

NORTH AFRICAN EPISODE

— BRINSON'S HISTORY —

During mid-May, 1943, rumors began circulating that the Group's next destination was to be North Africa. These rumors turned out to be fact.

When Allied planning for the Sicilian invasion commenced, it was soon realized that every available troop carrier plane in North Africa would be needed for airborne missions, leaving none for air resupply in the theater. The 60th, 62nd, 64th and 316th Groups had been engaged, in various degrees, in air resupply since the previous December. Therefore, early in May, the 315th, with its two squadrons, was selected to go to the Mediterranean to provide air transport service, and to be available for contingencies, while the Sicilian Campaign was launched.

The information received was that the Group would be in North Africa for approximately six weeks and then would return to England. Only the crew members in the air echelon, along with extra maintenance personnel were scheduled to go. (A few non-maintenance personnel were later included.)

On 25 May, twenty-one planes with 184 men aboard moved to Portreath, in Cornwall, and departed for Casablanca on the evening of the 27th. The first aircraft took off at 8 PM; the other twenty followed at five minute intervals. The planes climbed through the scattered clouds to 9,000 feet and the crew and passengers settled down for an eight to nine hour flight - hopefully uneventful.

The air route to Morocco was the one prescribed for unarmed transport aircraft -- southwest over the Scilly Islands to IO5[?] degrees west longitude, then south, paralleling the Bay of Biscay and the west coast of Spain and Portugal. No lights were seen until the lighthouse on Cape Finistere was sighted, and later the glow of lights from Lisbon was discernable off the port wing. The first planes that departed arrived at the destination just before daybreak, and by 8 AM all twenty-one aircraft had landed at Cazes Airport, Casablanca.

The following day at Casablanca, the Group flew to Oujda, and that afternoon, the 29th of May, the planes continued on to Blida Aerodrome Algeria -- a base that was to be the 315th's home for the next nine months.

Blida, situated in the fertile Mitidja Plain, 30 miles southwest of the ci of Algiers, is between the mountains

and the seacoast. The aerodrome was kilometers north of the town, from which the airport took its name. Although the winters were usually mild in this area of Algeria. Occasionally there were chilly and cloudy days with rain. The summers, on the other hand, are hot and rainless with a high amount of humidity.

The field had formerly been a training base for French pilots, and therefore accommodations were better than at many airfields in the area. The living quarters were two-storied concrete barracks with approximately 28 individual rooms on each floor. Each room had a small balcony with a cold water wash basin and shower. The latter seldom worked. Water was turned on for one hour each morning and evening, but water pressure was always low. Uniforms were hung in clothes cupboards located on one wall of the rooms.

Two or three cots were set up in the space remaining. Within a few days after arrival, almost everybody had been approached by one or more of the young Algerian boys who were granted access to the barracks area. For a small fee, these boys would fill GI mattress covers with straw. Later, there was a definite move to using comforters on the cots rather than being exposed to the bugs that often came with the mattress covers with "stuffing." In addition to providing straw for the mattresses, the Arab youngsters would shine shoes, take out laundry, and sometimes provide eggs for a price. Many of the Group people might have learned their first words of French by sorting out laundry items with these enterprising and often engaging young entrepreneurs. (Three shirts -- trois chemises, two trousers deux pantalons, etc.)

The mess hall, situated behind the officers' barracks, was a large one story building separated into two sections. Each section contained terrazzo tables and benches. The serving line was in the center of the building, and, for most of the stay at Blida, everyone used mess kits. Large vats of boiling water both soapy and clear for washing individual mess kits, were outside. Later, crockery plates were obtained, and Captain McRae of the 43rd made arrangements to have a number of Italian prisoners of war sent to Blida to assist in the kitchen. The preparation of the food was improved slightly by the 'Italians' arrival, but the plates were more of a bother than the mess kits. For purified drinking water, canvas "Lister" bags were set up on tripods, and located in the mess hall and barracks.

Operations and Engineering were located on the flight line, and the day after the planes arrived in Blida, both sections were busily engaged in work. The first task for the engineering sections was to remove the auxiliary cabin tanks which had been installed for the flight from England to North Africa. As soon as this task was accomplished, the operations section began receiving instructions from Northwest Africa Air Service Command to fly missions. This command had operational control of the 315th.

Within a week after arrival at Blida, eight of the 315th's C-47s were transferred. In return, the 315th received 39 planes (some called them "clunkers") from the 60th, 62nd, and 64th Troop Carrier Groups. This transfer gave each squadron 26 aircraft. The planes received were not the cream of the crop -- in fact, many were in poor mechanical condition. All were short of equipment, and the majority needed engine changes. Between 15 June and 15 July, there were 54 engines changed. Captain C. A. Mauger, 34th Engineering Officer, reported late in June that the Group had only 136 men to maintain 52 airplanes. Most mechanics were working fifteen hours a day and the Tech Supply sections were having difficulty in obtaining spare parts.

Obtaining replacement parts for the aircraft was to be a continuing problem at Blida. One of the items that was most difficult to obtain was part of the exhaust system collector ring known as a "short stack." The Supply Depot at La Senia Airdrome, outside of Oran, kept reporting "Not in Stock" whenever the items were requisitioned. Two of the 315th aircraft happened to land at La Senia around noon one day and were parked very close to the supply depot. The two crew chiefs decided to check the depot themselves, hoping to obtain items they needed, without going through the normal supply channels. One of the sergeants came upon a bin absolutely bulging with much needed "short stacks" - the same part that the depot people kept reporting as being unavailable. As all the depot people seemed to be away for the noon meal, and since the two unauthorized, but very determined, requisitioners knew where to locate a vehicle, within a very short time the vehicle was loaded with much needed items from the shelves of the depot. After the two planes returned to Blida, there was a brisk business done by the two sergeants swapping parts with other crew chiefs.

By such methods were the maintenance people able to keep the aircraft flying. The rule seemed to be that

parts that could be located were "requisitioned" by whatever method it took to obtain them. The only rule was that parts could not be "requisitioned" from other planes and other squadrons in the 315th. Every other outfit and depot was fair game.

Extra pilots and a few maintenance men arrived at Blida with additional planes. Most of these came from the 60th Troop Carrier Group and remained with the 315th until it returned to the UK.

