

483rd TROOP CARRIER GROUP



MISSION

LINEAGE

483rd Bombardment Group (Heavy) constituted, 14 Sep 1943
Activated, 20 Sep
Inactivated, 25 Sep 1945
Redesignated 483rd Troop Carrier Group, Medium
Activated 1 Jan 1953

STATIONS

Ephrata AAB, WA, 20 Sep 1943
MacDill Field, FL, 7 Nov 1943-2 Mar 1944
Tortorella, Italy, 30 Mar 1944
Sterparone Airfield, Italy, 22 Apr 1944
Pisa, Italy 15 May-25 Sep 1945
Ashiya AB, Japan, 1 Jan 1953

ASSIGNMENTS

ATTACHMENTS

Far East Air Forces

WEAPON SYSTEMS

B-17
C-119

COMMANDERS

Col Paul L. Barton, 26 Sep 1943
Col Joseph B. Stanley, 8 May-Sep 1945
LTC Ernest W. Burton, 1 Jan 1953
Col George M. Foster, 1 Mar 1953
LTC Kenneth C. Jacobs, Jul 1955
Col Horace W. Patch, Aug 1955

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

World War II
Air Combat, EAME Theater
Air Offensive, Europe
Rome-Arno
Normandy
Northern France
Southern France
North Apennines
Rhineland
Central Europe
Po Valley

Korean War
Third Korean Winter
Korea Summer-Fall, 1953

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations
Germany, 18 Jul 1944
Germany, 24 Mar 1945

Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation
[Jan]-27 Jul 1953

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award
6 May 1953-10 Sep 1954

EMBLEM

Azure (sky blue), a sphere encircled with an orbit all.or, latitude and longitude lines azure (deep blue), over the sphere a hand proper supporting a parachute proper, an aircraft proper, and artillery proper; encircling the upper section of the sphere, three clouds proper and an increscent moon and four stars of the second color; on a chief of the third, thirteen stars argent, the chief fimbriated or. (Approved, 2 Feb 1956)

MOTTO

EFFECTIVE AIRLIFT SUPPORT

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Began operations in Apr 1944 and served in combat until late in Apr 1945, hitting such targets as factories, oil refineries, marshalling yards, storage areas, airdromes, bridges, gun positions, and troop concentrations in Italy, France, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Rumania, Yugoslavia, and Greece. Received a DUG for action on 18 Jul 1944 when, without fighter escort, the group engaged numerous enemy aircraft in the target area and also bombed the objective, an airdrome and installations at Memmingen. Assisting the strategic bombardment of enemy industry, the group received another DUG for braving fighter assaults and antiaircraft fire to bomb tank factories at Berlin on 24 Mar 1945. Struck targets in southern France in preparation for the invasion in Aug 1944. Operated in suport of ground forces in northern Italy during the Allied offensive in Apr 1945. After V-E Day, transported personnel from Italy to North Africa for movement to the US.

Used C-119's to transport personnel and supplies to Korea, receiving a Korean PUC for the missions. Received an AFOUA for operations during 1953-1954: while transporting supplies to UN forces in Korea and training with airborne troops, the group also assisted the French in Indochina by hauling supplies and training personnel for airlift operations in C-119s.

The 483d TCG transported personnel and supplies by C119s from Japan to Korea. During the final months of the conflict, it alternated with the 314th TCG to airdrop supplies io a detachment of the 502d Tactical Control Group, located on a 5,000-foot mountain near Chongmong-ni. In late June 1953, the 483d TCG airlifted reinforcements and cargo to areas behind the western half of the UN line.

The U.S. Air Force reactivated the 483rd Troop Carrier Wing (later renamed the 483rd Tactical Airlift Wing) on October 15, 1966 with a nucleus of headquarters personnel. the wing was based at Cam Ranh AB and Colonel Paul J. Mascot took command on November 4, 1966. The USAF approved six new squadrons, each with sixteen C-7 Caribous and 24 aircrews. The manning authorization was for 1,555 spaces, replacing the 1,443 spaces used by the Army Caribou operation. The move saw a continuation of the interservice wrangling between the Army and the Air Force which had been central to the controversy surrounding the aircraft since it was ordered by the U.S. Army. The core issues were Army concerns that the Caribous

remain near enough Army maneuver units to continue the responsiveness the aircraft provided under Army ownership and the dedicated user concept whereby ground commanders allocated mission control to specific users. The Air Force wanted the aircraft under central control by 834th Air Division. Withdrawal of the aircraft from the Mekong Delta and from the 1st Cavalry Division base at An Khe were particularly controversial. Finally, Defense Secretary McNamara ruled that the Caribous would be based at Air Force and not Army bases. Two squadrons each were then deployed to Cam Ranh, Vung Tau, and Phu Cat.

