AIRBORNE TROOP CARRIER

Three-One-Five Group

by William L. Brinson

and the VOICES of the
315th Troop Carrier Group
by George F. Cholewczynski

Expanded
3rd edition

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For information, contact Miles Hamby at MilesHamby@cox.net, 703-76801353.

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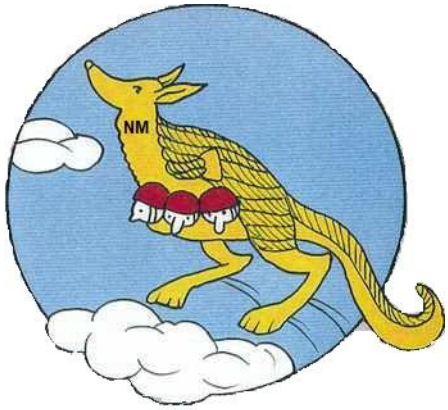

34th Troop Carrier Squadron
"NM"

43rd Troop Carrier Squadron
"UA"

"We will come"

315th Troop Carrier Group

309th Troop Carrier Squadron
"M6"

310th Troop Carrier Squadron
"4A"

818th Medical Air Evacuation
Transportation Squadron

Comprising Units of the 315th Troop Carrier Group

1942 – 1945

About This Book

This book was 80 years in the making – beginning in 1942 with the creation of the 315th Troop carrier Group, to its dissolve in 1945, to the inspiration and dedicated work of veteran member William "Bill' Brinson to preserve its history by writing the original book, to the three decades of reunions of the vets of the 315th, to researcher, historian, and publisher George F. Cholewczynski who interviewed many of the vets for his "voices", to Miles M. Hamby, *PhD*, an Air Force veteran himself and son of Col. Henry G. Hamby, USAF (Ret.), first Commanding Officer of the 310th Troop Carrier Squadron, and his re-publishing the book after the original file was lost.

The text in this book is exactly that of Brinson's original book and Cholewczynski's subsequent "Voices" addition, with no alterations of the text or content, except for correction of very few typographical errors, inclusion of very few editorial comments depicted in brackets "[abc]", and modifications in the format to fit 8½ x 11. All original pictures from the original book have been included (although not necessarily in their original positions in the narratives) and many pictures that were not in the original book (mostly from the website https://315Group.org, but all original photos from the period, courtesy of the vets who took them at the time) have been added in appropriate chapters and identified as such.

In each chapter, Brinson's original book "Airborne Troop Carrier: Three-One-Five Group" appears with its original chapter title followed by the added title "Brinson's History" to distinguish it from "Cholewczynski's 'Voices'" later in each chapter that were the transcripts of interviews by George Cholewczynski with the veterans subsequent to Brinson's first publishing in 1984.

Since the publication of the "Voices" edition and the website, there has been an increased interest in the 315th and the veterans, so much so, that Miles Hamby, son of an original veteran member of the 315th since its activation in 1942, set about re-publishing Brinson's and Cholewczynski's book with additional content from the era and new stories recently discovered and current content honoring the of 315th Troop Carrier Group and its veterans.

Miles M. Hamby, *PhD*
Editor of 3rd edition and webmaster 315Group.org

PREFACE

(from Brinson's original book)

I have had the privilege of knowing the men and women of the 315th Troop Carrier Group for some fifteen years now. I met them while doing research on World War II airborne operations and discovered a world that is usually left out of popular historiography.

When troop carrier is mentioned, which is rarely, it is usually in a context of what went wrong. In the Air Force, they are overshadowed by fighter and bomber operations. In fact, when I mention to people that I am working on the subject of troop carrier, the most common remark is, "Weren't they part of the Navy?"

Hindsight is great, but few bother exploring the avenues and evolution of military innovation fully. Paratroopers have captured the imagination since their first use in combat in 1940. It was easy enough to train and deploy paratroopers in the balmy skies of North Carolina, but it was another thing to do this in the often turbid skies of Europe, against a well-armed and skillful enemy.

Troop carrier flew in close formation at night, which was something that was not done by any other air force of any nation. This was during a time when navigation was so rudimentary that when raids of 1,000 bombers targeted entire cities, only a very small percentage of bombs landed within ten miles of the target. There was a long learning curve to airborne operations, and recruiting and training paratroops was the easy part.

In Sicily troop carrier aircraft were fired upon on successive nights by Allied naval and land units, shooting down dozens of troop carrier aircraft, damaging many more, and inflicting hundreds of casualties on aircrew, paratroopers, and glidermen. While changes were made so that friendly fire would not be a greater threat than the enemy, airborne operations were still one hell of a way to earn a paycheck.

In popular history airborne operations overshadow the fact that troop carrier ensured that the front line soldier had the beans, bullets, and oil he needed. And, when a wounded soldier's life hung by a thread, there was the hope of evacuation by air to better medical care than could be offered under canvas in a muddy field.

William Brinson
Author

* * * * * * * * *

The one blessing that troop carriers had was their equipment. Not as famous as the B-17, not as glamorous as the Spitfire or P-51, the C-47 was nonetheless one of the greatest aircraft that ever flew: reliable, kind and forgiving. Exploring the history of the 315th, listening to the voices of the aircrews, the reader will hopefully understand why, by the time it was all over, when asked: "How did you get into troop carrier?" The reply is usually, "Just lucky I guess."

George F. Cholewczynski
Editor, "Voices"

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to all of the members of the 315th Troop Carrier Group who responded to the appeal for their stories, materials and photographs for the production of this new edition of Bill Brinson's book, which has been supplemented by interviews, both recent and from past reunions, articles and reminiscences from the 315th Troop Carrier Group Association Newsletter, and items contributed by the members. I am grateful to you all.

I would like to acknowledge the following people for their help with the production of this book: Cecile Cassis, Michael F. Dilley, Corrin Jacobsen, Terrence Kovalcik, Michael W Leonard, Janice Shull, and especially Marie K. Erickson.

I would like to also specially thank David Benfield, an honorary association member in England, who always warmly welcomes visitors from the 315th, for providing numerous photos.

The 315th Troop Carrier Group Association really started in 1977 with a reunion in Savannah. There had been small reunions in 1947 and 1950, but with the advent of the Korean conflict, many of the old aircrew found themselves in uniform again, where their paths crossed often. Since 1978, reunions have been held every even year. William Brinson was a fixture of these affairs, as well as the compiler of the 315th's history.

Finally, a special salute to Robert L. “Doc” Cloer. “Doc” has been both the recording and corresponding secretary of the association for many years, and it was through his efforts in locating so many of the old 315th men that the association became so successful. The reader also owes a salute to “Doc” for this book. He was the mover and shaker behind this revised and expanded edition. He has been indefatigably helpful and encouraging to this editor, convincing the members to get off their duffs and have their stories told.

GF Cholewczynski

* * * * * * *

I cannot express sufficiently my appreciation to my friend George Cholewczynski, who, having attended several 315th Troop Carrier Association reunions, and with no family connection to the veterans himself, had the foresight to recognize the historical significance of their lives and deeds and recorded their stories for posterity. Because of his dedication to preserving their memory, many children, grand-children, relatives and just simply interested people have contacted and continue to contact me because they “want to know”! Thank you, George!

Miles M. Hamby, Editor, Expanded 3rd Edition

FOREWORD

by author William L, Brinson
Engineering Officer, 315th TCG, 1943

In September 1964, I went back to the airfield that once was Spanhoe RAF Station. The large oak trees near the crossroads in the center of the base were there, as was the watchtower. A few rusting Nissen huts remained and, through their broken windows, I could see that they had become depositories for farming equipment, just as the old tower had become a hay loft. Scraggily bushes covered much of the flight line area, and the trees that grew next to the site of the Headquarters building evidenced the growth of twenty years. The concrete foundations of one of the hangers and the Operations building remained. Still there, but crumbling away, were the old runways and the perimeter strip with its dispersed aircraft parking stands.