Most 43rd Squadron missions were flown in support of the North Africa Air Service Command. The 34th Squadron flew scheduled flights the Mediterranean Air Transport Service.

M.A.T.S. Headquarters was in Algiers and its various detachments were located at airfields throughout French Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Each evening M.A.T.S. would telephone Blida with trip assignments for following day and crews assigned to these would be posted later on in the barracks' bulletin boards. Some trips were for only one day; some were several days. Navigators and radio operators were removed temporarily from the crews.

Each morning two pilots and a crew chief would board each scheduled plane and fly from Blida to Maison Blanche Airdrome, outside of Algiers where passengers or freight would be loaded. A typical flight was from Maison Blanche to Telergma (Constantine), to Bone, to Bizerte, to El Aouina (Tunis) and returned by reversing the route. Other flights went to Sousse, Sfax Tripoli, La Senia (Oran), Ras-El-Ma (Fez), Cazes (Casablanca), Marrakech and Gibraltar.

When crews were required to be away from Blida overnight, the sleep! accommodations varied considerably. At Tunis there were either cots (with mosquito nets) on the porches of the barracks, or rooms in private homes in the city. (These "town" rooms ranged from moderately comfortable to very.

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NORTH AFRICAN EPISODE

— CHOLEWCZYNSKI'S "VOICES" —

Captain William D. McRae ("Duncan")
Intelligence Officer, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

Friday, May 28, 1943. It was as black as Hitler's heart when we reached Casablanca at 0430, and since radio reception was bad and we were unable to get a weather report, we decided to go on to Marrakech, the

alternative, rather than risk going through the overcast which covered the field. Further south the weather grew worse, however, so we returned to Casablanca and, along with several other planes now circling the field, made the letdown on the Casablanca beam, and joined most of the other 43rd ships which had come straight in.

In a short time the remainder of the squadron joined us. Everybody was tired and hungry, but that matter was soon remedied. After a hearty breakfast we were billeted in a huge hanger on double-decker bunks.

The dirty blankets, hard board beds, and the constant noise of planes warming up, and taking off and landing, combined with the increasing heat of the day which intensified by the tin roof of the hanger, drove most of the men out into the open after a couple hours of sleep. The first thing that struck everyone was the warmth of an honest to God sun, and after the cold and dreary winter in England, it was a marvelous luxury to bask in just plain sunlight.

The sun made itself felt as it climbed higher in the sky, and everybody who had them, lost no time in changing into khakis. Cold showers vanished any remnants of weariness from the night flight, but while the showers were fine, the other aspects of the French latrine left much to be desired. We made our first acquaintance with the bombsight toilet, a particular torture device and product of European mind - conclusion: satisfactory, but not adequate.

After lunch everybody streaked to town since the majority of the boys, armed with their first handful of French francs, were making their initial assault on a French, to say nothing of an African, city. After a preliminary inspection of the country from the field bus, which took us to the heart of city, Casa was soon thronged with individual groups of the 43rd ambling about the city in accordance with the rather haphazard maps issued at the field, beating off attacks of a myriad group of little Arab shoeshine boys and peering suspiciously at the outdoor cafes while balancing the doctors warnings about unsanitary conditions against the desire for a drink.

After a discussion pro and con, we finally entered a good sized cafe, which offered Frenchified jazz music from a small orchestra, which was bad Algerian beer which was worse, and French Cognac, which was awful. The doughboys in the place seemed to be quite happy though, and they colored the entertainment with a couple of spontaneous jitterbug sessions. Since dinner hour was

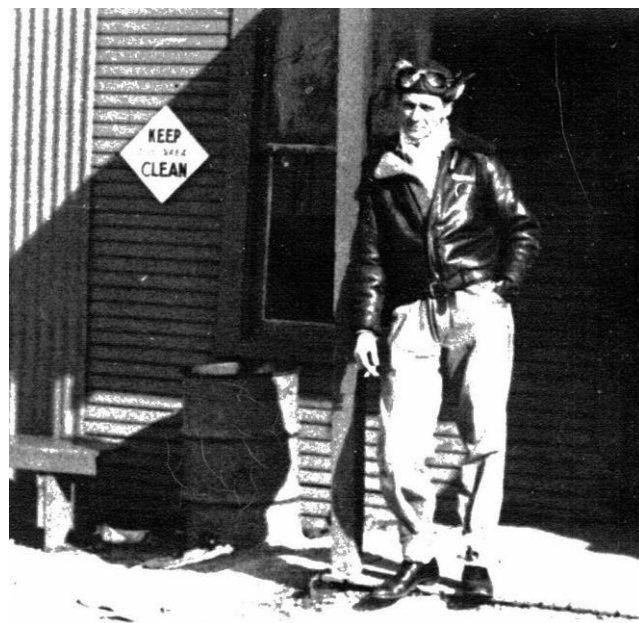
approaching, and most of us already were looking forward to something more substantial than the cognac, we deserted the questionable joys of the cafe in favor of a restaurant.

Flight Officer Richard L. Adams
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

North Africa was strange. It reminded me of when I was in Texas. Going from Kelly Field to San Antonio you went through an area that was a slum something I had never seen in Nebraska. It was like that. I remember the first time we went into Algiers, I noticed that there was a kind of ditch that ran in front of the houses, and that's where they went to the latrine, in these little ditches. It was kind of strange, culture shock, but you got used to it. It doesn't take that long. You know it, you recognize it, it was strange, but after a couple of weeks, you adjust.

Major Henry Hamby
Operations Officer, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

Blida was a major flying school for French Air Force cadets because of the good flying weather. The old cadet barracks were fairly comfortable, and we shared the base with an RAF detachment. HQ, Allied Forces was in Algiers and we were getting our orders from them.



(Above) Maj. Hamby, 34th Operations, Officer in front of Blida HQ.

We had a bunch of natives that worked on the base. Mostly simple labor. They were good people as far as I'm concerned. If you had one incident of theft, you'd blame it on everybody. That's not so, of course. I didn't find them to be any worse than anybody else. A lot of the men were selling their denim "B" barracks bags to the natives. They would simply cut two holes in the bottom for their legs, tighten the draw string around their waists, and - instant clothes without having to go through all the trouble of tailoring a mattress cover. The most unique use of our gear that I saw was that one of those gentlemen had either stolen or bought a canvas Lister bag, normally used for drinking water. He had leg holes cut in it, and all the faucets were still there around the bottom of his new "suit". That was funny as hell.

