

# 2<sup>nd</sup> COMBAT CARGO GROUP

## MISSION

### LINEAGE

2<sup>nd</sup> Combat Cargo Group constituted, 25 Apr 1944

Activated, 1 May 1944

Inactivated, 15 Jan 1946

Disbanded, 8 Oct 1948

### STATIONS

Syracuse AAB, NY, 1 May 1944

Baer Field, IN, 9-27 Oct 1944

Biak, Nov 1944

Dulag, Leyte, May 1945

Okinawa, 20 Aug 1945

Yokota, Japan, 22 Sep 1945-15 Jan 1946

### ASSIGNMENTS

#### WEAPON SYSTEMS

C-47

C-46

#### COMMANDERS

Col William J. Bell, May 1944

Maj Arthur D. Thomas, 10 Dec 1945

#### HONORS

##### Service Streamers

##### Campaign Streamers

Air Offensive, Japan

New Guinea

Western Pacific

Leyte  
Luzon  
Southern Philippines  
Ryukyus

## **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

### **Decorations**

Philippine Presidential Unit Citation

### **EMBLEM**

None

### **MOTTO**

### **NICKNAME**

### **OPERATIONS**

Combat Cargo Groups were officially authorized in April 1944, and a four month training period began in May 1944. The new groups original specifications were to: carry ground troops and auxiliary combat equipment to effective locations in a combat zone; maintain combat reinforcements, supply and resupply units in the combat zone; and evacuate casualties and other personnel from such zones. To this end four new cargo groups were planned. Seeing that these new units were to be carrying cargo into the heart of the battle, the new units were called Combat Cargo Groups.

The Combat Cargo Groups were to be self-contained groups, capable of being 100% operational and always ready to go at a moment's notice. To that end, each Combat Cargo Squadron was to have an Airdrome Squadron assigned with it. Each Airdrome Squadrons mission was to supply all tasks, including everything (from cooking to aircraft maintenance), necessary for the Combat Cargo Squadron to be self-sufficient. Both of these groups would function as one unit. Each of the Combat Cargo Groups was to consist of four Squadrons, each with 25 aircraft; originally C-47s. To fly these aircraft, 25 complete crews were assigned along with 25 extra Flying Officers.

The 2nd Combat Cargo Group (5th, 6th, 7th and 8th Squadrons) were sent into the Pacific to support the scattered fighting there. Airdrome Squadrons were assigned to the Combat Cargo Group in the states. The 2nd Combat Cargo Group was assigned the 336th, 337th, 338th, and 339th Airdrome Squadrons.

The Group's flying personnel was composed of some veteran airmen who had previously flown B-17's, B-24's, B-25's, B-26's and other multiengine aircraft. Others were fresh out of flight schools and the enlisted men had been trained in radio and mechanical schools. The Syracuse Army Air Base became a hub of activity as these young men assimilated into the routine

training in Douglas C-47 twin engine transport planes. Glider towing, paratroop drops, high and low altitude cross country flights, night flying, instrument flying, etc, were a normal part of the training. We became familiar with the beautiful terrain in New York state such as the Finger Lakes Region, the Catskills and also Lake Ontario. We also scared a lot of farmers' chickens on our low altitude cross country flights. In addition to our flying schedule, the pilots attended ground school courses in meteorology, flying regulations, communications, navigation, instruments, engines, weights and balances, air evacuation, demolition of supplies, link trainer, etc. Enlisted men likewise received varying courses in communications, engineering, blinkers, ciphers, radio equipment, engines, electrical and hydraulic equipment, etc. Bivouacs were required to prepare us for our life overseas and the Airdrome Squadrons drove in a convoy with their equipment and the pilots and crews flew our C-47 s to Fulton, N. Y. Later we did the same at Wheeler Sack Field near Watertown, N. Y. Gen. "Hap" Arnold visited Wheeler Sack and he viewed our group planes flying in formation at 500ft, dropping paratroopers and supplies. We also towed gliders (CG4A's) and engaged in numerous flight operations. We slept in pup tents and ate out of our mess gear. This experience proved beneficial to our future life overseas.