As I climbed through strands of a barbed wire fence and tried to identify some of the once familiar landmarks, my thoughts were back twenty years to when this ground was an operational base, filled with the noises of airplane engines, trucks, jeeps and American voices. That September day, the only sounds were the slight rustle of leaves on the trees, and, once, the whistle of a train down in the valley north of the field.

Later I drove down the slight hill to where the living sites once were located. There was no identification that any building had occupied those fields now tended by an English farmer.

Earlier that morning, driving from Oakham, I stopped at a pub in the small village of Harringworth and asked the owner for directions to Spanhoe. He was most helpful and asked if I was "one of the Americans who was there during the war years." When he learned that I was, he dropped the sometimes reserved manner of the English publican and talked about the days when the American airmen rode their bicycles down the hill in the evenings to spend a few hours at his establishment drinking "half and half" or a pint of bitter. I was forewarned that most of the buildings on the base had disappeared and that the land had reverted to private ownership. The pub owner assured me that although part of the base had been enclosed by a fence, it would be all right to climb through the wires and wander about. "Afraid you won't find much there," he repeated as I left.

He was right; there wasn't much at Spanhoe. The visit, however, evoked many memories. It was there, I suppose, that I first thought of writing a short account of the Army Air force unit with which I served for almost three years.

This, then, is the story of the 315th Troop Carrier Group, U.S. Army Air Force, which served overseas from November 1942 to July 1945. The majority of these months were in England and North Africa. Most of the story has been drawn from memory, assisted by some notes made by the writer during the war. Other data were obtained from the incomplete historical records which were reviewed in 1965 at the archives of the Air University; and from accounts of airborne operations in Europe and the Mediterranean prepared by the USAF Historical Division of the Air University.

No account can tell the whole story. My memory may be faulty on small points, and it is possible that I omitted incidents and names which others remember quite clearly. Emphasis is on the flying operations for that was the mission of the unit. The many hard-working officers and enlisted men, without whose support the flying could not have been maintained, are in no way intended to be slighted.

This story, then, is for my friends and acquaintances who might enjoy, as I have, mentally reliving the days they served in the 315th. ~

GENERAL ORDER WAR DEPARTMENT

No. 85 Washington 25, D. C. 3 November 1944

BATTLE HONORS. 1. As authorized by Executive Order No. 9396 (see I, Bull. 22. WD 1943) … Citations of the following units in General Orders No. 51, Headquarters, 4th United States Infantry Division, 14 August 1944, as approved by the Commanding General, European theater of Operations, are confirmed . . . in the name of the resident of the United States as public evidence of deserved honor and distinction. The citation reads as follows:

The 315th Troop Group. For outstanding performance of duty in enemy on the night of 5-6 June 1944. Members of Group Headquarters, and of the 34th, 43rd, 309th, and 310th Troop Carrier Squadrons of the 315th Troop Carrier Group performed 48 sorties in the mass vanguard of the invasion of the European continent. Despite alerted defenses, intense anti-aircraft fire, and the extreme hazards of low altitude flying under adverse weather conditions and over water, members of this group flew their aircraft at minimum airspeeds and dropped their paratroops over vital zones with great precision. The officers and enlisted men of the 315th Troop Carrier Group made an immeasurable contribution to the decisive and crippling blow struck at our enemies, and the fine teamwork and zealous endeavor were in the highest tradition of the military forces of the United States.

BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF WAR

G. C. Marshall
Chief of Staff

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It was late evening, June 6, 1944. I was the 34th Squadron's Operations Officer and not assigned to a designated crew. I wanted to go, so I bumped Bernie Pleasant's co-pilot and flew in his place. The paratroopers of the 505th PIR, 82nd Airborne, were clustered around the plane as we approached. The plane's wings and fuselage bore freshly painted two foot wide white and black stripes. A tall "NM" behind the cockpit windows proclaimed "34th Squadron". In a few hours, we, the crew, would flip a small toggle switch on the co-pilot's overhead panel. An eye-level green light forward of the cabin door on the port side would flash on. There would be shouts of" Go, Go, Go" as the troopers stepped into the dark skies over Normandy. With luck, we would fly home to our sanctuary in England. They would stay to fight.

~ Major J. S. Smith, Operations Officer, 34th TCS, Operation Neptune (D-Day), Ch 6

As we approached the coastal area of Holland and flew over Schouwen Island, patches of antiaircraft and small arms fire developed, with exploding shellfire filling the sky with flame and black smoke . . . . As we reached the island's east side, streams of glowing red tracer came arching up from the left, passing the nose of my plane. Glancing to the right I followed the flight of the tracers, and I caught a glimpse of flak bursting near the flight of C-47s slightly above and ahead of my flight. The lead plane was piloted by my Spanhoe roommate, Captain Richard Bohannan, and it appeared to be hit. One of the long parapacks slung from the belly of the C-47 was on fire. Black smoke and yellow flame spread under the fuselage. I immediately called Captain Bohannan in the clear, repeating, "Bo, your para-packs are on fire and burning. You should get out now!"

~ 1st Lieutenant William M. Perkins, Pilot, 34th TCS, Operation Market (Garden), Ch 8

Our DZ was across the Rhine River, not too far from a little town called Wesel. Since we were only going four or five miles into enemy territory, this particular mission was considered to be a milk run. Not only was this a terrible mistake, it was one of the greatest mistakes, as far as our group was concerned, made during the entire war.

~ Captain Bernard E. Coggins, Navigator, 43rd TCS, Operation Varsity, Ch 10

Chapter 1

FIRST DAYS

— BRINSON'S HISTORY —

At Olmsted Field, Middletown, Pennsylvania, the 315th Troop Carrier Group was activated on 17 February 1942, slightly over two months after the United States entered World War II. Composed of a headquarters and three squadrons (the 33rd, 34th, and 35th), its original strength was 17 officers and 114 enlisted men. Captain Thomas J. Schofield was the Group's first commanding officer, and the Group was assigned to the 50th Transport Wing.

Although a large number of the original cadre came from the 2nd and 6th Transport Squadrons at Middletown Air Depot (many of the first enlisted men first assigned were Pennsylvanians), other officers and enlisted men began arriving during the following months from various sources - the Basic Training Center at Keessler Field, Mississippi; the Army Air Forces Advanced Flying Schools at Columbus, Mississippi; Albany, Georgia; and Lake Charles Louisiana; the technical schools at Scott and Chanute Fields. Illinois and the Officers Candidate School at Miami Beach.

The Group's first months were taken up with receiving and assigning the new arrivals to various duties and squadrons while, at the same time, flying freight from air depots to locations throughout the country and Panama.

In April, Captain Hamish McLelland succeeded Major Schofield as the Group's commanding officer, and, in June, moved his undermanned unit to Bowman Field, Kentucky. This move was followed shortly thereafter by another move in early August to Florence Army Air Field, South Carolina.

Hamish McLelland was a Scotsman by birth. He had received pilot training in the Army Air Corps, served his active duty period as a reserve officer, then joined the enlisted ranks. The Air Corps later returned him to pilot status, while enlisted, and he was one of the small group of non- commissioned officers piloting Army airplanes in the 1930's. Sergeant McLelland was recalled to an extended period of active duty as an officer when the Air Corps began expanding about 1939-40.

During the summer of 1942, the 54th Transport Squadron replaced the 35th (the later assigned to the 64th Transport Group), and the 43rd Transport Squadron was activated with Captain H.B. Lyon named as the commanding officer. Lieutenant Donald G. Dekin had succeeded the 34th's first C. O. Lieutenant John Lacy, when Lacy was assigned to the 35th.