Flight Officer Jack E. Wilson
Pilot, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

When we flew down to North Africa we had no cooks. Some of the assistant mechanics that we brought along as passengers took over the task to cook. All they did was ruin the food we gave them, and they couldn't even make decent coffee.

Then, one of the ground officers thought of Italian POWs, and that they were available. What a difference those guys made! They were right at home in that kitchen and would cook like crazy. After that we never had any more trouble in the kitchen, and you couldn't run those guys off with a big stick! We didn't even need a guard on the main gate for those guys. They were much different than German prisoners, who were hard to handle and had to be guarded day and night.

I got along with the locals all right. We did a lot of trading with them. The shortage of cotton material was such that the going price for a mattress cover was twenty bucks, a big chunk of money back then. There was always trading going on ... mostly for fresh eggs because we wouldn't get dysentery from them. We wouldn't trade for fruit or vegetables.

Flight Officer Richard L. Adams
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

Only the air echelon went to North Africa, and subsequently they gave us more airplanes, and that got really hairy at certain times because we were flying with a limited number of crew. That was tough on you not having ground echelon and no real maintenance facility. We just had flight crews and for any major work that

had to be done, like a major inspection, we had to go back to Blida. The small stuff we could do. Initially we had a pilot; a co-pilot and a crew chief, and sometimes a radio operator. I remembered a couple of flights with only a two-man crew. That was either a pilot and radio operator, or a pilot and crew chief. It was no big deal, we didn't do that often.

We had no regular destinations. Whenever it was needed, we did whatever was needed. We were carrying passengers, hauling mail, hauling freight, hauling POWs. I couldn't even hazard a guess at what all we hauled. We hauled the whole nine yards: bullets, blankets, beans, fuel, medical supplies. Anything that was needed. We didn't have to do the unloading ourselves. Most of that was taken care of when we got there.

You just shuffled for yourself. Several times when we were hauling rations, we'd sneak a few and toss them in the back end. Otherwise we were on K-rations. Thank God the paperwork was pretty shoddy, otherwise we wouldn't have ended up with the rations that we did. If we went to a place where there was a unit stationed, then we might get into a mess hall, if they would let you in. Not every mess hall wanted to serve every Tom, Dick and Harry, and if they did, you had to have your own mess kit. You finished eating, and then dipped the mess kit in the barrels of boiling water. If you didn't, you ended up with the GIs.

I did have some friends that I made in an Algiers restaurant. I had gone in, sat down, and this elderly lady started talking to me. It turned out that she was Madame Brass, the proprietor, and a wartime refugee from Paris. Before long she said, "You don't sit here, you come in the back with me." She had a special table in the back, in the kitchen, where she took everybody that she liked, and you'd never have to pay. Madame Brass was a nice old lady, and told me that she had "adopted" me'.

Flight Officer James Alwood ("Seaweed")
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

We were only supposed to go down to North Africa for a few weeks, and the group left its ground echelon in England. We were doing an air transport, rather than a troop carrier role there, and you couldn't really keep a cohesive unit together there. The way we lived was really something else. Based at Blida, the food was lousy and we were glad to get out of there. When we went out, we would be two or three days sometimes, sleeping in the airplane, most of the time eating K-rations. Finally

we managed to get some of the "ten-in- one" rations which we had for emergency purposes, and they were much better, and then they took those away. That left us back with the K-rations again. Anyway, it was a lot of good flying. We chalked up a hell of a lot of hours over there, and we sergeants loved to fly. For most of us, that's what we went there for. I didn't mind it. I enjoyed it. There was shortage of pilots, and at times they sent us liaison pilots, who were qualified only on light aircraft. I had one, and we got along great. I let him fly the airplane, but couldn't teach him landings and takeoffs with people on board. However, he did get the feel of the C-47, much different from the Piper Cub he was qualified on.

Flight Officer Richard L. Adams
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

We were following the whole war pretty close. We started running out of Blida, but we didn't stay too long. We would be going out sometimes for weeks at a time, with bedroll, thermos, and "borrowed" rations. We often worked out of Maison Blanche, Algiers, and then went back to Elida every couple of days or weeks or so, depending on what we needed. As the front moved, we followed the action to Tunisia and Sicily. We moved over to Bizerte and Tunis after we pushed the enemy off the end of the peninsula. We were working into Tripoli and Cairo. We were going flying pretty much from Marrakech to Cairo and on up to the front.

Sergeant Edward M. Papp
Crew Chief, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

We crew chiefs considered the planes assigned to us as our "personal property, and woe to the guy who did anything to harm it! We would beg, borrow, or (more usually) steal anything like a generator, starter, exhaust stack or anything else we might be able to use provided it wasn't stolen from anyone in our own outfit.

During the course of our trips around North Africa, we crew chiefs often had the opportunity to check over the stocks maintained by Tech Supply and warehouses maintained by other outfits in the North Africa Theater. If we came upon items that we might find useful, we often appropriated them without going to the trouble of making out any paperwork. So, at any given time most of us had aircraft parts and supplies locked in the latrine located the rear of the airplane.

Many times the crew chiefs would trade among themselves. For example, if my airplane needed a generator, and the 43rd Tech Supply was out, and another crew chief just "happened to have one" that he had liberated somewhere else, we would work out a trade - his generator for a starter or something.

One day, an Air Inspector and his staff appeared at Blida to give our two squadrons the once over. As I understood it, everything about the operation of the unit was examined to determine if everything was up to the stranded mandated by the U.S. Army Air Corps. During the inspection, the Air Inspector or someone on his staff would select, at random, an aircraft which would be flown and inspected for air-worthiness.

It happened that "my" plane was one of those chosen to be flown, and in due time the pilot, a lieutenant colonel, arrived at the aircraft together with his co-pilot. I was in deep trouble. Locked in the latrine of my No. 502 was enough stuff to get me thrown into Leavenworth for life: 200 brand-new spark plugs, a carburetor, two starters, maybe a half-dozen assorted engine instruments, and a few other things. I had no opportunity to unload the stuff before the inspection.

