

# 516<sup>th</sup> AERONAUTICAL SYSTEMS GROUP

## MISSION

Directs the modernization, development, test, production, deployment and sustainment of C-17, F117 engine, support, and training systems. This Department of Defense airlift program provides vital airlift capability in support of U.S. national interests.

## LINEAGE

31<sup>st</sup> Transport Group constituted, 25 Oct 1943

Activated, 28 Oct 1943

Redesignated 516<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Group, 15 Sep 1945

Inactivated, 30 Sep 1946

Redesignated 516<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Group, Medium, 10 May 1949

Activated in the Reserve, 26 Jun 1949

Ordered to active service, 16 Apr 1951

Inactivated on 16 Jan 1953

Redesignated 516<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Group, Assault, Rotary Wing

Activated, 8 Mar 1955

Inactivated on 9 Jul 1956

Redesignated 516<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Group on 31 July 1985 (remained inactive)

C-17 Systems Group constituted, 23 Nov 2004

Activated, 18 Jan 2005

516<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Group and C-17 Systems Group consolidated, 23 Jun 2006

Consolidated organization redesignated 516<sup>th</sup> Aeronautical Systems Group, 14 Jul 2006

Inactivated, 30 Jun 2010

## STATIONS

Camp Griffiss, England, 28 Oct 1943  
Grove, England, 1 Nov 1943  
Querqueville, France, 5 Sep 1944  
Chartres, France, 12 Nov 1944  
Grove, England, 7 Dec 1944  
Bovingdon, England, 15 Oct 1945  
Bremen, Germany, 10 Apr 1946  
Tulln, Austria, 10 Jul 1946-30 Sep 1946  
Memphis Municipal Airport, TN, 26 Jun 1949 – 16 Jan 1953  
Sewart AFB, TN, 8 Mar 1955 – 9 Jul 1956  
Wright-Patterson AFB OH, 18 Jan 2005 - 30 Jun 2010

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

IX Air Service Command (later IX Air Force Service Command), 28 Oct 1943  
302<sup>nd</sup> Transport Wing, 1 Sep 1944  
51<sup>st</sup> Troop Carrier Wing, 4 Sep 1945-30 Sep 1946  
516<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Wing, 26 Jun 1949-16 Jan 1953  
Eighteenth Air Force, 8 Mar 1955-9 Jul 1956  
Mobility Systems Wing (later 516<sup>th</sup> Aeronautical Systems Wing), 18 Jan 2005-30 Jun 2010

### **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

C-47, 1943-1946  
T-7, 1949–1951  
T-11, 1949–1951  
C-46, 1949–1953  
C-119, 1952–1953  
H-19, 1955  
H-21, 1955-1956

### **COMMANDERS**

Col Henry C. Allen

### **HONORS**

**Service Streamers**

**Campaign Streamers**

**Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

**Decorations**

**EMBLEM**

**MOTTO**

## **NICKNAME**

## **OPERATIONS**

It was "D plus 5" when the 31st Transport Group first stuck its nose into the continental affairs as Colonel Carl Feldman, then Commanding Officer, touched down with a loaded C-47 on the dust swirled runway on the Normandy beachhead. After the delivery of supplies on board, the aircraft was loaded with allied casualties to return to waiting ambulance in England. From that date to Victory in Europe Day, the transport aircraft of the Wing have never ceased in their endless flights, carrying supplies to the continent and returning wounded to England.

A special picked cadre from this group was sent to the airstrip on Omaha Beach under the leadership of Major Milton E. Evans, Operations Officer, to organize the receiving of air freight and the assembling of evacuees. The airstrip was nothing more than a "wide open spot" right next to the beach, dusty and within range of enemy small arm fire, but its business surpassed that known to any other airdrome in the theater to that date. It passed the London airdromes of Hendon and Iffton and the Air Transport command airdromes of Prestwick and St. Mawgan. It was later reflected to by correspondents and generals, "G.I.s and Gobs", as well as by those who operated it as "the busiest airdrome in the world".

With the reassignment of the Wing to the United States Strategic Air Forces in Europe and the joining forces of the two groups the 31st Transport Group, which had primarily been fully occupied in cross channel operations, and the 27th Air Transport Group, which had been hauling passenger, mail and cargo from the date of provisional activation of its units in the theater in August of 1942, an organization equaled by none other was formulated, abundantly equipped with trained forces, and eager to apply itself to the colossal tasks of operating rapidly expanding aerial supply lines.

Colonel Arnold who assumed command just two weeks prior to the close of the campaign, named Colonel Laurence B. Hickam as Chief of Operations for the Wing, and Lt Col James Douglas as commanding officer of the 27th Air Transport Group, filling the position he had vacated.

The 31st Transport Group was moved from Grove to the Normandy peninsula, with its headquarters at Queraueville. The 27th Air Transport Group commenced cessation of its United Kingdom business and set its sights at the new field, that of operation on the continent. Squadrons were moved from their various "homes" all over the United Kingdom to Grove and then proceeded to move one at a time to Le Bourget airdrome near Paris.

Shortly after the move of the 31st Transport Group, Colonel Feldman was reassigned as commanding officer of the 27th Air Transport Group, carrying with him LTC Wendell I. Covalt, Major Ted Bennett and Captain John Moore as executive, operations officer and adjutant, respectively. Lt Col James H. Douglas, who had formerly commanded the group returned to the Zone of the Interior. Lt Col Henry C. Allen was made the new commanding officer of the

31st Transport Group with Lt Col Carey C. Harmon later appointed deputy for administration and Major Mitt Evans, deputy for operations.