On 1 July, all transport groups and squadrons in the AAF were predesignated "Troop Carrier," and, at the same time, the 315th's parent unit became 52nd Troop Carrier Wing. (Although an Air Transport Command had only been organized as a unit in April 1942, with its primary mission being "to work with airborne forces," less than two months later this new command was re-designated the Troop Carrier Command. At the same time the name Air Transport Command was given to the Ferry Command. The new ATC was given the responsibility of inter-theater air transport.

The tenure of the 33rd and 54th Troop Carrier Squadrons with the 315th was relatively short-lived. In September, orders were received for the 33rd to proceed to the South Pacific, and the 54th to pack and go north to Alaska.

Florence Army Airfield had good concrete runways, but was short on buildings. Most of the offices and living quarters were in tents, either adjacent to the runways or in a grove of pine trees about a mile away. In spite of the somewhat limited facilities at the new base, an intensified program of training began with emphasis on formation flying, low level flights and instrument flying. Crews were sent to Lawson Field at Fort Benning, Georgia and began to work with the Paratroop School. There they obtained their first experience in early airborne-troop carrier procedures.

Captain Dekin was in charge of a 36 plane flight that airlifted 560 airborne troops from Camp Beauregard, Louisiana to Pope Field, North Carolina on 23 September. It was reported to be the largest mass airlift carried out by the troop carriers up to that time. Shortly after that mission, planes of the 315th participated in a longer mass flight when a unit was moved by air [rom Pope Field, Ft. Bragg, North Carolina to San Antonio, Texas. One of the 34th planes, piloted by Lieutenant K.H. Wakely, crashed at Pope Field during takeoff, but the crew escaped serious injury. Not as fortunate was a crew from 43rd Squadron, who crashed in New Jersey on 19 September. Lieutenants Crandford and Smith, Privates Baker, Klegg and Rosenberg died in the crash.

Late in September and early in October crews went

to Brookley Field at Mobile, Alabama, to obtain new C-47 aircraft which were assigned to the 43rd Squadron. The 34th was equipped with the C-53, which was basically the same as Douglas aircraft, but had a smaller cargo door, lighter flooring in the cabin, and different propellers.

Among the new personnel arriving at this time were 26 navigators, over half of whom had flown to England in June with the 60th Troop Carrier Group, the first troop carrier group to go overseas. (The 315th was the fourth Troop Carrier Group sent to England. In addition to the 60th, the 64th went to England in late July, and the 62nd in late September. These three groups went to North Africa in November 1942.) Some of the officers stated that they were at Florence to navigate the group "across the pond," as one put it, and would be with the 315th for only a short while. This supposition did not prove to be correct.

In early October, orders were received to prepare to leave for England.

Crew and passenger lists were prepared, and instructions were posted on drawing equipment, receiving "shots," and arranging personal affairs.

Just prior to noon, on Sunday, 11 October, the planes of the 315th left Florence and headed north for Kellogg Field at Battle Creek, Michigan. For the next two weeks the air echelon was at Kellogg with the First Concentration Command. This organization's mission was to give air units heading overseas a final "shake down" before they departed. Records, supplies, and aircraft equipment were checked; instrument flight checks were given the pilots; medical records were examined; and briefings were given. It all seemed to be a waste of time to most of the air echelon, with few positive results and much paper shuffling. Another annoyance at Kellogg was that of being restricted to the post most of the time. This did not keep all restricted, but kept all annoyed. Security regulations and "loose talk" were constantly stressed.

Meanwhile, the 16 officers and 332 enlisted men who made up the ground echelon of the 315th departed Florence on 17 October for Fort Dix,New Jersey, remained there until 24 November, when they sailed for Greenock Scotland on the Queen Elizabeth.

They arrived in Scotland six days later. Among this group were Lieutenants Conquest, Collison, Gilfillan, Grimes, Maize, West, Fry, Mauger, Dawson, 1st Sergeant Nagle, Master Sergeant Kanner, Corporal Wallace, Privates Pennington, Carrig, Hindermann, Hoffman, Manemann, Mullins,Lane and Schertler.

After two long weeks at Kellogg, the air echelon arrived at Presque Isle, Maine, on 28 October. Final preparations were made which included crew briefings for the various legs of the flight to England. On the first of November, however, heavy snow began to fall throughout the northeastern United States and Canada, which delayed the departure several days. Perhaps this should have been taken as an omen of things to come.

(Above) Col. Hamish first commander of 315 Transport Group, re-designated 315th Troop Carrier Group

(Below) Photo of Olmsted Field, ca 1950. Originally called Middletown Air Depot, re-designated an official Air Corp Facility in 1922. Re-named after Lt Sandford Olmsted of Vermont who was stationed at the Air Depot in the balloon and airship division of the Army Air Service and was killed in 1923 in the International Balloon Races in Brussels, Belgium. kRetrieved 2024. Retrieved from https://middletownpubliclib.org/olmsted-air-force-base/

FIRST DAYS

— CHOLEWCZYNSKI'S "VOICES" —

William Brinson

Our generation attended the local picture shows to see "WINGS," HELL'S ANGELS," and "DAWN PATROL," vicariously lived (and sometimes died) with the likes of Buddy Rogers, Richard Arlen, and Richard Barrhelmess as they lined up the square goggled German pilots in their gun sights ("our side" always wore oval shaped goggles) and blasted away with their twin Vickers guns. Did any of those stalwarts fly anything but the most maneuverable Spads, Nieuports, Camels and the like?

Neither did the flying aces who filled the pages of the pulp magazines of the twenties and thirties. When the often hard-drinking, but kindhearted heroes of the stories in "FLYING ACE" and "SQUADRON" and other magazines of that nature survived training, they were usually posted to a hard-luck squadron on the Western Front. Were any of them assigned to any other type of outfit than one flying "scouts," as pursuit planes were called then?

A few years later as metal aircraft replaced the wood and fabric ones, I advanced my sights to P-26s and B-12s. Prior to commencing flight training, I visualized myself at the controls of one of the new breed of military planes - P-40s, P-38s, P-39s, and for those machines with more than one person, A- 20s, B-25s, B-26s, and B-17s.

So what happened near the end of my flight training where I had 200 hours in Stearmans, Vultees, AT-6s, and a few hours in a small twin-engined beast with very short wings, the Curtiss AT-9? This happened: one morning, about two weeks before our class was scheduled to complete training, Major Preuss, the school's flying training director, came into the ready room where the cadets were gathered to be briefed by their instructors on what the day held for them.

"Now men, give me your attention," said the major, "I have some forms here which will be passed out to each of you. When filled out by you, these forms will indicate what your' preference is with respect to flying duty after you graduate. I am assuming, of course, that each of you will, unless you do something foolish, or go and out and kill yourself You may indicate a first and second choice, and the type of plane you would like you would like to fly within your category of aviation. Everybody might not get his choice, but many of you should." These might not have been his exact words, but they come close.

After the major's departure from the ready room, and before we cadets left for the flight line, the air was filled with comments such as, "What are you going in for, single or multi-engines?" "I think I'll ask for B-17s. I kind of like company on board." Hey buddy, you might be looking at the next Eddie Rickenbacker once I strap one of those P-38s around me." "That Douglas A- 20 sounds like some airplane. I'm going to try for it."

And so it went, both that day and the ones that followed up to graduation. There was talk around the barracks that three or four of our classmates had asked their instructors to recommend them for instructor duty, but most of us found it hard to believe that anyone would voluntarily do that.

I can't recall whether we received our assignment orders before or after our class walked across the stage of the Turner Field base theater, and had our silver wings pinned on our new green blouses (either Kuppenehiemer or Hart, Schaffner & Marx - the only brands sold in the local stores) by the school's C.O., Colonel Patrick. It must have been afterwards, because I don't remember the shock on any of the faces of the new pilot/lieutenants during the ceremony. Thirty of our class were kept as instructors. ALL of the other 81 graduates were assigned to Air Transport Command (which became Troop Carrier Command a week or so later when the former Ferry Command became ATC)!