The pilots came aboard, checked the Engineering Form 1A and fired up the engines. I was wondering what I would do if the inspectors wanted to check the latrine and its equipment. We took off and flew around for 10 minutes, came back to the field, got landing instructions and the lieutenant colonel landed it with just two bounces (not anywhere near as good as our pilots!)

I jumped out, put in the landing gear pins, control surface locks, and pitot tube covers all the while wondering what to do if the Air Inspector asked me to open the padlocked latrine. I was really scared. In the meanwhile the pilots were in the cockpit writing up the flight in the Form 1A as I stood on the ground near the steps of the aircraft. As the pilots came down the aisle of the plane, inspiration struck! I pulled the ladder out of its slots in the doorway and banged the steps against the side of 502.

It made a bit of noise and the Air Inspector, being on the ball, came quickly to the door and wanted to know what was the problem with the stairs. I told him that they didn't fit very well and to be careful as he climbed out of the aircraft otherwise he might fall and get hurt.

He said, "Well sergeant, I won't write up the steps, but be sure you get them fixed so they work properly, you hear!" I said, "Thank you very much sir, I will get

these things squared away," whereupon the Air Inspector climbed down the stairs and forgot about looking in the latrine. It was the last time I had an Air inspector on my airplane, and I managed to continue maintaining a clandestine stock of parts and equipment until the end of the war.

1st Lieutenant William L. Brinson ["airborne Troop Carrier" author]

Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

Bomber, fighter, and recon pilots seldom rolled their aircraft's wheels on any runway other than those at their home base. Troop carrier pilots in the ETO during the war, when not engaged in missions with paratroopers or glider-borne troops, had airlift missions that required them to land at numerous airfields and landing strips, sometimes with unexpected results. One such flight occurred while the 315th was stationed in North Africa.

The furthest east and west airfields from Blida, the 315th's base, were normally Marrakech in one direction and Bari, Italy, in the other. Occasionally a mission was received to go to Cairo, well off our beaten path. Cairo flights were very highly desirable. Not only did the crew members want to see the Sphinx and the Pyramids, but a few wanted to see and, and perhaps sample, the exotic night life reportedly existing in the Egyptian metropolis. In early 1944, however, a mission was received to fly to another part of

Africa - in the opposite direction from Cairo and much further away. The 315th's mission was to airlift ten Frenchmen, members of General DeGaulle's Free French movement, to a conference in Brazzaville, in what was then French Equatorial Africa. DeGaulle had flown to the conference in a Lockheed Hudson provided to him by the U.S.A.

According to reports, the flight went from Algiers to Marrakech the first day, across the Atlas Mountains and the western Sahara Desert the second day before landing at Dakar. The flight proceeded over the Ivory Coast, the Gold Coast, Gabon, and then on to Brazzaville. Upon landing, the passengers were whisked away by a welcoming committee to the conference location.

Upon learning that Sabena Airlines had a very comfortable guesthouse just across the Congo River in Leopoldville, the next landing was at the airfield there.

While visiting the interesting capital of the Belgian Congo the following day, one of the aircrew learned that there was a warehouse in the city that had been

untouched by war, where one could buy spirits by the case. These were not medicinal spirits, to be precise, they were several hundred cases of Canadian blended whiskey - something that was difficult, if not impossible, to obtain in North Africa.

As soon as the news was secured the following day that the French officials would be returning to Algiers by other means, the crewmembers pooled the money they had with them, retaining only the minimum needed for the return flight. In a short time 44 cases of Canadian Club were aboard the C-47.

Crossing the Gulf of Guinea on the return flight, it was reported that a few anxious moments were experienced when, while out of sight of land, one of the engines began to falter. This was caused by a temporary air lock which arose while switching fuel tanks. The anxiety was caused as much by the thought that some, if not all, of the cargo might have to be jettisoned, as much as the thought of proceeding to the next airfield on only one engine.

At Marrakech, a crew member slept aboard the aircraft when it was learned that several planes from one of the new troop carrier groups whose number were "400 and something" had landed there earlier enroute to Britain. No chances were being taken, even with brother flyers, or was it especially with brother flyers?

After arrival at Blida a system was worked out to distribute the bottles on an equitable basis to all ranks. Whether all were made happy by this system is not recalled (probably not), but most who wanted a bottle received one at two dollars apiece. The crew recovered their money, and, perhaps an extra bottle each for their efforts. The next few nights after the return of the "Canadian Club Special" seemed to be more lively around the barracks at Blida than normal.

Flight Officer James Alwood

Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

While in North Africa, we got a little shook up about our competitors there - ATC. While troop carrier flew to the front lines, air transportation between theaters and in the rear was provided by Air Transport Command, and flown by air transport pilots. They really had their own air force. Once, after making several stops, we landed at Oran. It was lunchtime and we went to get something to eat. About halfway through my meal in the officers' mess, the mess officer came around and asked if I was in ATC. I told him "No, Troop Carrier." He then barked,

"You can't eat here." That really shook me up. If I hadn't been sitting, I would have slugged him. I asked, "What's going on?" "You have to be in ATC." I didn't argue with him. I got up and left.

Another time we were inland, and ATC had a beautiful and well-stocked PX [Post Exchange]. We thought, "Man, what a deal." But because we were not ATC, they let us buy only toothpaste, soap, and razor blades, nothing else. I thought, "What's wrong with our military that they didn't do anything about those guys, and let them get away with what they got away with? It didn't take long before we decided that ATC meant "Allergic To Combat. What was even more outrageous was when we saw a calendar that had a photo of a C-47 in Iceland with Bill Conine and a few other men from the 34th standing in front of it. It was our airplane, our people, and the caption said, "ATC is everywhere."

Corporal Russ Lane

Aviation Mechanic, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

We were at Aldermaston, and during the period when the air echelon was in North Africa, they made me a flight chief for some reason or other. Of course, maybe I was a little older than the rest of the guys. My flight had a C-47 and a British Oxford. Those were the only aircraft we had. So, to keep us busy they came up with any kind of detail that they possibly could. Morale got to a very low point in those days.

One day they put us on the airfield to cut grass and gave us shovels to cut it with. There was a request for two volunteers to go to aerial gunner school. Not too long after that notice went up on the board, you'd have thought that there was a "chow line" outside, with so many of the guys waiting to sign up. Morale was that low.