General Bell relates how we suddenly changed from training in C-47's to C-46's. He recalls the following, "Late in July, when Gen. Arnold came to observe our graduation exercises, we had completed our training in "Gooney Birds." Gen. Arnold, a General from the Troop Carrier Command and I (Col. Bell) rode off in the same car off base to observe a paradrop. On the way back, Gen. Arnold turned to me and said, "Bell, how long would it take you to transition into C-46 airplanes?" Having never had an occasion to even think of such a possibility, I was caught flatfooted. I hazarded a guess that it would probably take about two months. As you know, in about 6 weeks, when we all averaged about sixty hours per pilot in "The Big Assed Bird," we were off to Ft. Wayne to pick up our new airplanes. At any rate, the official date of transfer to C-46 training was August 24, 1944. This was accomplished with enthusiasm as the C-46 was larger, more powerful with R-2800 2,000 H. P. Pratt & Whitney engines and offered more of a challenge. Mr. DeGarmo, a Curtiss test pilot arrived in Syracuse to show the pilots the versatility of the C-46. He brought 18,000 hrs, of pilot experience along and a big black cigar. He really could make the C-46 perform and we were impressed. After 2 months of further training in the C-46, we were considered ready to embark on our adventure to the Pacific.

On October 7th, 1944 we flew our planes, crews and much equipment to our staging area at Baer Field near Ft, Wayne, Indiana. There we were outfitted and prepared for overseas duty. After a short time, we were ordered to fly to Fairfield-Suisun, Fairfield, Calif, with an overnight stop at Amarillo, Texas en-route. At this base auxiliary fuel tanks were installed in the cargo compartment of each C-46. We received additional shots, medical exams, had wills executed and were soon ready for the first leg of our long flight. On the night of Oct. 21, 1944, Col. Bell and Major Bowen took off in the 1st C-46 and Lt. Frank Hescoc, the second and headed west for John Rogers Field in Oahu, Hawaii. Gen. Bell writes, "That night take-off from Fairfield-Suisun heading for Hawaii, our very first flight with a full military load, was quite a thrill. Getting our original 80 planes from Ft. Wayne to Biak was in itself a real accomplishment," The following night, more planes ventured out on the long and somewhat fearful flight. Again the next night the same occurred, but some planes, for various mechanical reasons were forced to

remain at Fairfield-Suisun until repairs could be made. This flight took from 12 to 14 hours and became for most of us our first over water flight experience. Though our records state that every plane arrived safely, many pilots reported they were flying on fumes rather than liquid fuel as they approached Hawaii. Others reported they were preparing to ditch, but somehow managed to make it. From Oahu, we flew a route that took us to Christmas Island, Canton, the Fijis, New Caledonia and finally Townsville, Australia. Others flew to Tarawa and Henderson Field on Guadalcanal and then on to Townsville. This was where we first had a taste of the renowned Aussie beer and it was to become our favorite beverage. From Townsville we flew our planes up to Nadzab, New Guinea where our first actual flying began as our contribution to the war effort. There were flights to nearby Lae and Finschaven and also Townsville. Finally the orders were cut to fly to Biak which was to become our 1st home base of operations for 6 months. Biak is a part of the Schouten Islands off the East Side of Northern New Guinea and a part of the Netherlands, East Indies and we would be receiving our monthly pay in Dutch Guilders. Our planes then were all given a 100 hour-hour inspection. The arrival date on Biak was Nov. 10, 1944. We were assigned to the 5th Air Force under Gen. Ennis C. Whitehead and more specifically, to the 54th Troop Carrier Wing under Gen. Paul H. Prentiss. Wing Headquarters was located several miles west of the 2nd C. C. Group area on Biak. We chose the beach area to erect our tents which Gen. Bell humorously described as "The Worst Shanty Town in the Theatre."