The prevailing question was "How did we receive this assignment?" The answer was simple. During this period, May 1942, the expanding Army Air Force pilots were assigned where needed. From the top of the class to the bottom, all filled a quota. The same held true for other aircrew. The process did not please everyone, but does any process?

Just over a year later T was hailed one morning at Maison Blanche Airfield, Algeria, by a lieutenant who had been in the class behind ours. We had a few minutes to talk, and the subject arose as to the reason we were assigned to various commands. My friend was flying B-26s in Tunisia.

When I told him the story about my class's belief that we might have a preference in assignment, a belief that was quickly dispelled upon receipt of our orders, he laughed. "Would you believe the same thing happened to my class six weeks later?" Everyone of us was assigned to medium bombers - B25s and B-26s. That's where there were pilot vacancies that month."

Many things work out for the best. I thoroughly enjoyed my assignment in Troop Carrier. While the C-47s didn't lend themselves to chandelles and barrel rolls, they were dependable old friends who usually took us over to our destination and brought us back. Those who flew them could have nothing but admiration, almost affection, for those durable airplanes.

No doubt there were many members of our group who had the same experience concerning assignments as I had. I don't know what their reply is when asked the question "How did you become a Troop Carrier pilot?" Mine is, "Just lucky, I guess."

Edward M. Papp

On the day following my enlistment in the Army in Chicago, two days after Pearl Harbor, I was sent together with a few hundred other young men to Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois, the reception center for recruits in the area. The first few days were spent getting uniforms, listening to lectures and so on. On the fourth day we were told that on the morrow we were to be put through "classifying examination."

By "classifying," I assumed that meant being assigned to a branch of the Army: infantry, artillery, armor, ete. I was not sure what the air arm of the army was called, but that was the part of the Army I wanted to get into. My reasoning was, what branch could teach me more, and do the most good, in my chosen profession (industrial advertising) if I was lucky enough to survive the war? After some thought, I decided the Air Corps meant airplanes. They had internal combustion engines, hydraulic and electrical systems, and a lot of other mechanical stuff which was also involved with automobiles.

So on that cold winter morning we were marched over to a building and told to stand in line until our name was called, Entering, I saw a row of narrow cubicles on each side of the aisle. In each sat a uniformed person. I was directed to a cubicle and saw my classifier, a corporal. He had a pad of forms in front of him on which he entered the information, name, address, dependents, education, etc. Then carne the key question, "What are your hobbies?" Here was where I became careless with the truth, "I have a car that I take apart and put together every weekend. My hobby is mechanics."

That, I am sure, was the reason I was put in the Air Corps and sent to Chanute Field. Now if the truth be told, I had absolutely no mechanical aptitude whatsoever! I didn't own a car until five years later, and scarcely knew one end of a wrench from another. It says much for the Army Air Corps' training methods at Chanute that I was able, with not too many serious mistakes, to become a crew chief. Ever since that day at Camp Grant I've told the story of how a corporal controlled my destiny and started me on the way to the 315th Troop Carrier Group at some field near Florence, South Carolina.

Bernard Brown

I was born and raised in Chillicothie, Ohio. When I got out of high school, I worked at the Mead Paper Company. I had always built model airplanes, so I departed Chillicothie and went to Wichita, Kansas, and went to school at United Aircraft, and learned to build airplanes. That process was six weeks, and then I went back to Columbus, and went to work for Curtiss-Wright, where we were building SOC3-Cs and SB2Cs at that time. I was assisting not only in the fabricating of parts, because we didn't have manufactured parts at that time, but also in heat treating, processing and so forth, up to the installation. I wound up with a job installing the outer wing panels.

I decided to go into the Air Corps, and they shipped me out to Indianapolis that afternoon, then by to train to South Carolina for training. I wound up as an aviation mechanic because of my earlier history. I never went to school until I got over to Burtonwood. I did some studying over there. I made corporal, and then I made sergeant. We were moving along pretty fast, and I wound lip working on the airplanes and I became a crew chief that started the real excitement then – learning the airplane!

Aubrey Ross

My ambition throughout high school had been to become a pilot in the Army Air Corps. Since two years of college was required at that time, I enrolled in the

University of Florida for the sole purpose of getting the necessary credits so I could qualify for the flight program. World War II began before I finished my second year, so I entered, as many thousands of others did, by passing the written exam.

From the minute I was checked out in the Stearman PT-17 until graduation, I could picture myself in aerial combat flying a P-51 or P-47 against an Me-l 09 or a Zero. Even when I was told that my height of six feet two inches might be disqualifying, I never gave up the dream that I would get fighter. After much effort and some good rides in the Vultee "Vibrator," I convinced my flying instructor that I was fighter pilot material, so I headed for single engine advanced at Napier Field, Alabama.

Flying the AT-6 was probably the most fun I had during training since much of the flying consisted of maneuvers that fighter pilots used in combat. We were constantly reminded that being assigned to fighters would depend to a large degree on how well we scored at gunnery school. Those who scored poorly would be assigned to tow targets. I was lucky to score among the top in both aerial and ground gunnery, so I was certain that I was a born fighter pilot, and headed for P-51s. I had it made!

Orders were handed out after graduation, and to my surprise, mine read "(win engine fighters, Bergstrom Field, Texas." What a disappointment, but P-J8s were better than bombers. Imagine how I felt when I arrived at Bergstrom and there was nothing on the flight line but DC-3s, C-47s, and C-53s. I was informed that there was NO mistake in my orders, and to get back in line. I had never heard of Troop Carrier before.

Looking back now, it was probably the best thing that had ever happened to me because the rugged old bird forgave many mistakes I made as a pilot. Thanks to the C-47, I survived the war and many more hours of flying afterwards. Anybody asks me how I came to be in Troop Carrier, I would also have to answer, "Just lucky."

William Nagle
1st Sergeant, Headquarters, 315th Troop Carrier Group

On September 10, 1940 I reported for duty with the 6th Transport Squadron, U.S. Army Air Corps, Olmstead Field, Middletown, Pennsylvania. In those days you went from recruiting station to unit of assignment.

The squadron commander was 1st Lieutenant Hamish McLelland. About six weeks into basic training 2nd Lieutenant Robert J. Gibbons came out to the training area and asked for volunteers who knew how to type. I was one of the volunteers. This began an interesting career which led to my being present at the birth of the 315th Transport Group, later designated Troop Carrier, in Hanger 5 at the Middletown Air Depot. Captain Thomas J. Schofield, CO of the 2nd Transport Squadron, was initially appointed group commander with McLelland as group operations officer. A "date of rank" situation arose where McLelland outranked Schofield. He was subsequently appointed group commander.

Corporal Elmer S. Carson, Francis Hall, and I were clerks in group headquarters. During the early part of 1942 all we did was type up recommendations for direct commissions for senior NCOs. Like clockwork, master sergeants were commissioned captains and technical sergeants became 1st lieutenants.

In February, 1942 I was told to report to 1st Lieutenant Howard B. Lyon, the commander of HQ & HQ Squadron. I reported in proper military manner. He asked, "How would you like to be the first sergeant of the squadron?" The vacancy appeared when George A. Eckels was commissioned 2nd lieutenant. I replied that it was a pretty big job for a 20-year-old corporal.

HB said that he had queried the squadron's senior NCOs, and that they favored me as the top kick. I began as acting first sergeant with the rank of staff sergeant, but wearing the chevrons of the latter. We then moved to Louisville, Kentucky, and I was content with the situation. It meant that I could afford at least one night a week at the Air Devil's Inn on Bardstown Road.