There was another incident that happened around that same time. They sent in some colonel, I can't remember his name now, and he was going "shape up" the outfit. We had 7 guard posts on base. They were manned 24 hours a day. This colonel established 21 guard posts. If you are familiar with the way they built bases in England, if they came up to a village, they just built around it, and didn't move the people out. So, they set up these guard posts. They put us at any entrance to the village. They told us, in fact the day that I was on guard, they had to have a commissioned officer and a non-com on the post. We were told, "When these people

come through here, check their ID cards, but if they don't have one, let them go on through." We survived.

Private George Doll's Daily Diary

Aldermaston UK 8-18-43 - BROADCASTING VIA TANNON [British manufacturer of loud speaker systems]

Well, today we had our first 15 minute broadcast from the stage at Red Cross. Prior to the war in civvy street, we would run a class "A" phone line from the local radio station to the stage of the hotel, nightclub or where we were currently playing and do a 15-minute air show each night.

Consequently one day I thought that we might use the post Tannoy warning system in the same way. We got the necessary permission and the cooperation of the post carpenters, telephone technicians, and even talked Paul Andrews, 43rd Squadron supply sergeant, to loan us a throat mike to amplify Jack Stockton's guitar.

Henceforth, on Friday evenings at 1815 hours we and many off-duty soldiers adjourned to the ARC for favorite tunes, birthday song requests, etc. Our suggestion box was always filled with requests! For about two months of Fridays our 15 minute shows became a ritual; mechanics working on planes, soldiers eating in the mess halls, sick quarters, barracks - everywhere on the base the men had access to their own music.

Then, on Friday afternoon one particular speck in the English skies lost altitude, descended, became a C-47, and circled our music filled field. Wheels lowered, tires squealed on the tarmac, and the airplane lumbered to a stop ... not far from a Tannoy speaker high up a wooden pole.

The doors opened and a two star general found his way to the ground, and suddenly stopped all forward motion, swiveled his head around, jammed a finger in his left ear as if to clear it, and shouted, "Is that @?!*# music coming from the Tannoy speaker?"

Our local station was closed down twenty minutes later. The jeep driver that was sent to pick up the general said later, "At least he was patriotic. His eyes were blue with red whites!!"

2nd Lieutenant Peter J. Pfeiffer Navigator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

I graduated from navigation school in December 1942, and less than four months later was one of two navigators who was sent to Mobile to form two crews to

be assigned as casual replacements for the 315th Troop Carrier Group based at Aldermaston. We were assigned a C-47 with ferry tanks and a cargo of bicycles. None of us had ever laid eyes on each other before meeting in Mobile. We crossed the Atlantic on the "southern route," through Brazil, across the south Atlantic, north to Morocco, and finally arriving at Land's End in England.

After landing at Aldermaston, we learned that the majority of the group's aircraft and aircrew were in North Africa. I was assigned to the 43rd. I don't recall the name of the lieutenant who was the squadron's acting CO. I soon was doing what was left of the 315th's air echelon was doing in England namely flying cargo and personnel as an auxiliary air transport unit of the 8th Air Force in England.

In a short time I was assigned to go to a base near Leeds where they testing the C-47 as a tow-plane for the Horsa glider. The British had usually towed Horsas with four-engine bombers, and the Army Air Force was evaluating the large glider. We had observers with us who recorded engine temperature, fuel consumption, and other technical data under different conditions. When airborne combat glider operations commenced, the Horsa was often towed by the C-47.

I didn't stay at Aldermaston long after returning. After delivering a jeep to Scotland, I was assigned with a crew to go to Snailwell, near the Skegness Wash in Norfolk. We were to test a British-developed roller-conveyer for the rapid dropping of supplies from the C-47. On the night of September 17 1943, we were testing the feasibility of dropping fuel. The fuel, in cans, was loaded into wicker panniers fitted with parachutes. The conveyer took up most of the fuselage, and to move either forward or aft on the plane, one literally had to crawl over the cargo. There were six British soldiers from an aerial delivery unit. The radio operator, not having much to do, was also in the rear with our crew chief.

It was a dark night, but I got the plane to the designated location with no problem. I was standing between the pilot and co-pilot when we spotted the drop zone, marked by a line of lights in the form of an arrow. As we made a 360 degree turn to drop, the weather suddenly closed in, and we could no longer see the drop zone marker lights. We made successive passes to find the lights again, going fifty feet lower with each pass.

The weather was treacherous, and on one of the passes we stalled, and the plane just augured in. The

next thing I knew, I came to and realized I, was hurt, and that wherever I was, it was burning. I pulsed myself to my feet, and found that I couldn't stand. I was ready to roll out an opening, and somebody yelled, "Don't jump." The voice came from Polish troops on a training exercise in the area. They got me out, put me on the ground, and I said, "there are others in there."

The pilot and co-pilot were the only other survivors. The plane had exploded in flames, and everybody in the back perished. The pilot's seat had torn loose, and he went out the front through the instrument panel. The co-pilot stayed right where he had been. I am sure that I would have been killed had I been at the navigator's station, where I would have been sitting on an unattached stool without a seat belt, and a desk and bulkhead in front of me.

We were taken to an RAF hospital at Ely. I had a broken leg, which was put in a skin tight cast. The co-pilot had severe burns on one of his legs, and the pilot suffered extensive facial injuries. We were shortly transferred to an American hospital where it was discovered that my leg had a nasty compound that had not been set or treated before being encased in plaster.

I spent six months hospitalized in Britain before being transferred to the States. It was a year after the accident before was I reassigned as a navigation instructor and ended the war as a warehouse officer. I do not believe that there was ever blame or cause for the accident, but I question the wisdom of having all of that gasoline on board rather than the container being filled with water or some other nonvolatile fluid.

I was surprised one day in 2000 when a man who was in was in contact with the 315th Troop Carrier Group Association contacted me and asked if he could pass them my phone number. The following day, I received a phone call from a woman in Bircham Trofts, Norfolk, England.

The woman, Pauline Fisher, was born two years after the crash. The plane had crashed into a sugar beet field, and the nose actually went into her family's garden. She had been trying to locate the survivors. The pilot could not be located, and the co-pilot had passed away several years before. A regular correspondence soon developed, and in a short time I again held navigator wings that had been pinned to my chest when I graduated. They had been found in the garden. It was my intention to visit Pauline Fisher in England during the Fall of 2001, but the events of September 11th put an

end to those plans. I had spent my career in Military Airlift, and I am sure that they now had greater priorities than hauling a retired officer.

