

157 LIAISON SQUADRON



MISSION

Evacuation, supply, and courier support of combat forces in Southwest and Western Pacific.

LINEAGE

157 Liaison Squadron constituted, 28 Jan 1944

Activated, 10 Feb 1944

Redesignated 157 Liaison Squadron (Commando), 1 May 1944

Redesignated 157 Liaison Squadron, 25 Nov 1945

Inactivated, 25 Oct 1946

STATIONS

Brownwood AAFld, TX, 10 Feb 1944

Cox Field, TX, 10 Feb 1944

Statesboro AAFld, GA, 31 May 1944

Cross City AAFld, FL, 19 Aug 1944

Drew Field, FL, 6-26 Oct 1944

Leyte, 1 Dec 1944

Calasio, Luzon, 31 Jan 1945

Mabalacat, Luzon, 30 Apr 1945

Okinawa, 25 Jun 1945

Showa, Japan, 6 Oct 1945

Irumagawa, Japan, 7 Feb 1946

Nagoya, Japan, 15 Jun-25 Oct 1946

ASSIGNMENTS

II Tactical Air Division, 10 Feb 1944
I Tactical Air Division, 18 Apr 1944
3 Air Commando Group, 1 May 1944
V Bomber Command, 25 Mar 1 1946
Fifth Air Force, 1 Jun-25 Oct 1946

ATTACHMENTS

5 Air Liaison Group [Prov], May-Sep 1945
V Bomber Command, 25 Nov 1945-25 Mar 1946

WEAPON SYSTEMS

L-5, 1944-1946
UC-64, 1944-1946

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Leyte
Luzon
Ryukyus

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Philippine Presidential Unit Citation

EMBLEM

Over and through a medium blue disc, a caricatured light yellow green grasshopper with light blue wings, peering through a black telescope held in the left hand, wearing white aviator's goggles, red shoes and gloves, seated in a caricatured 'jeep' affrante, proper, winged gold, bouncing over white cloud formation, edged light blue, in base, and casting a light red violet shadow. (Approved, 30 May 1944)

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The 157 Liaison Squadron was activated at Paris, Texas 23 February 44, with an authorized strength of 15 officers and 125 Enlisted Men. Liaison pilots, mostly S/Sgt., were selected from a

pool of volunteers. The Men and Officers were selected with care to build a unit which would perform well together in what was to be often most difficult circumstances. This was the beginning of a unit, which after much rigorous training at several locations in the States, joined the 3rd Air Commando Group, to give a heroic performance in the battle for the Philippines.

In October the 157 moved to Drew Field at Tampa, Florida where they boarded a train for a six day train ride to Camp Stoneman, California, After drawing all new equipment the unit boarded the USS General Hersey for the long trip to the South Pacific and eventually the island of Leyte in the Philippines.

The 157 debarked from the General Hersey on Red Beach, Leyte in the early morning of 1 December 44 under the command of Capt. Clarence Odom. Shortly thereafter the Unit saw its first action with the 25th Liaison Squadron. The 159th had not yet received their planes so a good number of volunteers went to the aid of the hard pressed 25th Liaison Squadron and gave a good account of themselves in their first taste of combat.

The 25th Lia. Sqdn. was operational from Buri Airfield, Leyte, in Nov. of 1944. On 27 Nov. a Japanese transport plane tried to land on the strip but was shot down and all occupants were killed. A second attempt to recapture Buri came on 5 Dec. when about 150 Jap Infantrymen came out of the hills and attacked the bivouac area near the airstrip. This effort failed as well. About 20 hours later, 300 - 400 Jap Paratroopers invaded the general area and created some havoc for two days and three nights before being soundly defeated.

In the period from January, when the Philippines campaign was at its height, through June, the Light plane section - consisting of the 157, 59th, and 160th Liaison Squadrons, Commando and the 341st Airdrome Squadron - evacuated more than 20,000 doughboys from the front lines on Luzon and other Philippine Islands. To do this they had to carry an average of 110 wounded men daily in their single-passenger "kites".

The three Liaison Squadrons were an integral part of the 3rd Air Commando Group designed to do numerous tasks that were not practical for the Fighter or Troop Carrier Squadrons. Working alone rather than in a flight or group the pilot and his light plane engaged in removing the sick and wounded from the Battle Zone, supplying ground troops who were cut off or encircled with much needed food and ammunition, carrying secret messages, transporting key personnel to areas where needed and spotting enemy troop locations and movements which were not detectable from larger and faster aircraft.

