

2nd AIR TRANSPORT SQUADRON (MOBILE)

MISSION

LINEAGE

2nd Bomber Support Squadron, Mobile activated 29 Mar 1944
Redesignated 2nd Air Transport Squadron, Mobile, 8 Apr 1944
Activated, 22 Apr 1944
Inactivated, 20 Jun 1945

STATIONS

Homestead AAB, FL
Kalaikunda, India
Dergaon, India
Luliang, China

ASSIGNMENTS

Caribbean Wg, ATC
India-China Wg (later India-China Div), ATC
China Wg, Provisional

WEAPON SYSTEMS

C-46A
C-109

COMMANDERS

LTC Clyde A. Ray

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Meritorious Unit Citation

12 Jul 1944-12 Jan 1945

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

In 1944 Gen. Hap Arnold conceived the idea that the 20th AF Bomber Command should have control of its own specialized Air Transport Support. Three Mobile Air Transport Squadrons were organized, each with twenty C-46s. The orders issued in creating these three squadrons, required that the best trained maintenance specialist for R-2800 engines, hydraulics, electrical, etc. People who knew the C-46. These squadrons were to be self-sustaining. They were to be capable to load men and equipment into the aircraft in 24 hours, to fly where needed. In addition these units would also hauled repair parts to downed B-29's that could be repaired and flown back to base and returned downed B-29 crews who had bailed out and made their way to an airfield. They were to serve as a private Airline for the 20th Bomber Command.

Each mobile Air Transport Squadron possesses all personnel and equipment necessary for the operation of an Air Transport Base, for ground duties and for flying. Yet personnel and equipment are kept at such a low minimum of men and effects that both can be loaded aboard the squadron's own planes and in a few hours be flown to a new base for the performance of new tasks. The squadron has the staff and equipment needed for the operation of an air base, from radio control functions to the planning and ordering of sorties. The unit even has its own ground transportation, six jeeps with trailers. It has its own Post Exchange, its own ordnance supplies, its own finance and personnel staff, equipment for its own mess and its own tents for housing the several hundred men. Everything is completely portable, even the appurtenances of the squadron's own Officers' Club, of the Enlisted Men's Club and of the snack restaurant.

While activation date was April 22, 1944, planes and personnel were molding into this day practically one month previous. Flying officers, Ground officers, Crews and all type of personnel that go to make up a flying unit were called in from all over the United States to become a unit which was destined to play an important part in the overall war effort of the United States Army Air Force. Men began trickling into the Homestead Army Air Base from the 15th of April to the 15th of May.

Before the Commanding Officer lay the tremendous task of molding a unit together within thirty days. It was done and was proven every day after that eventful April 22, 1944. Our first month

dealt with our tenure of duty in the States and the formation of the unit into a smooth working organization.

Squadron Headquarters was set up in one of the buildings easily accessible to all. Squadron Operations under the capable leadership of Capt. Frank Sylvester and Capt. Robert Howley was set up in the Base Operation's hanger.

The first few days took up processing and was a rather tiresome if not monotonous job. Soon the squadron began to take shape and looked like an organization. A large amount of credit for this is given to Capt. Ralph L. Stevenson, the squadron adjutant. Within two weeks he performed the almost unbelievable task of having three hundred and fifty men working together as an efficient unit.

We were at the edge waiting for the day that would eventually come, D-day. Everything possible that we might need overseas was thought of, a washing machine, a refrigerator, pressure cookers, special service equipment and countless other things that would make life easier. The Lucky Strike Corporation gave us two hundred thousand cigarettes. On the seventh of May, the officers held a final shindig and got together at Winnies' Riptide in Miami Beach. The enlisted men were given special passes and transportation into Miami for their final blowout in the States. After this date we were restricted to the base and we knew that D-day was not far off. Lt. William Davis took a trip to Ohio for tech supplies. Ships were going all over the state picking up our last-minute needs.

On the twentieth of May, we were alerted for immediate shipment overseas. Twenty-four hours later the orders came and after church services at midnight, twenty C-46s with Lt. Col. Clyde A. Ray at the helm lined up on the runway at 0200, May 22, 1944 ready for the unannounced destination.

At precisely 0200, Lt. Col. Ray's ship was committed for take-off, ready for the longest single complete, thorough movement in the history of the Army Air Forces. For the next hour and forty minutes (every five minutes) a Second Air Transport Squadron C-46 took off.

Rumors were rampant as to where we were going. It could be India, it could be Europe, it could be Russia. No one knew, but everyone felt that they had the right idea. To our great surprise, our pilots opened up the secret orders and we were destined for Deversoir, Egypt.

Our first leg of the journey was from Homestead, Florida to Borinquen, Puerto Rico. Both officers and enlisted men were pleasantly surprised with Borinquen and an enjoyable relaxation period was had by all.