2nd Lieutenant William E. Bruce
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

I arrived in England in July 1943. The C-47 that I flew overseas went to some general, I'm sure, probably fixed it up plush. Once in a while we'd get a replacement crew in, but when a plane came in from the States, it was a new low-time, so somebody was always wanting it. What we had were the left over dogs, C-53s as well as C-47s.

There were two squadrons at Aldermaston and the ground echelon. Each of the squadrons at Aldermaston had about four airplanes each but that varied a lot. The air people were in North Africa. At one time we had British Oxford IIs, training planes. We had some four or five C-47s between the two squadrons at Aldermaston.

Life at Aldermaston with everybody gone was somewhat easy. We could go to London in an hour and a half. You went the 10 miles to Reading by truck and an hour from Reading you'd be in London. The Windmill Chorus and all those beautiful women would come up, and do a show in the hangers and stuff like that.

But the food was terrible. We were on British rations, and I nearly starved to death. Brussel sprouts, powdered eggs, and rutabagas. You'd go to London: in the Red Cross club, they'd serve you pancakes and they made the syrup out of rutabagas, and that was about one of the most terrible things you could get just awful. When the battle against the U-Boats was won, we started getting American rations, but Spam was pretty bad back then. You could live with that, not well, but you could live with it.

At times it seemed that the whole purpose of the outfit in Aldermaston was to provide transport for, I won't say VIP missions, but it tended to in that direction. Sometimes we'd exhibit the equipment and stuff for generals. We'd also fly experimental missions, testing new British airborne equipment.

Major Henry Hamby
Operations Officer, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

It was evening and I was watching a movie at Blida when I heard the alarm. I ran down to the flight line to see what was going on. What had happened was that during the day we had a dozen Mosquito fighter

bombers land, as Blida was a leg of their ferry mission. This Hudson was returning from an anti-submarine patrol. His depth charge load was still on board, he hadn't dropped any, and as he taxied to his hard stand among those Mosquitos, his engine started leaking oil. In moments he was burning big time. I was at least 200 yards from him and I instinctively ducked around a corner. I then heard a great big thud and, when I stuck my head back around the corner, a generator from the airplane had blown off and hit the corner of that building right where my head would have been a second before. Those beautiful Mosquitos were now all on fire. It was tragic, and the only good thing was that none of our planes were threatened. The best that they figured out was that the leaking oil dripped on his hot brakes, and the Hudson caught fire.

Flight Officer Jack E. Wilson
Pilot, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

A BAD DAY IN NORTH AFRICA - Very shortly after the defeat of the Afrika Korps, three of our C-47s were to fly to a new dirt strip at Cape Bon. After we delivered our cargo, we were to cram as many wounded on board as we could and bring them back to Algiers. As a flight leader, I had a nurse on board.

Nearing our destination, our right engine started running rough. The instruments told us that a magneto was deteriorating, and the crew chief looked worried. The crew chief reported that though he had some spare magneto parts on board, and he hoped that the other planes might have more because he didn't have a whole one. I could have aborted, but we were near our destination and kept going. The magneto quit before touch down, though the engine continued to run very rough on the single remaining magneto.

Our destination revealed the biggest junkyard every seen. An entire German Army had abandoned its equipment. Stretching for miles were ranks cannons, trucks, vehicles of all kinds, in addition to piles of supplies. The engineers had bulldozed a long dirt airstrip in the middle of it all. We went in and landed.

Trucks picked up our cargo and we waited for the wounded to arrive. The three crew chiefs went to work. They removed the cowlings, pulled the faulty magneto, disassembled it, and spread the parts on a tarp. The temperature must have been over 90. The magneto's distributor block needed to be replaced, and we were fortunate that there was one on another plane. To install

it, the entire magneto had to be taken apart. This was normally done on a workbench where it could be fine-tuned, but the crew chiefs had to improvise.

A platoon of bewhiskered and dirty infantrymen were poking through the junk piles nearby. Three managed to get a tanker truck running, and were proceeding to wreck it. All of them looked mighty scary, carrying their weapons at the ready. They walked with a swagger, and were waiting for a convoy to arrive that would bring them fresh clothing and a portable shower I was glad they were on our side.

A truck arrived carrying warm beer. A sage old sergeant told them to cut the top off of a gasoline drum. With a stentorian voice he yelled at the guys in the truck to come over. They filled the drum half way with gas, put in three cases of beer, and started a German air compressor. They put the hose into the drum, and the rapid evaporation of the gasoline would do the job of cooling the beer.

They stood around the drum, smoking while waiting for the beer to cool. One of our pilots shouted that they should stay away from the gas fumes. A GI shouted back, "FUCK YOU!" That was that!

A convoy of ambulances arrived, followed by trucks with walking wounded. The stretcher cases were unloaded near the planes and I told other two pilots to load up and get going to Algiers. They needed no urging and that left my crew chief and radio operator to finish the magneto. I stayed: dear, knowing that would do it as quickly as possible.

The nurse was a Godsend. She comforted the wounded and even found items to put under their heads as pillows. She brought water, and for those too weak held up their heads and put the cup to their lips. They were British, American, and German. A wounded soldier no longer able to hold a weapon was no longer an enemy, but just another human being in need. The Brits and Yanks thanked her with words, the Germans with their eyes.

A bearded and grubby infantry lieutenant came walking over. He was carrying a carbine in the crook of his arm, and looked as if he could be really deadly with it. We had a short and pleasant conversation, and then he asked if I wanted to take a look at some brand new Mauser rifles he found. We walked a short distance up a road marked by tape signifying that it was dear of mines and booby traps. The cosmoline-covered rifles were in a wooden crate. The lieutenant said that they were made

prior to 1942, and had top quality machined components, and that the action was the best in the world. He asked if I wanted one? I said, "Heck, let's take them all."

When I got back to the plane I glanced at the nurse and saw that she was not her smiling self. Puzzled, I notice that there were tears in her eyes.