Because of the limited number of aircraft, not all of our Group were destined to fly, but came to Biak via the conscripted Dutch Freighter, "The Boschfontein." Those that came to Biak by ship may very well be considered the lucky ones. First of all, we lived for almost 2 weeks at Camp Stoneman, Pittsburg, Calif. There we enjoyed numerous visits into San Francisco during our days of preparation for the voyage. There was considerable social life in and about the small town of Pittsburg. When our time to depart the U. S. arrived, we went via a ferry to San Francisco and were sent off to the unknown with the music of an army band. Life aboard the Dutch liner, the Boschfontein, wasn't all that bad. Though the ship zig-zagged across the Pacific to avoid Jap subs and we were assigned our life boat stations and had drills, it became a rather pleasant experience. The officers aboard dined at tables with white table cloths, goblets for water, fine dishes and Indian boy waiters. The food was served to us in a manner similar to one of the finer restaurants. We sunned ourselves, as the days got warmer, out on the decks. We engaged each day in bull sessions to pass the timer. We had the makings of a swing band that rehearsed out on the fantail quite often. Our living conditions were really not preparing us too well for the life ahead. After 25 days of this, we arrived in the harbor at Hollandia and disembarked - rather reluctantly to a dusty, dirty transient camp via an army truck. There we awaited our flights to Biak and upon arriving there, we were looked at with disdain by the "veteran flyers" who were already experienced in their jobs. The operations officers got us flying without any hesitancy and we soon became veteran flyers like the rest. Most of the passengers aboard The Boschfontein were enlisted men from the Airdrome Squadrons. These men did not participate in the "fine dining", but ate out of their mess gear, Living conditions aboard ship were very undemocratic. We settled on the coral island of Biak with everyone pitching in, to set up our tents, mess halls, headquarters and operations tents, etc. Our meal

fare became powdered milk, powdered eggs, Spam, C-rations type food and coffee brewed with odoriferous water. Not too palatable, but we survived.

About eight hundred ground support personnel left San Francisco on election day in November 1944 on board the General Hershey. This is a week or so before the Boschfontein sailed. After following a zig-zag course for about three weeks, we arrived in Hollandia. There were orders waiting for the engineering officer and 47 aircraft maintenance personnel from each of the four squadrons to disembark. That is all we were told. The rest of us stayed on board. We were joined by a destroyer escort and headed to sea again. The officers enjoyed fine dining just as they did on the Boschfontein with one exception. Every time there was an enemy aircraft alarm, all our waiters deserted us and took up their positions in the gun turrets. After a week or so we anchored off Leyte in the Philippines and were taken ashore at Red Beach in ducks. We were told that MacArthur had liberated the Philippines just three weeks earlier. We were not met by anyone so we pitched pup tents on the beach to prepare for the night (big mistake). The tide came in just after midnight and caused a lot of the troops to lose most of their personal belongings. On reporting to the base commander the following morning to find out what our orders were, he answered with another question. "Who the H---- are you people and what are you doing here?" "Our Quarter Master is having a big enough problem just feeding the troops that are already here." They did feed us though---mostly C Rations. Our CO visited the local air strip and found a pilot who had seen C-46s with our emblems at Biak. After communicating with our superiors at Biak, planes were sent to Leyte and we were all flown back to Biak. Our total stay on Leyte was no more than a week if that

The group Operated from Biak to fly passengers and cargo to US bases in Australia, New Guinea, the Admiralties, and the Philippines. Also dropped supplies to US and guerrilla forces in the Philippines. Moved to Leyte in May 1945.

The group maintained flights to bases in Australia, New Guinea, and the Philippines; transported personnel and supplies to the Ryukyus, and evacuated casualties on return flights; moved to Okinawa in Aug 1945; transported personnel and equipment of the occupation forces to Japan and ferried liberated prisoners of war to the Philippines; moved to Japan in Sep 1945.

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Air Force Order of Battle

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#### Sources

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