At 0200 the following morning we were on our way to Atkinson, British Guiana. From there to Belem, Brazil and from there to Natal. The next hop would be over nothing but water from Natal, Brazil (the jumping-off spot) to the "Rock" Ascension Island, somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

Everything was being taken in stride. The pilots were cool as could be. Their coolness gave a note of confidence to all the men who did not have the knowledge of what a tremendous help this was to be. Twenty ships took off from Natal, Brazil beginning on the night of the twenty-fourth and they hit the "Rock" right on the button the following morning. We remained there long enough to refuel and were on our way again. This time our destination would be Accra on the Gold Coast of Africa, a very long flight over the ocean. This was termed as our first stop in what we termed as the foreign lands. From there we took off for Maduguri. This leg nearly proved to be fatal and was our only mishap of the journey. Six of our planes were told to land at Kano where they remained overnight. Early next morning they were told to proceed to Madugari to join the rest of the squadron. While taking off, one of the ships lost control and careened madly down the runway. Lt. Frank Arlaskas proved the first hero in our unit when he succeeded in getting his ship out of the way of the oncoming monster and saved forty lives in doing so.

No one was injured, thanks to God and we continued on our way. We spent the following night at Maduguri. We then took off for Kartoum, Anglo Egyptian Sudan. From there we reached our destination. The following day we arrived at Deversoir, Egypt, exactly nine days after leaving the United States. History had been made and the U.S. Army Air Forces had one more unit to be proud of. We were happy the trip was over and was ready to settle down to a calm Army life on the banks of the Suez Canal, not far from Cairo.

Deversoir was known as the Country Club of the Middle Eastern Theatre. The weather was temperate. Swimming was in order daily in the Suez. A shuttle plane flew into Cairo and we were able to see the pyramids and other main points of interest and education.

Within forty-eight hours we were operating efficiently. Movies were held nightly in an open air theater. The Red Cross served coffee and doughnuts nightly to the men and they had an excellent service men's club located on the beach of the Great Bitter Lake. The morale of the men was very high. The officers also had a fine club. All in all it was a splendid set-up.

There was still a question as to what and where our mission might be and where it would take us. Our commanding officer flew to Casa Blanca to secure information but reached no definite conclusions.

Tragedy struck in a mild manner. One of the enlisted men's barracks burned to the ground destroying all their personal belongings. The Red Cross came to their help and secured for the men, the necessary toilet articles and items that were sorely needed.

Mail became muddled up, due to the A.P.O. change and we didn't receive any mail for many weeks, still morale remained high. Then when everything was going smoothly, one evening at about 2100, orders came to proceed to Kalaikunda, India, to carry out our mission. That night proved to Lt. Col. Clyde A. Ray and all others entrusted in the welfare and guidance of the Second Air Transport Squadron (Mobile) that we were an efficient, smooth-working organization. We

completely loaded our ships that night in the darkness and bid farewell to Egypt that following morning.

The trip to Kalaikunda, India was uneventful with the exception of two historical sights, the Holy Land and flying over the Taj Mahal, Agra, India. We stopped in Iran and also at Karachi, India. From Karachi we headed for our final destination.

Enroute, Capt. Jules Prevost, our engineering officer, became quite ill and for a few days it seemed as though we were going to lose a very valuable man. Luckily, good fortune was with us and he joined us again in good health.

Life came to Kalaikunda, India on the fourteenth of June, 1944. Things were in a great muddle upon landing. First off, we didn't know where we were going to "Chow Down", second we did not know where we were going to sleep. So we bitched and moaned as all soldiers are expected to do and proceeded to get things solved and taken care of. That was the first experience in Kalaikunda.

On the following day we really got the ball rolling. Squadron Headquarters and Operations was set up on the line. Also, a branch exchange was set up where a man could cool his whistle after a hot day of work. Some of our early days at Kalaikunda were spent under temperatures of 130 degrees. Within days things were back to normal and we were once again operating as efficiently as conditions would warrant.

The engineering section was operating twenty-four hours a day and our mission had begun. There was constant traffic between Kalaikunda and Chengtu, China, via the "Hump".

Within a matter of a few weeks our squadron had surpassed the record of any previous organization. In most cases it was a great experience for the pilots and the crews. Flying over enemy territory with the possibility of a few Zeros on your tail was no joke. The prime mission of the Second Air Transport Squadron was to carry fuel and supplies to China, the main item being gasoline.

Generally, the men made five consecutive trips over the "Hump" and then back to Kalaikunda for a brief rest. The system was changed whereby the men could go direct to Jorhat and then over the "Hump" to China and after a ten-hour rest period, return to Kalaikunda where they made ready for another trip. A mild epidemic of Malaria broke out among our radio operators, five of them became ill. Our flight Surgeon, Leslie M. Lisle did an exceptional job in the medical care of our organization.