The crew chief and radio operator installed the rebuilt magneto and timed it on the engine. I told the crew chief about the rifles, saying that he could have one for himself and to stow the box wherever he wished. I ran up the engine. It ran rough, with dropping RPMs, but it worked. I grinned at the crew chief, "If the damned thing keeps running until we get off and at altitude, we won't worry about it."

While the crew chief was replacing the cowling, I learned what had affected our nurse: two of the wounded died waiting for us to repair the magneto. Perhaps if we had been able to load them and get off with the other planes, we might have gotten them to the hospital alive.

In my mind the reason for the lack of spare parts was because of a strike in the States for higher pay and improved working conditions. Damn them! Our meager pay and working conditions were far from the best, and even if we could, we would not even consider striking.

We started loading the wounded. First the stretchers onto the cabin wall brackets. We pilots and the radio operator went up front as the crew chief directed the walking wounded to sit in the aisle, packed in as dose as possible, facing rear with their chins on their knees. The crew chief kept packing them n until they were back to a certain point. He then held up his hand and closed the cargo door.

We all know that the C-47 is a wonderful airplane, and it could carry almost any weight if loaded properly. As Bill Brinson had written, a C-47 not loaded until it was "about full, just don't put it all in the tail." We may have overlooked weight restrictions, but never balance. That was critical.

I fired up the engines and we took off, the rebuilt mag working fine even if the engine was running rough. I leveled off at 9,000 feet where it was cooler and left the throttles wide open. The 01' C-47 got its tail up. You could make almost 200 MPH if you lay the whip to it. Our goal was to get the wounded to the hospital before losing any more. All were still alive when we reached Algiers.

1st Lieutenant Jacob E. Mancinelli
Navigator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

We never flew formation in North Africa. East of Tunisia and across the gulf to Benghazi we often flew at altitudes of only 50-100 feet because we never knew when the German fighters might show up from Sicily or Pantelleria.

In the summer it was very hot in the planes. Since we did not have issue shorts as did the British, we cut down our khaki trousers into shorts. That was against military regulations - damaging government property. Once we landed at one of the "sandy" air strips. We were not aware that a big colonel was coming toward us until we heard, "Don't you people salute?" We never saluted anyone at an air base. Not ten yards away was General Patton surrounded by officers wearing leggings, neckties and all the other crap - the Patton entourage. We quickly came to attention and saluted, which we barely knew how to do by then. Patton began with, "You people get some pants on," before he started to really chew our butts out. We took the chewing, and figured the hell with him, we would never see them again. We stood attention until they started to board their plane and then we went about our business.

Flight Officer Jack E. Wilson
Pilot, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

We managed to steal, well "inherit," a German Fieseler Stork liaison plane. We were making a delivery to the 45th Division in Algeria, which was staging for its part in the coming invasion of Sicily. That was where we spotted the Stork, so named for its long and spindly landing gear. It had slots that ran the entire length of the wing, and had a reputation for being able to land within 30 yards and take off in 50.

It "belonged" to an army sergeant. We convinced him that since he couldn't take it with him for the invasion, that we could certainly find a good home for it. I had the co-pilot fly it back to Blida, where we got it into a hanger and painted American markings on it.

We had some rare time off, and knew about a ski resort up in the Atlas Mountains populated by Frenchmen who found it a pleasant location to avoid the war. They were really hospitable people. We "paid" for our stay there with GI rations. What came out of the kitchen bore little resemblance to what came out of the government-issue crates. We had some real bashes up there. Those French, you know, are great on

entertaining. Unfortunately, I did not get to fly the Stork much. Coming back to Blida after a fine "vacation," some bird colonel decided that we couldn't have it. That little Stork was sure dandy. With only a few flights in it I didn't learn much about it, but boy, I sure liked it.

Flight Officer Richard L. Adams
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

With all the time spent on detached service, we had no specific place to go. In those areas they didn't have mess halls and barracks, and anything you had was something that was blown up. In Africa I spent as many nights on the floor of that Gooney Bird as I did in any kind of facility. Bizerte and Tunis had been hit pretty hard during the final fight for North Africa. It was really banged up around the airfields. If we had to RON (Remain Over Night) there, we usually stayed on the airplane, sometimes we'd go in and they had facilities in some bombed-out barracks. There was a field hospital outside of town. We got friendly with some of the nurses, Bizerte, I think, was the worst, and Tunis was not as bad. When we started flying there regularly six of us eventually rented an apartment. But there still wasn't much available there in the way of anything.

1st Lieutenant Jacob E. Mancinelli
Navigator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

On the night of June 1, 1943 we had the pleasure of spending the night in Gibraltar. There was no black out in the isolated seaport and military base that was the crossroads between Britain and the Mediterranean. The city lit up, well stocked, and it all seemed as if it was almost peacetime. Our crew went to the Rock Hotel in search of dinner. The place was full of British generals, so many it seemed as if there was an entire corps of them at the fortress. We junior officers managed to get a place at a shared table and, to my great surprise, had to share it with Leslie Howard, the famous actor. He was- on his back way to England after entertaining British troops in the desert. It was a wonderful evening and for us even more interesting than the USO groups we had flown.

Well known for numerous movies, especially "Gone With the Wind." Howard seemed to be a humble and introspective man, and nothing that one, might have expected of someone who was at home with the most glamorous celebrities of the time. I remember specifically his conversation, and that he was so taken by

what he saw and how the "real world" compared to what he had been living in.

It was a really wonderful dinner and after a few moments we forgot he was a big movie star. He was a very articulate and wonderful story teller. He was interested in hearing about our activity as well. He made one other comment - he saw how religious the troops that he had met were, the Americans as well as the British, and that he had sort of forgotten church over the years and it was time that he would start devoting more of his energy and money to this activity.

This evening God was on his mind when he departed on a flight to Britain. The plane never arrived. It was reported that the plane was shot down by German fighters off the French coast. His last flight -- eternity.

Flight Officer Richard L. Adams
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

We were hauling about anything they needed to Sicily and later to Italy. We carried passengers, picked up mail, and all kind of crap that they wanted from one spot to another. It's hard to say what we carried exactly. It was a potpourri of everything. We carried rations and we purloined a bunch of those. We were going over to Sicily, and then on over to Naples and Bari, and on up we never did get to Rome though. The Italians were a friendly bunch of people. They didn't have a "war-torn" mentality. They took it on a day-to-day basis. Italy was not torn up as bad as some parts of London. I didn't notice it as much as I did in England. They still had nice places to go, and there were nice looking girls. Over in Sicily it was pretty much the same as it was in Italy. They were friendly people and, next to the English, I would probably be more attuned to the Italians than the rest of the people I had met.