It was in Louisville that I found out Lieutenant Colonel McLelland was a decision maker, I was having coffee in the mess with Sergeant John English, the mess sergeant. He and McLelland had previously soldiered together as corporals. McLelland came in and said, "How about a cup of joe, John?" English said, "How about some cooks, Corporal McLelland? Colonel Mac 'then turned to me, "Nagle, send English a student cook." That is how Stroude Sonner, an orderly room clerk, became a cook.

In August 1942 we moved to Florence, South Carolina. What I remember most about Florence is hot nights and millions of mosquitos. I got the squadron area set up and tents assigned. Being human, I was beginning to wonder when somebody would say, "Okay Nagle, you passed the test, we'll make you a full-fledged first sergeant."

We began receiving great numbers of troops to bring the group up to strength. One that I remember most was Private Wayne F. Solomon, later Staff Sergeant Solomon in group operations. I had him and others raking and policing the squadron area when I saw Captain w,L. Parker approaching. Knowing Solomon's Hoosier humor, I had to eavesdrop. The conversation went something like this:

Captain Parker: "What's your name, private?"

Solomon: "Solomon"

Captain Parker: (looking for a 'Sir'): "Solomon what?"

Solomon: “Just Private Sullivan”

Captain Parker: "Where did you take basic training?"

Solomon: “Keesler.”

Captain Parker: "Keesler what?"

Solomon: "Keesler Field, Mississippi."

Captain Parker: "Keesler Field, Mississippi what?"

Solomon: “Captain, you ain't been around much, have you?"

Captain Parker walked away muttering something about disrespectful draftees.

As time passed in Florence I felt that I had proven my abilities as first sergeant, and should be receiving the pay. One day, Parker came down to the orderly room tent to check the squadron area. I accompanied him on the inspection, but I wasn't too talkative. This was enough to make anybody that knew me suspicious. When he asked Group Sergeant Major E.S. Carson what was eating me, Carson told him I was upset about not being promoted. Parker told Carson, "You call him and tell he will be promoted to first sergeant on September 1st." This was the day that first sergeant rank and rate of pay rose from that of technical sergeant to master sergeant. Parker then added, "And tell Nagle that if he so much as once steps over the traces one inch, I will personally come down to the squadron area and tear the chevrons off his arms.

Obviously that never happened. I counted Major Parker as one of the friends to whom I could go to with any problem, and we always came up with solutions.

At Florence, South Carolina, the 315th HQ & HQ Squadron's orderly room was located in a two-room building at the edge of the base farthest from the flight line. I had my office in one room. The other, that comprised the orderly room, was under the management of Raymond J. Armstrong, a native of Zanesville, Ohio. 1st Lieutenant William Grimes, a WW I retread, commanded the squadron.

There was one plus to being so far from the flight line. Smitty's restaurant was some 300 yards down the road. Housed in a log cabin, the man's specialty was fried chicken dipped in buttermilk and honey. It was a favorite hangout It»" the men of the 315th.

On the evening of October 17, 1942 the war in Europe suddenly became very dose to the men of the ground echelon as they assembled at the Florence railroad station for transport to Ft. Dix, New Jersey. The seriousness of the situation came to us with a reality that had been buried under the surface. Our steel helmets, gas masks and weapons made it all real. Each man had his own thoughts about what was in his future.

The movement was presumably secret, but it seemed that the entire town was at the station when we arrived. They were there to say goodbye, and wish us good luck, though I'm sure some were heaving a huge sigh of relief to see us go.

We boarded our assigned coaches for the trip to Ft. Dix. It was dark as (he train pulled out of the station. The mess car was well stocked with both liquid and solid nourishment. I have no idea where the liquid nourishment carne from, but I do know that canteen cups were very popular items on the (rip. Not too many men seemed to be drinking coffee, unless it was coffee that smelled 80 proof'.

Captain Parker

At Ft. Dix we were initially billeted in old World War I barracks, and then in pyramidal tents, six to eight men in each. Sanitary facilities consisted of a field latrine with 18 wooden seats over a trench. This was covered by a tent. I might say, by November it was a more than a bit chilly.

It was late in November when Lieutenant Grimes informed me that one of the HQ Squadron had gone

AWOL, and had turned himself in at the New Cumberland Army Depot outside of Harrisburg. He then asked me who should go to Harrisburg and pick him up. I told him, "It is a job for the Ist sergeant and another man." I picked an individual whom I thought would be ideal for the task, and together we departed Ft. Dix that afternoon. When we reached Harrisburg I said that we should have dinner and see a movie. We knew that the outfit was going to go overseas soon, and we anticipated a night of visiting our old Harrisburg haunts from the days when the 315th was stationed in nearby Middletown.

As we came out of the movie, I suddenly had one of those "DON'T DO IT" feelings come over me. To make a long story short, I signed for the prisoner, and we hopped on a train that got into Trenton at 1 AM. That evening the 315th's ground echelon began boarding the RMS Queen Elizabeth. Had we had a night of fun in Harrisburg, there would have been three AWOLs missing the boat.

The next morning we left New York harbor, as part of a large convoy of what looked like a hundred ships of all sizes. I was in my quarters on "C" Deck. One of the men came down and said, "If you want to see the lady with the torch, you better get up one deck. I got there as the torch was sinking below the horizon.

Suddenly I was overcome with a horrible empty feeling. It was a combination of homesickness, and wondering if I would ever see New York again.

On the second day out of New York I went up to the promenade deck to watch the rest of the convoy. I was surprised to see that all of the other ships had disappeared, and the Queen Elizabeth was alone on the gray Atlantic. I soon found out that she could outrun any U-boar, and had some sense of security return. We kept changing course every six minutes as a precaution.

We could tell by the vibration when this was happening. When going flat out, the ride was a smooth as a drive on the interstate.

There were 18,000 troops aboard including Canadians, RAP personnel, and of course, thousands of Americans. There were also a handful of ARC personnel, and some of those Red Cross women were real lookers. I know that sailors call stairs "ladders," but the stairways were beautiful, wide and luxurious wooden affairs. We were served two meals a day, mostly potatoes and fish.

Colonel Hamish McLelland (in trench coat) in North Africa with Allied officers. Photo courtesy of S. McLelland Hoefler (daughter).
Photo courtesy of Sheila McLelland Hoefler (daughter of McLelland)

(Above L to R) ca 1945, Col. Hamish McClelland, CO 315th TCG 1942-45 and LTC Colonel Howard B. Lyon, CO 315th 1945-46. Picture on wall Gen. Henry “Hap” Arnold, Chief of Army Air Forces. *Photo htts://315group.org*

-- End of Chapter --

(Above) ca. 1942, 315th TCG C-47, a/c 290, pre-Normandy invasion (note absence of invasion stripes). Note absence of red dot in center of white star, removed in 1942 so as to distinguish US from Japanese aircraft. White "wings" were added to the star in 1943. *Photo courtesy of Knight Photo Collection*

(Above) McClelland (C, others not identified) in front of CG-4A Waco glider, England
Photo from https://315group.org

(Below) ca May 1942, 309th TCS C-47, prior to Normandy invasion. Note absence of invasion stripes and presence of white "wings" with white star that were added in 1943. The 309th TCS was created in May 1944. *Photo from https://315group.org*

(Above) The "first" days – C-47 #887 with nose art. Nose art was much more prevalent on bombers and fighters than on troop carriers. Note absence of nose two-character unit identifiers (315th Troop Carrier Group's squadrons 34th "NM", 43rd "UA", 309th "M6", 310th "4A") that didn't appear until 1943. *Photo from https://315group.org*

Chapter 2

TO ENGLAND

— HISTORY —

From the base at Presque Isle, the 315th's air route to England first went 573 miles northeast to the Royal Canadian Air Force Base at Goose Bay, Labrador; then 776 miles east-northeast to a landing field (Bluie West One) in southern Greenland. Continuing northeast, the third leg was 745 miles to Reykjavik, Iceland. At Reykjavik, the route turned southeast for the last overwater flight of 870 miles to Prestwick, Scotland. It was just short of 3000 statute miles from the airfield in Maine to the one in Scotland.

