

The Military Airlift Command, 10 & 2

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During the war in Viet-Nam countless tons of materials were airlifted from the U.S. to Southeast Asia in support of the struggle there. The bulk of that immense task was carried out by officers and men of Military Airlift Command (MAC).

The vehicle selected to perform that feat was a jet powered cargo aircraft called the C-141 Star Lifter, made by Lockheed. Powered by four GE J-57 turbo fan engines, it was well equipped for the job. With a full load of fuel (approximately 153,000 pounds) the aircraft could operate off short runways with a 60,000-pound payload. The basic flight crew consisted of an aircraft commander, sometimes called the AC or the Ace, a co-pilot, a navigator, sometimes called "the gator," a flight engineer and a load master, sometimes called "the loader."

All the basic 141 crew training, at that time, was conducted at Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma City, OK. During the height of the Viet-Nam war, Travis Air Force Base in California had the distinction of being the largest aerial port in the world. During that period the typical MAC mission flown from Travis went something like this: The first stop after departure from Travis was generally Hickam Air Force Base, HI, or Wake Island. When you landed another crew would be waiting on the ramp to refuel the aircraft and continue on toward Viet-Nam while your crew ate, showered and rested.

Most of the time the Ace would inform us that we were going to "10 and 2," which meant he was informing ACP (Airlift Command Post) that we wanted to be alerted for another flight 10 hours from the time we landed. Once alerted the crew then had two hours to eat, see that the new aircraft was refueled, complete the pre-flight and be off the

ground. Next stop would most likely be Clark AFB, Philippines. Ten hours later, start getting ready to go "in country," places like Da Nang, Phu Cat, Cam Ranh Bay, Bien Hoa, Phan Rang and Tan Son Nhut.

We would haul in live people, parts, Class A explosives, bulldozers, etc., and haul out broken equipment, live people, dead people and wounded people. After off loading, refueling and on loading it was off again, destination Yokota AFB at Fusa, Japan. By this time the crew was ready for a little longer rest and rehabilitation time but likely as not the Ace would opt to 10 and 2. The 55-1 was a manual that, among other things,

was supposed to limit the number of consecutive 10 and 2s a crew could take but no one seemed to pay much attention to it.

Fusa was a little Japanese town, just off the base at Yokota, that had a very large crematory. It was a good place to stay but it smelled somewhat different than most Japanese towns. After a short stay at Yokota it was time for the final nine hour trip back to Travis. The average crew member could expect an in country trip once every two weeks. The rest of his time was spent on flight training, flights within the states and an occasional around the world "Em-bassy run."

I submit, with tongue in cheek, these few lines of simple verse, penned by me while waiting for a call to go in country.

The MAC Mission

*Midnight comes, the telephone rings and so begins my story
Of how the MAC mission is flown In all its
Pride and Glory.*

*The crew assembles at Base Ops. Oh,
what a motley crew
If you can spare a minute or so I'll
introduce all to you.*

*The AC comes from Tinker's School about
two months ago
What he can't tell you about this jet you
have no need to know.*

*How many raids has the Co-Pilot made?
Just asking is great fun.
He'll tell you of the raids he's made and
these include the panty one.*

*The troop we drew for a "Gator" was
really quite a guy.
He didn't know how to get into the plane
or where it was going to fly.*

*The Engineer, oh bless his heart was a
little bent old man.
He was used to bending throttles, Never
heard of a turbo fan.*

*The Loader was a lazy cuss, he slept both
night and day.
Whenever you wanted a cup of Joe you'd
find him in the hay.*

*Let's go! Let's go! cries ACP who cares
about maintenance status.
Each bird that we kick off the ground is
just so much free gratis.*

*We leap off into the dead of night, fish
tailin' like a SAM.*

*We've got 30 tons of class "A" for the
boys in Viet-Nam.*

*Quick stops for rest in several places like
Hickam, Wake and Clark,
With the AC yellin', "10 & 2" every place
we park.*

*We put her down in Viet-Nam amid flares,
smoke and stink
Off load, on load, back in the air quicker
than a wink.*

*We smoke up into the azure blue, Yokota
air patch bound.
A better place in the whole Far East was
never ever found.*

*No fan fare at Yokota's block the crew
takes off a runnin'.
Our leader's voice rings loud and clear,
there'll be no time for funnin'.*

*We'll 10 and 2 this smelly place, let's fly
where the air is pure.
I want to keep you boys from sin you'll
find it in Fusa for sure.*

*Oh such grumblings you've never heard,
from every mother's son.
There a question on all our lips. "What
happened to 55-1?"*

*The Ace's eyes are an icy blue; who would
dare to snicker?
We'll just have to buy more yen and drink
a little quicker!*

*Then short hours flit quickly by, no time
for another round.
The call comes down from ACP, "you've
got one Travis bound."*

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1968

and another officer that acted as the provost marshal (military police) for the group were standing outside in front of the canteen.