The Liaison aircraft were ideally suited for the type of operation carried on in the Pacific Theater, where island hopping advanced the War ever closer to the Japanese homeland. This left behind pockets of enemy troops cut off and left to starve. As a result there was an ever increasing need to maintain contact between the areas taken by friendly troops. This task was ideally suited to the light aircraft available on a moment's notice and able to take off and land

any place where a smooth area could be found. The light plane could often provide transportation where surface, water or other air transportation was out of the question.

The Liaison Pilots performed in a fearless manner, yet did not for the most part receive recognition commensurate with their many successful missions. The Newsmen generally preferred the exploits of the Fighters and Bombers and usually did not recognize the Liaison Pilots for the excellent work they were doing. This was partly due to the fact that the Liaison Pilots did not rain destruction on the enemy, record numerous kills nor work in large groups. Working alone is a hazardous situation, and the accomplishment of a successful mission was often not reported as significant or the only information available was swallowed up by the vast ocean or completely hidden by the unforgiving jungle. It is also very difficult to give a full account of the activity of a unit of Liaison aircraft since they operated alone and to report all of the events would have been an impossible task.

The Liaison Pilots were a unique group who numbered only about 1200 in the entire Army Air Force. They flew the L-5 Stinson Aircraft for the most part and except for the flight leaders and commanding officers they were enlisted men. After their completion of their training and graduation, they were rated as S/Sgt. They were required to be qualified as pilots prior to becoming an L-Pilot and they came from civilian pilots, washed out cadets, RAF and RCAF pilots who returned to the States to serve their country.

Their training involved techniques in short field take-offs and landings from every conceivable place such as golf courses, roads and trails, beaches, rice paddies or any place with enough clearing to get airborne. They learned to fly low, to follow ground contours and to become as inconspicuous as possible. These planes had no protection other than their ability to maneuver at low speeds and to be nearly invisible against the terrain.

The three Liaison Squadrons the 157, 159th and the 160th were a unique group assigned to the 3rd Air Commando Group, a unique organization in itself.

As with the Air Commandos each unit went through a rigid period of selection so that the men finally assigned were the best available. From May to October each Unit followed a rigorous training schedule preparing them for the demands of combat.

In October the Liaison units reported to Drew Field, Tampa, Florida for final processing for overseas duty and on 7 Nov 44 the Unit boarded the General Hersey at San Francisco destined for the South Pacific. After many days at sea and several stops along the way the Liaison Squadrons arrived on the island of Leyte, Philippines 30 Nov 44 and into the combat zone.

The plane cleared a cliff by a few dozen feet, with a cloud directly above, then dropped into a narrow canyon, flying well below the tops of the bordering cliffs and only a couple of hundred feet from either wall. The canyon widened for a lake but beyond it the jungle closed in solidly again in a series of knife-edge ravines. No sign of any movement anywhere. Yet this was the center of an area where patrols that morning had reported some 2000 Japanese, remnants of

the defending armies of Leyte now trying to make their way to the northwestern coast. These troops were retreating slowly in good order and with enough weapons, but in such terrible physical condition that they had resorted to cannibalism.

The sergeant with the close-cropped blond hair flew at such altitudes that it would have been no trick to hit the plane with a rock. When he finally crossed the top of the island hog track and could see the plains leading to Tacloban spreading out to the east, he turned around and grinned widely. 'You know,' he said, 'that compass was right, after all. In the States, I never used to fly by compass and I didn't believe this one. But it was right. I'd have sworn we were flying due north.'

Presently, after once making an extra circle just to get a good look at an attractive trout stream, the sergeant came down at Tacloban airport. A four-motored transport - C-54 - and a whole squadron of bombers - B-24s - were circling the field, waiting for opportunities to land. The sergeant paid no attention to them. He came in at a neat seventy miles an hour, hit the edge of the runway and taxied up it without once glancing at the transport landing beside him simultaneously or the two bombers which, balancing delicately on their nose wheels, screeched to stops while the sergeant was finding a parking space and swinging the little plane into it.

He said, "O.K., Mac, this is it." I said, "By the way, sergeant, did you know there are a couple of thousand Japs around that lake we just went over?" The sergeant said, "No? Say, you should have told me. We could have gone lower and maybe seen some of them." He wandered off alone into a maze of whirling bomber propellers, beyond which were living tents for the personnel of that maelstrom of an airport.

An L-5 is itself an embarrassing airplane. Nobody knows exactly what to call it. It looks enough like a Cub plane to be mistaken for one regularly, but it has 165 horsepower, needs more landing room than a Cub and serves an entirely different function. Built as an Army model by various manufacturers, it just doesn't fit anywhere. Neither do the aerial sergeants-not quite officers, not quite ordinary enlisted men- who fly it from fields never intended for it, over terrain never intended to be crossed on missions the designers never dreamed about.

