When Japan surrendered Aug. 15, 1945 the TCS Commando conducted routine duties in India and Burma and awaited further orders.


The 317th TCS Commando was the first unit of the 2nd Air Commandos to enter combat in the CBI Theater and one of the last to leave.

After the war it became necessary to move back to China from India and Burma. Americans were scattered all over China and they had to be evacuated to locations where established military transportation could take them back to the United States.

There were scattered OSS groups, personnel from Chungking, prisoners of war, fighter pilots and ground crews in remote locations, and, possibly, some hospitalized cases. In the middle of September 1945, we moved to Liangshan, 120 miles northeast of Chungking. After a few weeks we moved up to Sian (Hsian).

Food, medical supplies, and gasoline were transported to Nanking and Shanghai. Fighter pilots and crews were moved from northern areas to Kungming and various other groups were relocated. While at Sian, six of our planes were sent to Rangoon on detached service. They flew to Saigon and dropped leaflets in the area to consolidate POWs for the trip out. The POWs were taken to Calcutta for hospitalization; Chinese POWs were taken back to China.
One plane from Sian was used for two weeks to ferry a Chinese general and captain to various locations such as Shanghai, Nanking, and Hankow helping in consolidating troop and supply planning. At least one other plane went to Peking (Beijing) before a contingent of marines arrived by train from Tientsin or Tsingtao. Japanese soldiers, armed, kept as guards at the airport to prevent stealing by the Chinese.

One plane made a night flight to Yenan with two Americans, and the flight crew was directed not to speak to them. Yenan was headquarters of the Chinese Communist Army. Our passengers met with several people in a tarpaper-covered shack, the only building in sight at the landing strip. Some Americans were assigned for liaison to the communist forces. Later several planes evacuated these Americans from Yenan. The whole time we were there, the communist troops were encamped just outside the airport walls, and as our planes left they could see soldiers and warfare equipment ready to roll. Chinese Nationalist forces were in the airport with their mortars and artillery in revetments. The city of Sian had already fallen to the communists.

Finally the squadron was ordered to leave Sian and prepare to return to the States. It left Sian 4 November, 1945 for Kungming where the planes were left for the Thai Air Force and the personnel were flown to Kalaikunda to await shipment home based on the point system.

The status of the remaining C-123 force in the United States became anomalous as the 464th Wing resumed its conversions to C-130s. The Air Force in mid-1963 recommended, and the Secretary of Defense later approved, transfer of the C-123s to the special air warfare force, a descendant of Jungle Jim. The C-123s remaining at Pope were moved to Hurlburt along with a nucleus of officers and airmen. They formed the 317th Air Commando Squadron (Troop Carrier), which was activated July 1, 1964. Pipeline C-123 training for Vietnam also shifted to Hurlburt. The C-123 units, thereafter, claimed the air commando tradition, although the eliteness of the early Jungle Jim venture had faded.

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**Air Force Order of Battle**
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**Sources**
The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.