And then the Monsoon rains came. Some tents were flooded and swept away. Still we came back for more and then we were given orders to move to a new area on the base. Once again our mobility was proven and we set ourselves up in quite fashionable quarters.

Things ran smoothly; two planes were made Class 26 in the operations over the "Hump". The pilots wanted to be able to keep flying. They would have flown twice as much if allowed to.

The "Mobile" seemed to have left us and we became more or less permanent party at Kalaikunda. The field had changed considerably for the better and there were no complaints.

During the month of August, total trips over the "Hump" fell to 155 trips. Our previous trip total had been 206 trips. The reason for the drop was due to the fact that the length of the missions had been increased approximately 40%. Instead of loading at Jorhat and taking a load over, we were loading at home field and just stopping at Jorhat to refuel. This met with the disapproval of many, but to no avail. We continued on fulfilling our mission, doing an excellent job.

It would be well to give a little description of a mission that a crew participated in. The usual hours of takeoff from Kalaikunda were from ten at night until ten in the morning. The crews were awakened and given one hour to report to operations. Their ship was fully loaded with gasoline to be delivered to China, after clearing with operations, they were ready to go.

Actual flying time of their mission from Kalaikunda, India to Tsinching, China was approximately 9 hours and 30 minutes. The usual route was from Kalaikunda to Jorhat, there the plane was refueled and the crew was able to eat at the line mess, this took about an hour. The total time from Jorhat to China was about 5 hours. Usual altitude for flying was 16,500 ft. sometimes over 20,000 ft. Much of the time was spent flying on instruments. The clouds were handy at times as there was always the possibility of meeting a Jap Zero. It happened many times. Some of the experiences that happened on the "Hump" were having both engines cut out, and by the grace of God have them come back in. Sometimes planes would ice up to such an extent that there was a continual loss of altitude. This made it necessary to lighten the load by throwing the drums of gasoline overboard. It was something to see the crew tie themselves to the side of the ship at 20,000 ft. and open the hatch and start rolling the big drums of gasoline overboard. It made one wonder if now the time had come and it would be necessary to bail out.

After 532 trips by our outfit over the hump, we had not had to jump. Upon arrival in China, at a base known as A-I we were met at the ship with transportation to either the mess or a Hostel. On first making those trips, the crews could hardly get there fast enough in order to have some of the "eggesses" that have been lacking since leaving the States. Also one of the features of the field was the hot shower we were able to take. A Chinese would fill a five gallon bucket with hot water and then would turn on a sprinkler system on the bucket to get a nice warm shower. After this it was the time for the pilots and crew to relax. They usually "hit the sack" or played some poker. As a rule, in the evening there was a movie. Some of the boys would go into one of the small villages close by. That is, Old Tsinching, just off the runway, or New Tsinching, across the river only reached by taking a sampan across. Both of these villages were interesting and an education to those who were able to visit them. There was one nice place to eat in Old Tsinching called the "Stork Club", very different from what we had at home, but then it was a diversion. We were able to get roast duck, roast chicken and other types of Chinese food and those that wished could partake of the old "Liquid Spirit" in the form of Chinese wine. The Chinese were very friendly and constantly put their thumb up and give us "Ding Hao" (very good).

Those who were "going out" were awakened anywhere from three until six in the morning. On a clear day it was seldom that a trip got monotonous. After four hours on the return trip we would land at Jorhat and once again prepare for the last leg to home base. The average of our pilots in trips over the "Hump" so far runs about 25, which is tremendous. Some special missions from the base at Tsinching to the advance forward area of China were accomplished. These missions run practically to the Jap lines. It took courage to fly our ships (without guns or armor) so close to enemy territory, with the possibility of being attacked by enemy aircraft.

Lieutenants Grossoehme, Paxton, and Arlaskas are just a few of the pilots who flew within a few miles of the Jap lines to take supplies and parts, thus enabling another wounded superfort to again be airborne for another raid. One of our C-46s had been hit by Japanese bombs and its wings were badly damaged, it wasn't long until it was flying again.

On the first of September, the enlisted men had a "grand opening" of the Squadron Club. Here they served drinks and gave the boys a chance to relax after a hard day's work. Everyone settled down to a normal daily routine and the morale of the unit was as good as any in the theatre. Everyone got along well and there was a friendly feeling between the officers and enlisted men. Games between them were always excellent contests to watch.

Tragedy and sorrow struck our squadron on the 8th of Sept. 1944. Lt. Dave Hayden, pilot; F/O Francis Johnson, Co-pilot; S/Sgt Okie Venable, crew chief; Corp. Charles Cooper, radio operator and Corp. Paul Kenney, asst. crew chief, took off on a mission from Kalaikunda to China in the early morning and were never heard of again. Undoubtedly they joined other air heroes who had given their lives.