In retrospect, when one considers that less than one fourth of the pilots had more than 500 flying hours; that inclement weather flying was a new experience to the majority of them; that the aircraft takeoff weights permitted on this flight were the maximum permitted; it is interesting to note that every plane that started out from Presque Isle arrived at its destination.

On Saturday, 7 November 1942, twenty-one of the twenty-six Group aircraft departed Presque Isle for Goose Bay. The following day, nineteen of these went on to Greenland. Lieutenant Colonel McLelland piloted a 43rd Squadron C-47, as did Captain Lyon and Lieutenant Stark from Group Headquarters. Captain Estrumse and Captain Gibbons from Headquarters flew 34th Squadron planes along with Captain Dekin (34th C. 0.), Lieutenants Hamby, Henner, Greene, Brinson, Pleasant, Schwerin, Sitarz, Steinbach, Kirschner, and Blaney. Lieutenant Otto Peterson (43rd C. O.), Lieutenants Andrews, Mandt, Matson, Pate, Carnick, Davis, Campbell, Beckley, and Staff Sergeant J. Campbell were at the controls of 43rd Squadron planes. (See Appendix 2 for the complete Air Echelon.)

Five of the twenty-six aircraft were delayed at Presque Isle either because of mechanical problems or because they needed parts; then they were held up by a spell of bad weather which prevented them from arriving at Goose Bay until 17 November.

The facilities for transients at Goose Bay were austere. Sleeping accommodations were in a gymnasium containing double-decked blinks placed very close together. If there was an efficient heating system in the gymnasium when the 315th stopped there, it was not functioning properly at that time. Most men slept in all the clothing they brought from the planes. None of the visitors was unhappy to move on. The five crews that arrived at Goose Bay a week later, after a few days in the "gym," were provided with better accommodations. It was well for them that new barracks had been constructed, since these five crews remained in Labrador for approximately two weeks.

While the scenery on the flight from Maine to Goose Bay was new and interesting, once the St. Lawrence River was passed, the view below was mostly low forested country cut up by lakes and streams.

The route to Bluie West One was something different. First, there was almost 700 miles of overwater flying across the Davis Strait between Labrador .and Greenland. Southern Greenland, when sighted, presented a coastline completely barren, extremely precipitous, and containing many narrow fjords. The destination was about fifty miles up Tunugdliarfik Fjord where mountains in the vicinity of the airfield rise to five thousand feet. The first radio checkpoint approaching BW-l was located on Simiutak Island, a small rocky knoll at the mouth of the fjord. Continuing up Tunugdliarfik Fjord, thc course passed the Eskimo village of Narsak. Other than Narsak, there was nothing but rock to the right and left, near freezing green-blue water below, .and the Greenland icecap glimmering in the distance (if there was no cloud cover), After passing Narsak, at the visual check point of Sugarloaf Mountain, the course turned left up the fjord, and to the right was the airstrip. The procedure was to lower landing gear and wing flaps, and make a straight-in approach to the runway. A two percent gradient in the runway aided slowdown when landing.

The planes that landed in Greenland on 8 November remained there for OIlC month as a result of storms and unfavorable winds in the North Atlantic during that period. Snow, rain and high winds plagued the area. On 3 December, winds were measured at 70 mph, rising to 112 mph in gusts. These "Foehn" winds necessitated tying down the airplanes, and, in some cases, placing heavy rocks on the wings and tail surfaces to steady them in the most violent gust.,

Those few days when the weather around BW-l was favorable enough to fly, but not favorable enough to go on to Iceland, Group aircraft were sent on search

missions over the Greenland icecap trying to locate three planes that had disappeared several weeks earlier. On 18 November, Lieutenant Julius Petersen, Staff Sergeants Steve Bolling, and Joe Campbell located one of the planes, an A-20 light bomber, and dropped supplies near the aircraft. The crew of the A-20 was later rescued.

The accommodations for transients at BW-l were acceptable if the stay there was only for a night or two. After a week they became an annoyance. Having nothing to do was the main problem. Except for the occasional flights by some over the icecap, sleeping, reading, complaining about the weather, and participating in furious card games of poker and "Red Dog" helped pass the time. Periodic trips were made to the flight line to check on the planes and run the engines for a few minutes.

There was talk at one stage of returning the air echelon to the U. S. and flying to England via the long South Atlantic route. Of course, most days the weather was bad in both directions (west to Labrador and east to Iceland), therefore, nothing came of this scheme, if it had been seriously considered at all.

The last five planes for Goose Bay, led by Captain Hamby, arrived at BW- 1 on 9 December. That same morning, twenty-one of the first planes to arrive in Greenland departed for Iceland. Nine of these returned because of weather or maintenance difficulties. Those that proceeded eastward climbed to more than 12,000 feet to safely top part of the Greenland glacier.

Within the next seven to ten days the weather over the North Atlantic improved appreciably, which permitted all 315th planes to fly to Iceland, and from there to Scotland. Some flights went directly from Reykjavik to Prestwick; others landed at the northernmost airfield in the New Hebrides, Stornoway, to refuel. Two 43rd Squadron aircraft were damaged slightly while at Reykjavik. Parts were removed from one plane to repair the other, thereby leaving a crew in Iceland until the following February when replacement parts were received. Another plane from the 43rd, piloted by Lieutenant Matson, while flying low in limited visibility between Prestwick and Aldermaston, bounced off the top of a hill in Wales, but was fortunate enough to make a controlled landing at a nearby British airfield. The first 315th C-47 touched down at the field at Aldermaston on 12 December, and with the exception of the one temporarily stranded in Iceland, all arrived within the next few days. Upon arrival in the U.K., the 315th became a unit of the 8th Air Force.

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TO ENGLAND

— CHOLEWCZYNSKI'S "VOICES" —

2nd Lieutenant J.S. Smith ("Stan")
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

Fortunately, we had navigators aboard who had been through there before. You had to drop your gear, and make a port turn and then a starboard turn, and there was the airfield, which was essentially matting, and it sloped upwards a significant number of degrees. If you had to go around, it was extremely difficult, because there just wasn't much airspace to maneuver in. No one went around if they could possibly avoid it, and I really don't remember anybody having to. Greenland was, as you could imagine, bleak as hell. The water being essentially the same color as the rocks and the sky. There was a certain grayness to it. It all sort of blended together after a while.

2nd Lieutenant Julius H. Petersen ("Bert")
Pilot, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

We thought that we would shoot straight through to England. In other words, one day to Greenland, one day to Iceland and one day to Prestwick. That didn't mean we flew each day in a row, but knew that we would take a couple days off. We arrived in Greenland on November 8, 1942. The minute we got there, we were sent out on search missions for the next three days. We didn't find anything, and then the weather closed in.

Staff Sergeant Richard L. Adams ("Rick")
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

All those hops that we did were fairly long. That was a good bit of flying, but flying in those northern latitudes wasn't actually all that bad. The only problems we had were when we got into Greenland and we were stuck therefor a couple of weeks. I was born and raised in western Nebraska, and cold didn't bother me much. I remember we went out on the first search mission. They had taken the back door off, and they had equipment they would boot out if we found somebody. I remember looking at the free air temperature gauge and that

mother was down against the peg, which was -50 degrees. That was some cold.

The landscape was something to see for the first time. Ice and rock, and absolutely no trees. It was just bare.

When you were coming into Bluie West One, you had to go down a fjord and then up over a mountain, and then down and onto the strip, which ran uphill going in. You had to take off going downhill, and then up and over the icecap. The only way that you could do that was to circle up and over the field before you headed out. Flying over the icecap was kind of weird because it was practically all white, and there was a real danger of whiting out.