During the month of December the 31st Transport Group returned to its original home Grove, Berkshire in England. Priority air cargo was building up at that station and soon reached the highest known in the theater. The Grove air freight terminal soon became the second largest terminal in the world, second only to that where air freight is collected for flights over the "hump" in the China-Burma-India Theater.

Three C-46 Commandos were assigned to the 31st Transport Group to increase the moving capacity from Grove and other shipping points in the United Kingdom. These aircraft were capable of carrying over 9,000 pounds on each trip and often chalked up loads of 27,000 pounds to the "far shore" in a single day, with a similar tonnage of casualties returned to the United Kingdom. On these days pilots and crews of the coveted aircraft would rise before many cooks and K.P.s were catching their "forty winks" and take off for the front before 0300 hours in order to complete three round trips for the day.

The three months of October, November and December of 1943 were the labor months for the 31st Transport Group at Grove, Berkshire in England, for it was then the headquarters and five squadrons were activated, manned and organized. Among these units were the 313th, 314th, 315th and 316th Transport Squadrons and the 326th Ferrying Squadron.

Col Carl Feldmen was appointed commanding officer by the Commanding General of the Ninth Air Force Service Command, the command to which the group was then assigned. The first commanding officer was an officer of the Regular Army; a command pilot with some thirteen years of service. He was a member of the first task force to land in the United Kingdom and a veteran of the famous Ploesti oil refinery raid.

The group was activated with one lone aircraft the famous "Baby Dumpling", a veteran of battles against African heat and burning sands. The "Babe" was symbolic as a beginning, for on V-E Day she was still carrying her share of the supply and evacuation burden. It was the "Babe" that carried the 10,000th patient from Normandy.

From that winter the group grew and expanded, groaned from new loads and constantly prepared for the invasion so long awaited. Each cargo flight in the United Kingdom was but a prelude to bigger things ahead. Pilots were trained to fly under simulated combat conditions to hug the ground and to recognize emergencies. Other units of the group were sent out to live field conditions.

Each step forward was a drive toward invasion. Suddenly the tempo increased. New aircraft were added, mechanics worked the clock around painting black and white invasion stripes on the transports, and a special assembly crew was called in to work a twenty-four hour shift installing litters, magically converting the "sky trains" to "flying ambulances" capable of carrying 24 litter patients or 27 ambulatory patients. They were the "mercy planes" of World

War II.

By "D-Day" the group was a potent force. June 11th brought the first test, and this by the commanding officer, as Col Feldman landed the first transport on the beach at Omaha. From then on the airstrip was a 31st show. The queens of the sky swept in, dumped their loads and took aboard wounded allied soldiers for the hospitals in England. The field operations were placed under Major Milton Evans, and T-1 became "the busiest airdrome in the world".

Led by the 313th Transport Squadron, the group made its way to airstrips in Normandy. The headquarters was located at Querqueville, a former Luftwaffe fighter base just south of Cherbourg.

Shortly after the completion of the move, the group was reassigned with the wing to the Air Service Command, operating for the United States Strategic Air Forces in Europe instead of the Ninth Air Force alone. New faces were seen newly assigned personnel to assist in maintenance and ATC crews attached for operational duty.

Evacuation aircraft of the group were inspected by General Eisenhower and Admiral King. Transports of the group assisted in the hauling of thousands of gallons of gasoline to the Third Army during the battle for France and to the thunderbolt units pounding at the Germans during the siege of the Falaise gap.

With the front ever nearer to Germany, group aircraft delivered hundreds of pints of life giving blood plasma and whole blood to field hospitals. To the fighting men went bayonets, rifles, grenades, combat rations and rubber shoes to war against trench foot. Belly tanks, cramming planes so tightly that pilots and crews entered their planes through escape hatches, were flown to tactical units, increasing the striking range of thunderbolts, mustangs, and lightnings, escorting bombers and coordinating strafing attacks with the ground forces. Army medics demanded toilet seats, and toilet seats were carried by the 31st aircraft. Engineers ordered fence posts and received them, and the Quartermaster called for chicken wire, receiving same on priority shipment for road matting. "Red Ball" trucks brought hot freight to the 31st airstrips, who in turn flew it to the tactical units. France was busy in an American way and the Americans with the 31st Transport Group were on their way to Germany.

In those long, work-filled months, the 31st Transport Group posted a number of "firsts" that will long serve as a measuring stick with which to gauge the activities of the group. It was first to establish an air freight and evacuation strip on the Normandy beachhead. It was first to evacuate wounded from Germany. It was first to evacuate wounded from the other side of the Rhine. It was first to ferry the A-26 attack bomber in the European Theater of Operations.

Air transport of supplies could never have hoped to take the place of the Liberty Ships that plied the channel. But it did get a tremendous amount of critical cargo where it was needed and did it more quickly than any other known means of Military transportation.

The men at the front have paid silent homage to the C-47s of the 31st Transport Group as they landed with urgently needed supplies. And many a man owes his life today to the speed with which he, as a wounded combat soldier, was returned from the front to a base hospital in the rear.

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

Unit History. *Gooney Birds and Ferry Tales; The 27<sup>th</sup> Air Transport Group in World War II*. Jon A. Maguire. Schiffer Military History. Atglen, PA. 1998.

Unit history. *302 Transport Wing*. Nd.