On the twenty-second of Sept. the base opened the Base Officer's Club. The officers had all donated thirty rupees for its building and it was worth considerably more. On that night, once again, the Second Air Transport boys got together and really had a good time. We had now entered our sixth month since activation and fifth month overseas and could truthfully say that a better bunch of fellows could have never gotten together in one group. Every man in the squadron would have done anything for each and every man in it.

On Sept. 27, 1944, Captain Joseph Paxton and his crew crashed against the mountainside just out of Hsian in the forward area. He and his crew were on a special mission flying nearly to the Jap lines from Tsinching. Included with Capt. Paxton on this flight were Co-pilot 2nd Lt. James O Neill; 1st Lt. George Smith, engineering officer; S/Sgt Joseph Mahan, radio operator; S/Sgt John (Abe) Lincoln, crew chief and Corp. Luther Turpin. They were not only a valuable crew, but all of outstanding character and personage. They were a great bunch of airmen.

This month was our most successful to date. We were operating with two less ships than was required and still with more than two weeks left in the month, we had well over ninety trips over the "Hump". Many of the crews had well over thirty trips to their credit and were eagerly looking to a trip to the United States upon completion of forty-eight to fifty trips to China.

The monsoon season was over and the temperature had dropped accordingly. What a difference from the way it was four months before upon our arrival. Then it was 130 degrees and very uncomfortable; now it was even cool enough to use blankets at night.

The latter part of October had passed with a "business as usual" atmosphere tinged slightly by the prevalence of usual rumors that came from nowhere and could be about anything—a normal trend of imaginative minds and a sure sign of restlessness.

A number of ships had come up for engine change, and two or three special trips were made to Agra for critical supply items. Fellows lucky enough to make the trip returned with beautiful souvenirs and tales about the impressive "Taj Mahal", the wonders of Fort Agra and especially the abundance of fresh foods, almost "stateside" at the Air Depot messes. The Province of Bengal did not lend to the same resources. Spam refuses to turn into T-bone and regardless of the myriads of Vienna sausages, the mess hall did not turn into a Coney Island hot dog stand.

The post exchange rations had been coming in as usual, but the boys with the bars were beginning to wonder where their "Jungle rations" (monthly quart of whisky) got lost.

As month's end grew nigh, something was definitely brewing. When Lt/Col. Clyde A. Ray and Major Frank S. Sylvester returned from the Air Transport Command's Theatre headquarters at Hasting's Mills, the cat was out of the bag—another move was coming up. Preparations were made for packing all organizational equipment and the move was to be made on a shuttle basis while continuing operations. The field's air traffic set-up was to handle the loading as if it were more cargo going over the "Hump".

On 30th October, Major Hawley, Capt. Stevenson and the technical and administrative supply officers, Lts. Davis and Funderback, took a trip to Deragon, India in the Assam Valley to look over the set-up of our new home. With them was Lt. Dietz, the priorities and traffic chief who stayed with Lt. Funderback to get things started and take care of the ships as they arrived. The base was just in its infancy as far as facilities and new personnel were concerned. It had a steel mat runway, tents and an occasional straw basha for dwelling and an acute shortage of mess facilities.

On the 31st of October, the first of the squadron's planes arrived with some personnel and equipment, and as soon as the crew could be fed and the ship loaded, it was on its way for the first operational Hump mission with gas for China even before normal housekeeping had been established. Again the standard of "mobility with facility" had been maintained.

Our mission was to fly "aid to China" based upon the Air Transport Command's designated distribution of cargo and receiving of China base priorities. For the most part, gasoline was the commodity. The new set-up was good for several reasons.

The weather was dry, making steel mat runways and taxi strips adequate. A spacious steel mat loading ramp adjacent to warehouses and offices of the priorities and traffic section, which was

served at the rear of a railway siding made for quick and efficient loading operations and Deragon was much nearer the Hump than Kalaikunda had been.

Capt. Tom Miller, chief of the squadron priorities and traffic section developed a speedy, safe loading tie-down procedure, by incorporating his system on the entire base. The eventual results were the maximum loading of forty to fifty planes in a twenty-four hour period using the low number of three 6X6 trucks and three fork lifts to accomplish the job.

With the shorter air route to final destination, greater utility of assigned aircraft was attainable. Better still, the crews could make daylight Hump trips and be back the same night. This was a source of improved morale and everyone had a better feeling of accomplishment with greater facility. Also, a round trip could usually be made on one full service of fuel without carrying back some from China part of the precious cargo in the planes tanks.

A brief resume of our Radio Operators activities were shown from 15-30 October. This shows a total of 1744 hours flown by 27 operators or an average of four hours per day per operator. The radio men preflighted, inspected or serviced equipment of 132 planes, an average of nine per day. Lt. Dietz, chief of the section made a routine Hump and forward area flight as a Radio operator for inspection purposes and to observe some of the operator's problems.