We were billeted in huts, ten or twelve people and a pot-bellied stove.

There was little to do to fight boredom. You were with these guys all the time, and there was no place to go out. We were all kind of anxious to get moving again. In between times we went out on search missions, but the temperature and wind were such that if it got blowing, you couldn't get out. I had pajamas, flannel with elastic around the ankles and wrists, and I didn't take those things off for I don't know how long. I'd go out of the quarters to get a shower, and you'd about freeze your fanny off doing that. In between times there wasn't that much to do but lie around. I wasn't much of a drinker, but I did notice that we certainly did play poker. Cards were probably our saving grace. We had nothing else to do around there. We went down to the airplanes once, twice a day, to make sure they were in one piece. There was not that much to do there, just routine stuff on the airplane. Most of the time you were in your quarters or going to the mess hall, or going to get a shower.

2nd Lieutenant Julius H. Petersen
Pilot, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

There were more days when we couldn't fly than when we could. We used to check at operations early in the morning, and remember, we didn't have a lot of daylight then, so it would be dark when we checked. The guy who checked to see if anything was on would come back into the barracks. We had about 40 people living in them, along with a 20-hole latrine. He would come through the door and holler out, "Let the games begin," and out would come the cards, and poker games would start, and that would go on until the following morning. For some reason we could get all the beer we wanted. Practically everybody had a case of beer under his cot. The minute that flying was of, out came the beer and the cards.

The chaplain was disgusted with everybody drinking, playing cards, and swearing, and he went to the day room and got a bunch of dart boards and checker boards and monopoly games, and brought them back to the barracks. He was trying to get everybody to play board games instead of poker. Shooting darts was popular then, so he tried to get everybody involved. I volunteered to play the chaplain in a game. When he cocked his arm to throw the dart, someone in the back of the barracks shouted out, "TWENTY BUCKS ON THE CHAPLAIN!"

When there was a chance to fly, we would all report to the operations room. We had a lot of non-flying personnel, staff officers, intelligence officers, and so forth. "Joe," one of the squadron intelligence officers would always get to the operations room early, and he and a bunch of fellows who had nothing to do with flying would sit up in the front seats so we pilots could not see or hear what was going on. One day some of the boys woke "Joe" up in the middle of the night, and told him that they were having a briefing for all the intelligence people, and he went out into the night with the wind howling. He was up in the front seat at Operations all by himself, and waiting for everybody else to show up.

Everybody thought that they could beat the jackpot in "Red Dog," but nobody could. Fortunes were won, lost and sometimes recovered. "Joe" got into one of those games. We had never seen him gamble, smoke, or ever take a drink. Before the game was over he was doing all three.

Staff Sergeant Jack E. Wilson ("Jake")
Pilot, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

We got to the point where the only food was pork and canned peaches. We still had some rather lousy coffee and plenty of sugar and flour, and the bakers made fresh bread daily. Some of the cooks were innovative and with all of those canned peaches, they started draining off the juice. They put it in casks behind the stoves, added some baker's yeast, and then stood back to see what would happen, and plenty did.

The result was a remarkably potent liquor which they called "mojo juice."

I was not much of a drinking man in those days. I tasted it, and it was terrible. Some of the enlisted men acquired a few bottles of the stuff and proceeded to have a roaring party. During its height those of us who were sober were kept busy keeping the drinkers from beating the hell out of each other, or restraining them from going outside underdressed for the arctic cold.

The next day we were aware of men with some of the most monuments hangovers ever seen. Some of them damned near died, yet after three days, all had recovered. In a way it was fortunate that the weather remained bad and we didn't have to fly. The senior officers found out about all of this, and wasted no time in confiscating all the mojo juice that could be found. Strict orders were posted prohibiting any consumption of alcoholic beverages and that ended the mojo period.

1st Sergeant King and I found a diversion. We were both westerners and outdoorsmen. So, when the weather permitted, we roamed the hills between the bay and the mountains. There were no trees but there were clumps brush and we soon learned that they provided cover for ptarmigan. We had never seen these small white birds before, but knew that they were delicious. The birds did not always flyaway when approached, but sometimes just walked or ran away from us. We tried to shoot them with our sidearms, but could not hit them in the head with the .45 caliber pistols, and we knew better than to hit them in the body. We did find a way to get them. The juniper bushes had stalks heavy enough to make a dub, and we whittled some. We threw these eighteen inch sticks at the birds, and were very happy to get a few.

Then we discovered the great arctic hares - all white with black on their ears, and larger than a western jackrabbit. Like the western jack, they would jump up and run off about fifty yards, then stop and stand up, and look back. This was ideal. In each aircraft we had a couple of Springfield rifles, and these were just what we needed. We dressed the game and hung it on the outside wall of the barracks where it froze.

Then, unbelievably, we found a fishing hole! We came across a small, clear water stream alongside the great glacier. Before emptying into the bay, the stream formed a couple of pools. The big winds had cleared the snow off these pools exposing clear ice. Through this we saw large fish swimming below.

Excited, we went to the airplane and asked the crew chief for permission to board and search through our emergency gear for fishing tackle. He granted us permission. (We were careful to ask. On the ground the crew chief "owns" the airplane, and even officers knew enough to ask him for permission to board.)

Armed with the tackle, and an axe to chop a hole in the ice, we went to the kitchen and begged the cook for a little bacon for bait. We jigged for the fish and got some. They were big and beautiful. Someone said they were "salmon-trout," and perhaps they were. We hung them on the side of the barracks with our other trophies.

Everybody in the barracks was enthusiastic, so we decided to put on a big feed. However, the cooks would not cook our game in the mess hall. We swiped lard, salt and flour and tried to rig our oil heaters into cook stoves. Everybody wanted to help, and using mess kits as skillets, we started cooking. We were only partially successful, yet our efforts paid off as a diversion for at least one evening.

2nd Lieutenant J. S. Smith
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

We spent two or three weeks there, maybe longer, and it almost overwhelmed you. One of the warmest places in Greenland was the damned latrine. That's where people used to gather and warm up. The rest of the time you just hung around and spent plenty of sack time. There were lots of poker games, but I'm not a poker player. There was very little flying because of the weather, and the only flying we did do was on search missions. But with the winds in Greenland, some of the crew chiefs managed to get some flying time - even though they were lashed down, there were times that the wheels of the airplanes managed to lift off due to the relentless gales.

2nd Lieutenant Julius H. Petersen
Pilot, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

We were sent out to search for planes that were down, and we did find one, an A-20 attack plane. It was cold. It was 40 or 50 degrees below zero and we were flying with the door removed. Everything froze up.

The icecap in the part of Greenland where we were flying was 10,000 feet thick. It was awfully hard to see on top of the icecap with the sun shining down on the ice and snow. You had to really get dose to see anything on it. It was dangerous to get too dose to the icecap because you could easily get vertigo. You had to

fly on instruments to keep from flying into the snow bank. The pilot had to keep hands on the controls, and the co-pilot had to do all the looking. You never had a good horizon to go on because it was all solid snow.

We were 10,000 feet up, and it was the co-pilot that spotted the missing A-20. Even looking straight at it, it was very hard to see. The people wen moving around the plane, waving, and needless to say, very happy to see us We dropped them food, tents, warm clothes, blankets, and a Coleman stove.

Months later I met one of them in England. We had found them it November, and they didn't get out of there until the following spring. The man was really burned because he had been expecting to receive the $7 a day: per diem, but this was denied as food and lodging was provided by the. government the entire time.

2nd Lieutenant Norman Greene
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron
(in a letter to Private Raymond Schwartz; Radio Mechanic, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron, after the war)

Dear Ray:

As you know, I have always given you the credit for saving our lives on the trip overseas from Greenland to Iceland. We were flying at 14,000 feet between two layers of solid clouds and as we approached Iceland we could see mountains and had to let down on instruments dropping out about 300 feet above the ocean. The navigator told me to turn north and we flew about 1-1/2t hours without seeing anything except the rugged mountains on our right.