1st Lieutenant J. Alexander
Navigator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

After the invasion of Sicily, I tried to spend most of my time there. I got back to North Africa once a month to get paid and get some new clothes and stuff like that. I had a ball in Sicily. I flew with two or three very good pilots, and they asked for me because they knew I had been there and knew all the ins and outs, where to stay and where to eat and where to drink and so on.

I always found somebody who spoke English wherever I was. After a month or so, every damn place that I landed I knew where I could get a room. These

were people who were technically not legal and I'd give them a few bucks more. I really liked the food.

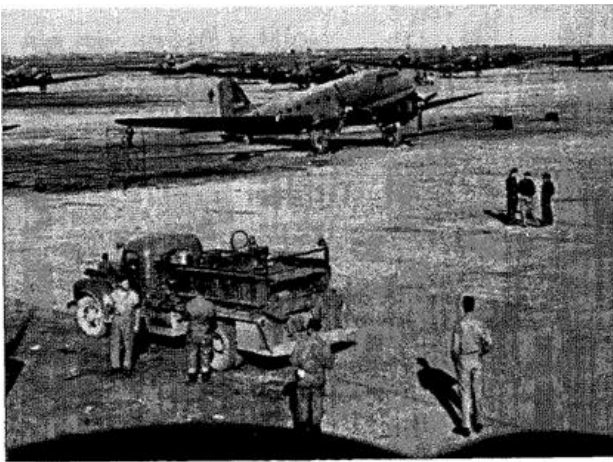
1st Lieutenant Jacob E. Mancinelli
Navigator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

On one trip to Bari, Italy we brought in supplies. A number of American ships were in the harbor including an American fuel tanker. German bombers blew up the tanker during the middle of the night. We were asleep at a small home, three of the crew in one room - when the concussion blew in the windows, and scattering glass allover. Though we were all superficially cut we didn't put in for Purple Hearts. After we took Naples the front line stalled south of Cassino. I found out that my brother, who was in a "Long Tom" cannon outfit, was in the area bombarding the Germans on the mountain above. Of course the Germans were returning the fire. John Andrews and I agreed to make an extra trip for the supply depot in Naples if they would lend us a jeep and a driver for me to find my brother's outfit. Supply depots had such information available, and the following day we were given a command car and a sergeant driver, and began our odyssey. We found that the outfit had moved up the line several times and was now just south of Monte Cassino. We "merrily" drove up the highway south of Cassino in an officers' command car, unaware that we were in full view and range of the German artillery. We learned that later from my brother when we located his outfit. It was the rainy season, and we found my brother Joe, a corporal, sitting in the mud eating cold rations out of his canteen cup. He told us about the hazards that we had driven through to arrive at his battery, but then advised us that the greatest concern they had every evening was not the Germans, but the nearby French North African troops. These fierce mountain warriors would make nightly forays into the German outposts in the mountains above as soon as it was dark. They were "rewarded" by the number of "left ears" which they returned with after their nightly missions. The men in my brother's battery realized that an American ear was no different from a German's ear. We departed at twilight and went south, back to Naples. We did have a "beacon" to aim for, Vesuvius, the volcano, which was erupting and lighting up the sky south of the city. The headlights on our vehicle were "muted" and unfortunately a number of tanks were coming north, which made driving against the traffic difficult, but we did finally make it back. Our odyssey

was over, and John and I never forgot the search for my brother and resolved that we would never volunteer for front line duty.

- End of Chapter --

Editor's note – Since the second publication of the 315 Group in 2003, in 2023, Peter Connelly, the son of Ed Connelly, pilot in the 34th TCS, , contacted the 315Group.org webmaster to say he had his father's photo album from when the 34th Squadron was in North Africa. Capt. Connelly's name appears often in the 34th TCS War Diaries posted on <https://315Group.org>., While detached to Blida, Maj. Connelly was assigned to VIP service, flying senior staff around North Africa engaged in diplomatic missions for the war effort. Following are selections from his photo album,



(Above) Ramp at Blida, Algiers.
Photo courtesy of Dave Benfield



(Above) Lieutenant Ed Connelly, prior to 1943 service in Blida, Algeria.



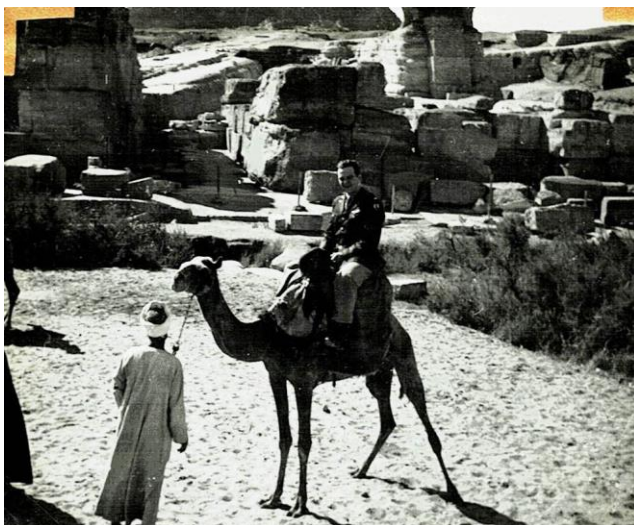
(Above) Ed Connelly, Cairo, ca. early '44



(Above) Maj. Ed Connelly (L) with the King's General (R)
[referring to the King of Saudi Arabia]



(Above) the Sphinx and Pyramids, Egypt, taken while on a diplomatic mission, spring '44



(Above) Ed Connelly on camel ride, ca. March 44.



(Above) Gen. Benjamin Giles, Gen. Ralph Royce, Saudi minister (unidentified)



(Above) Connelly (fr left 3rd), Foward (4th), Gen Giles (5th; commander 9th Air Force), Gen Ryce (6th; Commander, U.S. Army Forces in the Middle East (USAFIME)), Hazen (8th), Bazooka (10th), and Arabian ministers & Scoehy men (in Arab dress); crewmembers in background