The squadron's broad-shouldered smiling, poker-playing young "Old Man", as Lt. Col. Ray was referred to, was transferred to a Calcutta hospital from where later word came of his transfer to "Uncle Sugar Able".

The outfit that once termed itself "Ray's Raiders" (developing from reports in the forward area of China that formations of large twin-engine, yellow-nosed ships had been spotted over fields behind Jap-held territory, took on the name of "Sylvester's Circus" as Major Sylvester, promoter first class, assumed command and turned over operations to Capt. Eugene M. Moore.

Lt. Ralph A. Wakefield, an old timer, crashed on take-off with his crew late in the evening of 15th November. Only while searching for his ship was the density and vastness of the surrounding jungle fully realized. Here the grimness of carrying on a war was impressed on the minds of Lt. Wakefield's companions.

The word "Mobile" seemed to be the magic pass word to good morale and the proof was on its way at the time. On the 19th of November preparations were made for another move of most personnel and equipment in one single haul with thirteen aircraft to a new home at Luliang, China, situated in the province of Yunnan, in a valley of a small river at 6,064 ft. above sea level.

Early in the morning of the 20th of November the yellow nosed ships began the trip. Over the "Hump" the weather was generally CAVU (ceiling and visibility unlimited) and the newcomers got a good look of such historical projects as the Ledo and Burma Roads and a glimpse of the hard-won field of Myitkyna. To the north could be seen white capped peaks, and there is no doubt that the wide expanse of rugged country below, doubly endeared parachutes and jungle kits to the

newly initiated, thinking about "just in case" flying at an average altitude of 12,500 ft. Also, passengers did very well without oxygen.

Shortly after sighting Lake Ehr at the foot of Mt. Tali off to the left of the course, "Sylvester's Circus" went down beneath the overcast, past the walled city of Kunming and over a large stone forest to land on the very long runway of Luliang.

This was the home of the 1343d Army Air Force Base Unit located in the western province of Yunan, a primitive province on the East. The altitude was above 6000 ft. and the soil was acid and the area vast. Underlying the top soil of a few inches was solid rock. Trees were few and the wind was constant. The airbase was surrounded on all sides by mountains.

The people were known as Miaos, an ancient race of people from the Himalayas. These people were being assimilated very slowly by the Chinese who were apparently newcomers to the area. These people were friendly but being away from the traveled world were somewhat wary of white strangers. They were basically a courteous, hospitable and cheerful people and predominantly of the peasant class. They worked from dawn to dusk on their meager farms and their clothing was mostly patchwork, the cloth being made by hand from cotton grown in the Chengtu area. Every bit of labor was accomplished by manual labor or with the help of large water buffalos. Occasionally we would see a woman with bound feet, a custom outlawed years ago. The village or city of Luliang was located approximately three miles north of the base, it was truly an ancient city. It was surrounded by a wall about thirty feet high made of stone. The ramparts on top were styled much like the castles of feudal Europe. A tower or blockhouse was situated at each corner. The gates, located on the north, south, east and west were tremendous, standing twenty feet high with each section ten feet wide and about two feet thick. The streets were cobbled and rocky and only wide enough for the average vehicle. In the center where the street intersects was a high pagoda shaped tower known as the "Drum Tower."

Immediately outside the main gate of the airfield was "Boom Town", a village of mud huts, consisting mostly of restaurants and wine shops. The occupants were mostly refugees from Japanese occupied parts of China, who have fled to live in peace and to get rich off the Americans.

The Luliang Air Base consisted of a main runway over 12,000 ft. long and 240 ft. wide, the longest in China. It could accommodate planes as large and heavy as the B-29's. The C-47 pilots jokingly claimed that they could get in a half hour flying time before reaching the end of the runway. The field had an altitude of 6,064 ft. and formed the floor of the valley. The runway was constructed of a rock base, crushed stone with a holder of mud, dusty when dry and muddy when wet. Two fighter strips were built parallel to the main runway located to the northwest. They were used by fighter type aircraft mostly P-51's and a few. F-5-E2's. The B-24's of the 373 Bomb squadron and the B-25's of the Chinese Air Force used the main runway. The 373 Bomb squadron occupied the east side of the main runway where they dispersed their aircraft in hard stand revetments. The west side of the main runway also contained hardstands, which were used for offloading of cargo and passengers.

When the 2nd ATS arrived at Luliang, the 1343 AAF Base Unit had 10 C-46s assigned to it, which were kept busy continually, a shortage of flight crews did not slow them down. With the arrival of the 2nd ATS, the ten base aircraft were transferred and operations were carried on by the 2nd ATS, this time using the twenty C-46s and flight crews of the 2nd ATS. This caused an increase in operations. Capt. Floyd W Jones the squadron chief pilot became unit chief pilot.

All pilots agreed that from the beginning the maintenance of our aircraft was superior. One of the contributing factors, they believed, was the practice of the unit to require that the crew chief fly on the aircraft as flight engineer.