About that time I became a little anxious because I saw the gas getting low. .As I remember, I asked the navigator several times if we were headed in the right direction. Something inside of me told me no, but he was positive. Then I spotted you and asked you to please get a radio fix on the airport. You came back 180 degrees. We turned south and a couple of hours later saw the field lights and came straight in. They were worried about us. We were the last plane in and they were about to turn the lights off. In those days there were no land beacons. As we rolled to a stop, the gas tanks were on empty. We never could have crash landed and certainly no one could have survived in the water at those temperatures. That water was damn cold. If you had not gotten that fix we would have still been flying and there would not have been any Reunions for us. 1942. That's a few years ago! But it will always be on my mind.

Best regards,
Norm Greene,
December 31, 1989

2nd Lieutenant Julius H. Petersen (Bert)
Pilot, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

We had already flown 3,000 miles when we finally reached Prestwick, Scotland on December 12. We then were given two days off to rest. Our last hop to Aldermaston was going to be a walk in the clover after our long-haul over the North Atlantic during early winter.

I was flying left seat, and Sig Matson was my co-pilot. We were good friends, even though he outranked me, and we had always taken turns in the left seat. In addition to my navigator and radioman, we had eight passengers and a ton of equipment. The ceiling was overcast and high, with scattered cloud at 1,000 feet. The first leg over water to the Isle of Man was a breeze. As we turned east toward the coast of northern Wales, the low level cloud increased. My navigator, Woodrow White, told me that we still had altitude over the Berwyn Hills in the area.

We were at 1,900 feet when we entered another thick cloud layer. We lost sight of the lead aircraft. Mushing through the clouds, I was astonished to see green trees emerge from the gray clouds coming straight at us. I yanked back the yoke, and slipped the bird into a right turn when the right wing thumped against a hill top. I immediately turned to the left, and experienced the same. [See photo at end of the chapter]

Everything happened very fast. The bird was starting to stall, but fortunately, the peaks were already behind us. I put the nose down to pick up speed, and managed not to hit anything else as the bird flew down the contours of the butte. Sig was struggling with the controls right along with me. In fact, it seemed as if we were both trying to pull the controls away from each other.

We finally regained control, and as I regained my breath, I glanced out the window. I was flabbergasted to see the last six feet of the wing standing vertically. I told Sig what I saw, and he looked out the right window

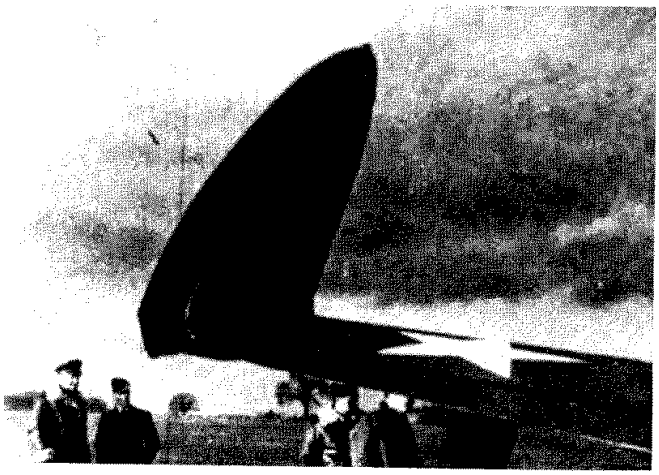
and reported the preposterous fact that the end of other wing was also bent straight up.

Our ailerons were gone, so turning was a serious problem, but we were still flying. Woody looked at his maps and reported that there was an airfield ahead of us. It was labeled Montford Bridge, and looked good to us.

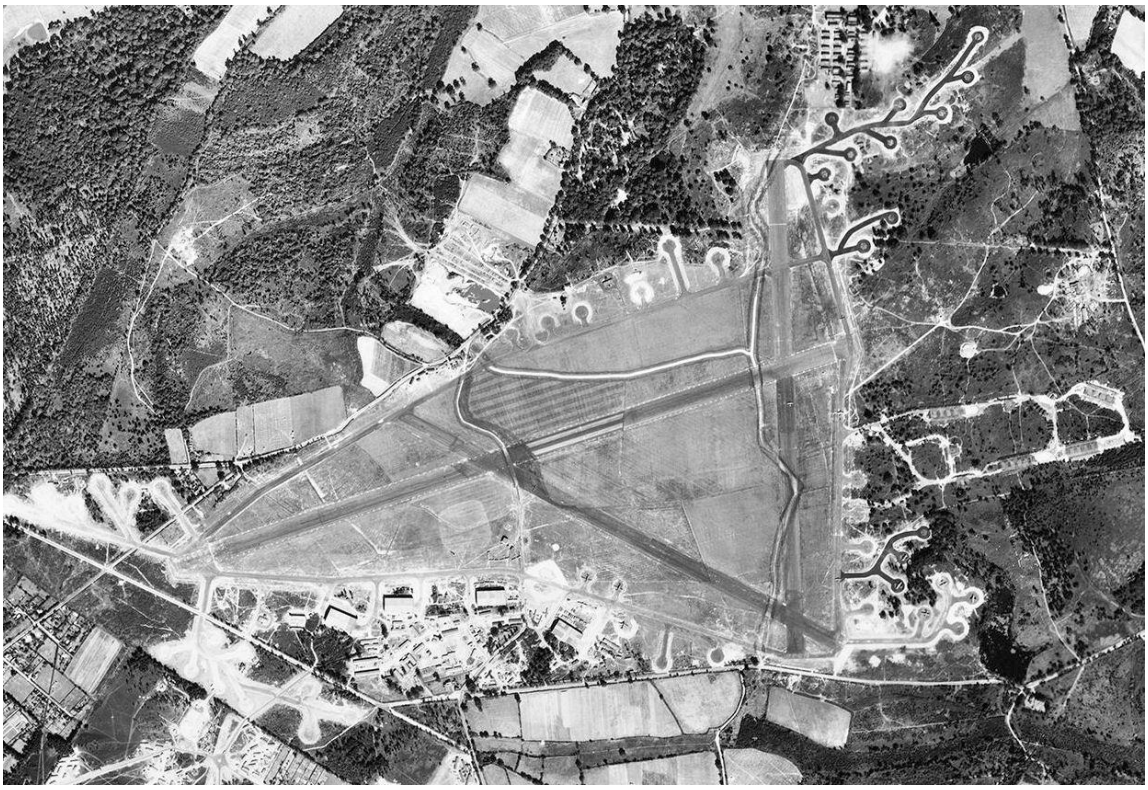
Fortunately, we were flying lined up with the runway, but I knew that if dropped the landing gear, we would lose airspeed. I was going to put her down, wheels up on the grass parallel to the runway. I let the bird down slowly, and the wheels projecting from the well smoothly rolled along the grass. We thumped along the grass until we ran across another runway that crossed the main one, and finally came to a stop. Everybody got out of the plane, and two bottles of brandy were passed around and drained in record time. The RAF officer on duty in the control. tower was quoted as saying, "What bloody new type of plane have the Yank come up with now!" as our odd-looking silhouette came in for a landing.

We did get to Aldermaston by nightfall, but not in a C-47. It was ignominious arrival for an aviator- to arrive at his new base under canvas in the back of a truck.

-- End of Chapter --



Bert Petersen's "Bloody new type Yank airplane." The opposite wing looked the same.(Brinson). *Photo courtesy of J. H. Petersen*



(Above) Aerial photo of Airfield RAF Aldermaston taken 19 August 1943. *Photo From https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAF_Aldermaston#/media/File:RAF_Aldermaston_-_19_Aug_1943_Airphoto.jpg*