Their chances are slim. They draw flight pay and are exempt from normal enlisted men's chores. But they don't have those lovely gold bars - and the hardwood ones at which they could be resting between flights if they were officers. If they have special privileges such as not saluting much of anybody, it is because nearly every officer around any airport you can pick sooner or later wants a ride in an L-5 - to see a girl on the other side of the mountain, to meet his brother fifty miles down the line or to take a thirty-five minute flight which will save him an all day, 150 mile jeep ride over backbreaking roads. Those taxi trips keep the L-5s busy between operations, but the sergeants have something to say about who gets them, and so everybody is pretty nice to the sergeants.

The sergeants practically never get any mail, which is misdirected as a matter of course by postal clerks who are convinced that liaison squadrons must be (a) attached to the troop-

carrying groups, or (b) part of some artillery unit. They take what quarters are left around an airfield after the Bomber and Fighter pilots are housed, and they eat where they can, seldom having a mess of their own. Operationally, they remain sturdy independents. Two days after flying with Whiley Pease, I tried to find their headquarters. A young man behind the operations desk at Tacloban field looked up owlishly and said, "Oh them? Well, I'll tell you. They're all crazy. They don't have any headquarters. They just fly out of holes once in a while - crossing the strip, about half the time - and you can't never find the holes. They got no parking space and they don't pay any attention to anybody. Last night, so help me, one of them tried to bluff a C-54 out of the landing circle, and got away with it. Made that big guy pull up and come around again. They ought to be shot, the whole bunch. I don't think they're even our Allies."

He thought a while, and concluded, "I'll tell you what, you can sit out there in front and wait if you want to. They was here yesterday, and they might come back any time or they might not ever. The guys is fighting a war all by themselves."

The 157 Lia. Sqdn. which was bivouacked on Red Beach, was requested to send a dozen or more pilots and mechanics to assist the hard-pressed 25th. Those who became a part of the activity were honored by being named in the PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION, awarded to the 25th.

The citation, dated 2 August 1945, from the FAR EAST AIR FORCES, and signed by General George C. Kenney, described the outstanding job that the 25th performed. The members of the 157 rendered valuable aid to the 25th during this crisis and helped save the situation for the Allied Forces.

The 157 left Leyte 9 January 45 on an LST and ten days later arrived at Buid Clasio, where the 157 became operational again on a very fine air strip. The pilots and their planes ranged far and wide, mostly on detached service with the Army, Navy and the marine Corps, performing courier service, evacuation of wounded, artillery spotting and dropping supplies. During March through June one flight was assigned to Mobalcat near Clark Field and Grace Park in North manila.

While at Grace Park, a US Marine landed one day and asked for gasoline. His tanks were filled with the same fuel being used by the 157 about twenty minutes after take-off the same plane was reported down in a rice in Southwestern Manila. An investigation revealed that the fuel had a high content of kerosene which caused engine failure. The Observer aboard was a full colonel and was reported to be the fuel coordinator for the Southwest Pacific Area.

With the island of Luzon secured the next move for the 157 was to Okinawa. The ground echelon moved by truck convoy to Subic Bay and on 14 June 45 boarded LST 802 destined for Okinawa. The air echelon was to fly to the island of Okinawa, which was a flight of over seven hours entirely over water. This unusual feat was accomplished by adding three auxiliary fuel

tanks, one under each wing and one in the cargo compartment. The flight was completed without incident.

In late June the 157 was operational again on Bise Airstrip on Northwestern Okinawa and was directly East of Ie Shima. It was here that an interesting story took place concerning General Stillwell's hat.

Our strip was at Bise Point on Okinawa and on 5 Aug 45, General "Uncle Joe" Stillwell paid us a visit on his way to Fifth Fighter Command Headquarters. Many of us spent our free time on the coral ledge that surrounded the strip, viewing the beautiful colored coral, tropical fish, sharks and barracuda. I was on the beach the day the General lost his hat and saw something falling from an L-5 and land in the water. When I returned to the strip, the General was back and word was that he was offering five bottles of whiskey to anyone returning his hat.

I returned to the beach, waded out to the area where I had seen the object fall and found the hat. I returned to my tent in a roundabout way, to keep others from knowing that I had recovered the hat. Later an aide to the General returned to our strip and finding out that I had the hat, asked me to go back to headquarters to meet the General and personally return the hat. T/Sgt. Bockman, of the 157 flew me back in an L-5 to 10th Army Headquarters. From the strip I rode in the General's jeep to his quarters. He seemed very pleased to get his hat back as the old campaign hat went back to his days as a buck private. After a short conversation the General gave me five bottles of bourbon, indicating his supply of scotch was low. He smiled when I said his supply was much better than mine. I returned to Bise Point with my reward.

USAF Unit Histories
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Sources
Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.