After the 20th of November, one officer and eighty enlisted men plus seven crews and aircraft were all that remained behind. Of the main body in China, officers were quartered in the Chinese-operated hostel section. Enlisted men were housed in a tent area and except for headquarters office and operations, all sections were set up in tents. For a while the weather seemed very cold, and wool clothing not thought of as being a practical issue up to this time came out in a hurry.

The first mission of importance came on the 21st of November, the day after arrival when the "Circus" completed in twenty-seven hours a "hot" priority mission of moving an anti-aircraft battalion, complete with guns, men and equipment from Myitkyina, Burma, to Chengtu, China, to protect certain B-29 bases in that area, being subjected to Jap bombing raids almost nightly.

Major Sylvester began to prove that he, too had broad shoulders when he assumed the command of the 1343 Army Air Force Base Unit at Luliang on the 21st of November, in addition to his squadron command. On the 22nd of November, the squadrons next higher command echelon was officially designated as the China Wing (provisional) India China Division, Air Transport Command, with headquarters in Kunming.

As previously indicated, operations began immediately as a normal function, hauling gas to support forward bases for the Fourteenth Air Force and performing reverse hump shuttle runs to obtain gas from the ATC's India bases in the Assam Valley.

On 22nd Nov. Chief Warrant Officer "Jimmy" Harris was sent to Ksian, a forward base in Northern China on thirty days temporary duty. This was for the purpose of acting as operation's officer and general coordinator on a large scale movement of Chinese troops to meet the demands for a strategic rush counter-offensive move against the threatening Japanese lines moving from the Kwelin - Linchow -Hockin area toward Kweiyang and Kunming.

Hsian had very few facilities for efficient operations. The mission had to be accomplished during the worst period of weather in what weather men called "The Winter Monsoon of the North" bringing with it driving snow and sleet. The icing level was often on the ground. Many times pilots were forced by the raging winds and ice aloft to turn back. Despite this tremendous hazard, a steady flow of troops kept moving.

The crews were aware that should they overshoot the field at Hsian, they would be out of the pan into the fire. Japanese fighter planes based along the yellow river eagerly enjoyed shooting down slow-moving unarmed transport planes.

Lt. Al Fisher in ship number 42-96779, had been unable to get into Lo Ho Kow on 10th December with his load of gas. Somewhere in the vicinity of Hsian he was attempting to establish his position. About thirty minutes after he had made contact with a field in the area, he called in to describe a town later established as being Poai in the Honan province. Ten minutes later he reported that an unidentified aircraft with "Red Balls" on its wings was approaching. Fisher's plane was attacked and shot down. The crew bailed out and all with the exception of Co-Pilot George McGuire fell into the Chinese hands and were brought out after many unusual experiences.

A close-up view of operations pertaining to the engineering section during October, November and December revealed some interesting items, these went back further than Luliang.

October was a routine month of Hump and Forward Area (China) flying. During the month 172 Hump trips were made, each equal to 3,000 miles of flying. By the month's end the squadron had flown a total of 726 Hump trips carrying over 400 tons of supplies into China since coming into the CBI Theatre.

S/Sgt. Grover Elsensohn, crew chief, on ship #42-61049 led the others with 270.40 hours of flying time on his plane. His energy paid off for he was one of the first crew chiefs to rotate back to "Uncle Sugar Able".

Despite the fact that only 16 assigned aircraft were available throughout the month and despite the fact that 16 engine changes were made effecting ten of these ships, the overall picture of flying time showed 3,489 hours, a record month at that time.

In November our planes flying out of Deragon started flying without crew chiefs. The bad element here was that minor troubles developments normally detected while flying by the crew chief might be neglected longer simply by ignorance of the existence of the problem by the ship's crew chief. To the men personally, it meant that radio operators were piling up flying hours, while they were forced to sit on the ground.

S/Sgt. Howard McWhorter led the squadron in maintenance by keeping ship #42-61055 flying 271 hours out of the month.

During December a total of nine engine changes were made, seven of the engines had given an average of 733 hours of operating time. Two of the engines were rebuilt jobs of the Central India Air Depot and had an average time of 366 hours. During the month 22 plane days were lost to maintenance and six plane days due to aircraft grounded for parts.

S/Sgt. Michael S. Plecas' ship #42-61977 led the month with 237 hours flying time.

A wire of congratulations received December 2nd from Brig. Gen. Tanner, India China division, Air Transport Command, for "one hundred percent" of our ships in commission for two consecutive days, Dec. 4th and 5th put a feather in the engineering hat and a source of pride to the squadron.

4 Dec. This movement was made up of the Chinese Fourteenth division from Myitkyna, Burma to Chanyi and Kunming, China.

6 Dec. to 29 Dec. This movement involved twenty C-46s from Luliang and fourteen C-46s from Myitkyna carrying 13,000 troops, ninety-nine tons of equipment of the Chinese Army from Myitkyna to Chanyi, Kunming and Luliang.