The commander looked up, saw my friend, then told him to leave, that his group were discussing the charges to be filed against him and his friends. My friend said, "That won't be necessary, I take care of it now." He then raised his AK-47 and started firing. The commander and the canteen keeper went first, then the rest. Somehow one man made it out. He had dropped down behind something and made it out around the corner.

My friend left the canteen and returned to our barracks area. None of us knew what had gone on, we were so used to gunfire around the camp, you know, men testing their weapons at anytime day or night. My friend came to where his team was about to go to sleep and told them "You don't have worry now, I already take care of all of them." Then he walk back to the canteen where all of the others lay dead. He put the muzzle of the AK under his chin and pulled the trigger. The bullet came out the top left side of his head. I had been awake and saw what happened.

Another one of his friends ran to him. He was still alive. His friend wrapped his bandanna around his wounds to try to stop the bleeding. He was conscious. He looked at him and says, "No, don't try to save me," and pulled the bandage off. Then the other friend ran to find a Jeep. They put him in the back and held him while another one drove. When they get to the hospital, they took him into the emergency room, where he died.

When the men bury him the next day, they put layers of barbed wire over him in his grave. This is symbol that he had done a bad thing and that even in death he was to be kept in prison.

My friend always act like a very "cool" person and like all Special Forces men, we are trained not to let anger rule us. Before that night he had never shown anger or even raised his voice. But all men have the point that they should not be pushed beyond.

Even though what my friend did was a wrong thing, there was good for all of us that came about because of his sacrifice.

All of the commanders and other officers that were replaced, had been sent to special meetings and were told to be very careful not to be overbearing and to try to be fair in every way. Good Special Forces men were hard to replace and something

like two bottles of beer was too high of a price to pay for that kind of loss. Nothing like that ever happened again and the food was better too.

Vietnamese Army canteens and mess halls

There is a lot of difference between the way Vietnamese soldiers and the American GIs were fed. The Americans have army cooks, hitchers, food supplies and mess halls, all supplied by the army. In the Vietnamese Army, the commanders draw money from the soldier's pay each month. The commander assigns someone like the commo sergeant to run the canteen. He buys his supplies in the local market daily as well as things like cold drinks, cigarettes and toilet articles. The canteen also serves as a mini-PX, although Vietnamese soldiers never have much money to spend.

We had two Special Forces sergeants that knew how to cook. Helpers for mess-cook duty was shared in rotation by members of the teams in order to run the mess hall. In the regular ARVN army they have civilians under contract to cook and run the mess hall. In the Special Forces no civilians were allowed in our camp.

Skimming

Since these camps rarely had refrigeration or even electricity, our cooks had to buy our food supplies daily at a village market. Sometimes the money was diverted several times. It finds its way into the pockets of the officers in charge and on down to the man in charge of buying food for the mess hall. So the soup could get a little thin at times.

One thing that I always hate to tell anyone is that all of us many times have had orders that we knew were wrong. Like some kind of a useless mission that some officer on staff

thinks up, back at headquarters. I don't like to talk about this because I've always felt that we were all a band of brothers and if I admit that there were crooked people in with us, it is a shame on the rest of us.

All of our officers came up through the ranks just like me, but somehow when some of them reached the command staff level, they changed and forgot how it was in the jungle.

We were just ordinary soldiers except for our Special Forces training. We worked hard to carry out our missions and face unimaginable dangers every day, most of us never got any awards or medals for what we did. It's not just for pride. It's because for every award received, our pay is increased.

So on the days that we are all lined up on the parade around for inspection and review, we stand there and we can see all those officers that work in headquarters, everyone with their chest full of ribbons for bravery. We wonder where we been! No, we know where we been, it's where have they been and when did they go?

Sometimes even when we have proof that a HQ officer has done wrong, we dare not say anything, because we could be ordered out to some bad place and never picked up.

Toward the end of the war, we found out that there were even communist agents in our command. For us in Special Forces, it was a loss to our honor that one of our brothers had betrayed us. No matter whatever happened, we were still there and we had to do the job. We have to always remember that we are fighting for our country and that's the main thing.

I never forget this thing. My friend was a good man and a brave soldier. He had been forced to the wall by stupidity too many times. This incident had pushed him beyond the wall.



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