On 7th December, the status of the squadron was definitely defined when orders came assigning it officially to the XX Bomber Command and attaching it for administrative and duty to the India, China Division of the Air Transport Command and more locally to the 1343 Army Air Base Unit.

10 Dec. 1944, Fatal accident for one crew member of a plane, the number of which is not known, shot down by Japanese. The pilot, engineer and radio operator safely parachuted to earth and returned to the unit on 4 March, 1945.

The remainder of the squadron left at Deragon, came to Luliang on the 13th of December, making the move complete.

About this time, buildings were found available with supplemental housing in tents at a lake generally located about six miles north of the base. We were allowed a three-day visit to this area, where we could relax and hunt duck and geese. Weapons were made available for the hunt, food was prepared and served American Style and resulted in a new outlook on life.

Of course not all of our new experiences could be told to the folks at home, but the fact that alerts (Jing Baos, as the Chinese called them) put everyone in the slit trenches almost nightly for a while after arriving in China. This was never noticed to have dampened the high morale of our outfit. If anything, it quickened the interest in the war and increased the efforts of the general personnel to doing the job better. Actual combat was much nearer here than it had seemed back in India.

Morale was high, no one remembers seeing any sadness coming from the first eight pilots to finish the required theatre flying hours, as they boarded one of the old reliable yellow nosed ships for India and finally home on the 10th of December. This was the rotation policy working and although it seemed like part of the family splitting up, everyone was glad to see them reaping the fruit of their efforts. They had done a good job and were definitely missed.

Another sad day in the history of the outfit occurred on the 16th December. Lt. Bob Cole and his crew left on a routine flight to Hsinching, China, and was never heard of again.

On the 19th of December while Major Sylvester and Captain Moore were away on a cross-country flight, Chief-Pilot, Capt. Jones, got a taste of the heavy weight of command. Capt. Jones wondered why he got caught with jobs like that at the particular time, when Wing Commanders and other such rank were out leaving their calling cards.

One ship visiting the Calcutta area before Christmas brought back some welcome supplemental "B" ration foods for the Holidays. Local duck and chickens formed the nucleus for the meal that was classified by all as pretty good, especially considering the remoteness from home.

January, 1945, presented to the squadron a month of variety both in activity and weather conditions. Its participation in one mission in particular, which will be mentioned later, brought out the proof of the flexibility that had become part and parcel of the stamina and interest constantly maintained in all of our operations.

During the month a total of 4,730 flying hours was accumulated on the total of twenty assigned aircraft. S/Sgt. Bob Garrett, crew chief on ship #42-96685 kept his ship flying 355 hours before January's bugaboo engine changes.

Cargo of all types, including troops and passengers, were carried over the rock pile (Hump) without loss of a man or aircraft. Two minor accidents marred the record for the month, but the ships were soon back in commission, piling up lost time. Primary mission for January was Hump-in-reverse cargo hauling.

A special mission served to break the routine when a total of fifteen ships were sent to assist in evacuation of Fourteenth Air Force Bases in Eastern China. This was known in the squadrons annals as the "Suichwan Deal".

January, 1945, saw the first arrival of C-54 parts and the first C-109 arrival.

21 Feb 1945, Accident to C-46 #42-107332 at Hsian in which pilot overshot runway and crashed into anti-tank ditch at night, Plane class 26.

Warning of the impending mission was received by Major Sylvester and Capt. Leonard at 17:30 hours, 21st January at wing headquarters in Kiinming. They wanted fifteen C-46 aircraft to proceed from Luliang to Hsinching and to shuttle personnel and equipment from Suichwan and possibly other bases to Hsinching. First take off was scheduled for 0200 hours, 22 Jan. and as fast as safe for the following fourteen aircraft. , at 2300 hours, 21 January, a call was received by Major Sylvester changing the original destination from Hsinching to Suichwan.

In view of unpredictable circumstances that might have arisen and to assure that the mission would function in the desired manner and with all possible speed, personnel both officers and enlisted men were taken from operations, engineering, traffic, communications, and the medical section to handle any problem arising on the ground at destination or destinations and although

in some instances the need did not arise, the planning and initial ground work proved to be wisely laid.

The first aircraft departed Luliang at 0210 hours, 22 January, and proceeded to Suichwan followed by the remaining fourteen at approximately twenty-minute intervals. The last ship to leave broke ground at 0730 hours, 22 January.

The first ship arrived at Suichwan at 0545 hours, 22 Jan, and after a conference with Col. Cassel at that base, it was decided that the personnel and equipment from Suichwan would be moved directly to the Kunming area instead of Hsinching as first planned. It was further decided to divert six aircraft to Kanchow to off-load their wet cargo and return to Suichwan for return loads. The last ship to arrive at Suichwan for loading touched the ground at 11:45 hours. Due to the scheduled arrival of additional transport type aircraft, it was decided to return two of the squadrons ships to Kanchow for personnel and equipment. The last ship departed Kanchow at 1700 hours 22 January, and arrived at Luliang at 2400 hours, 22 January, completing the mission.

All aircraft completed their mission successfully. One incurred damage to wing tip, but returned safely, carrying a light load.

During the mission, aircraft of Sylvester's Circus flew with no fighter cover over Japanese held fields, in weather that did not always afford good cloud cover, to within less than 100 miles of Hong Kong in the East China Coast. Participants in the evacuation reported that even before the last ship left the ground, Jap artillery would be heard a few miles from the base.

The engineering section recorded 515 flights during January, a rough average of 285 trips for each of our assigned aircraft. Average flying time of each of the ships was 236 hours. Twenty-one engine changes were made on thirteen ships during the month.

The beginning of the month saw several key-personnel changes in the squadron staff. Capt. Angelo T. Lack, Jr. joined the 1343d as executive officer. 1st Lt. Anthony S. Wolfe joined the 1343d to become ordinance supply and motor transportation officer. 1st Lt. Walter J. French became squadron adjutant. He was very fair and did a good job.

2nd Lt. Earl E. Smith joined our squadron from the 1343d as Asst. Engineering Officer. Also, ten new flying officers joined us to take place of those being rotated. Thirty-five year old officers were rotated at this time. The squadron maintained a total of sixty enlisted men (line personnel and flight engineers) on flying status during the month.

Special services activities hinged around three points: First, under the supervision of 1st Sgt. Ralph M. Hobbs, a farmer from Georgia, an old crashed C-46 fuselage was obtained and placed in the enlisted men's tent area to serve as a coffee shop. On a twenty-four hour basis such items as coffee, doughnuts, cream puffs and pie made a pleasant between meal snack. Second, the nearby rescue and search training camp provided rest and relaxation to a certain number of men each week. In the Third place came the beginning of a physical training program of three hours a week

for every officer and enlisted man. This was worked out on a game basis; we had equipment and facilities to play baseball, basketball, football, volley ball, horse shoes, and went on hunting trips at the rest camp.

27 Feb 1945, Accident to C-46 #42-96689 at Yankai, in which pilot landed downwind and overshot the runway. Plane class 26.

28 Feb 1945, Accident to C-46 #42-61068 at Luliang, in which pilot applied excessive brake in early morning landing and nosed ship up. Major damage.

5 March 1945, Accident to C-46 #42-61042 at Luliang, in which pilot lost control of ship on take-off in a strong cross-wind and run off of runway into ditch. Major damage.

23 March 1945, Accident of C-46 #4296685 at Luliang, in which pilot lost control of ship as tail wheel failed to lock, although in the locked position. Major damage.

29 March 1945, Accident of C-46 #43-47140 at Chihkiang in which pilot landed too long and hot and was forced to ground loop the ship off the side of runway, to avoid running off a high embankment at the end of runway. Pilot was under strain as he had just witnessed a mid-air explosion of a B-25 landing at night. Major damage.

7 April 1945, Accident of C-46 #43-47211 in which ship took off from Hanchung for Liangshan and was never found. The missing crew were: Pilot F/O R.W. Fiske; Co. Pilot, 2nd Lt. R.K. Hill; Radio Operator, T/Sgt F. Bufkin, Flight Engineer, T/Sgt B.W. Wright.

10 April to 18 March. This movement was for the fourth and fifth divisions of the Chinese Army from Paoshan to Luliang.

10 April to 12 April. This was a movement of the 490th Bomb Squadron from Yunnanyi to Luliang and then to Hanchung.

21 April to about 10 May. The movement of the Chinese 22nd division, personnel, animals, supplies and equipment from Chanyi, Luliang, Chenkung to Chihkiang.

15 June 1945, Accident to C-46 #43-47166 at Chihkiang in which pilot undershot runway on landing. Class 26.

16 June 1945, Accident to C-46 #43-47094 at Laohwangping, in which pilot undershot runway at night on landing. Class 26.

From time of activation until June 20, 1945, when the 2nd Air Transport Squadron (Mobile) was deactivated the mission of the unit was not greatly changed. From time to time special missions were assigned, but the basic mission hardly varied from "Reverse-Hump" and "Intra-China hauling". When the 2nd ATS was deactivated, the personnel, together with aircraft and organizational equipment were transferred to the 1343d. Thus the famous "Sylvester's Circus"

became a thing of the past and the 1343d received personnel with wide knowledge of flying and maintenance conditions in India as well as China, and equipment that was difficult to get within the theatre.

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

Unit History. *2nd Air Transport Squadron (Mobile)*. AFHRA. Maxwell AFB, AL.