The 483rd had a long history in combat and a long history in Southeast Asia. The unit was formed as the 483rd Bombardment Group (Heavy) on September 14, 1943 and activated on September 20th. After initial basing at Ephrata AAB, Washington the group moved to MacDill Field, Florida for training on B-17s from 7 November 1943 to 2 March 1944. After passing their Army Air Corps operational readiness inspection, the wing left MacDill on March 4, 1944 for deployment to Italy and 15th Air Force.

The ground echelon moved by train to Camp Patrick, Virginia for processing and embarked on three Liberty ships on March 13. They arrived at Sterparone, Italy on April 9. On the way they experienced submarine and enemy air threats. The air echelon picked up brand-new B-17Gs at Hunter Field, Georgia and flew to Italy via Miami, Trinidad, Belem and Natal, Brazil.

In Natal, the B-17s were fitted with extra fuel tanks and then flew nine and one-half hours across the South Atlantic to Dakar, Senegal. After stops in Marrakech and either Tunis or Bizerte in North Africa, they arrived in Italy in late March. They were temporarily based in the Foggia area until the runway at their base in Sterparone was completed. The wing flew in to Sterparone on April 22 after their ground element built a base around a 6,000 foot runway in the middle of a wheat field in 13 days. The next day they mounted a 32-plane mission to Austria.

The group flew combat missions from April 1944 until late April 1945. Their targets were factories, oil refineries, marshalling yards, storage areas, airfields, bridges, gun positions and troop concentrations. Targets were hit in Italy, France, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Rumania, Yugoslavia, and Greece. The 483rd received a DUC for a mission to Memmingen, Germany on July 18, 1944. The 483rd was in the fifth position in the wing formation of six groups and was led by Captain Louis T. Seith. Over the Adriatic Sea, flying through 8/10s cumulus clouds, the groups became separated. Two groups with 44 B-17s returned to base and 27 B-17s from another group bombed an alternate target. The break in time schedules caused by the adverse weather made it impossible for fighter escort to make their rendezvous with the bombers or to escort them over the target area. Formations were further confused by phony messages broadcast from enemy radio stations. Without a properly authenticated recall signal from 15th Air Force, the 483rd Bomb Group decided to attack the primary target and flew on alone and unescorted into the target in southwestern Germany. On the way, they were attacked by around 200 enemy fighters, half Me-109s and half FW-190s. By the time they reached the target, only 12 B-17s were left and the intelligence summary for July 19, 1944 indicates that they score direct hits on the airfield. The Germans lost 101 fighters, fifty-three in the air combat. The 483rd lost 143 officers and men and 14 out of 26 planes on the mission.

The second 483rd Bomb Group unit citation was for a mission to Berlin flown on March 24, 1945. The target was the Daimler-Benz Tank Works. The bomb pattern was accurate even though the B-17s were attacked by sixteen ME-262 jet fighters. The crew of "Big Yank" was officially credited with shooting down three Me-262 jets and another probable. The mission was a long one and the bombers of the 483rd landed at their base in Italy with nearly dry tanks. Some of the Group's B-17s had to land at alternate bases due to low fuel.

The 483rd was the only bomb group in the entire Air Force to be credited with shooting down three jet fighters on one mission by one plane and the only Group with an aerial gunner to be credited with having shot down two Me-262s.

The Group flew a total of 215 combat missions in 14 months of combat. The Group bombed Ploesti, Rumania nine times and flew multiple missions against other heavily defended targets. The unit participated in the invasion of France and took part in the first shuttle mission into Mirgorod, Russia, bombing a target on the way in and another on the way back. The Group lost 66 B-17s in aerial combat, two others that ditched while on combat missions, and another 13 that made it back to base but were so severely damaged to fly again. This made a total of 81 lost B-17s. A total of 760 crew members were shot down with 214 killed in action, 315 became POWs and 231 evaded capture and returned to duty. At any given time the 483rd had about 70 aircraft in the group and normally flew 28 B-17s on each combat mission. Maintenance was excellent and the ground crews were especially commended to General Twining, commander of 15th Air Force by General Ira Eaker, commander of the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces in the early fall of 1944.

The Group operated in support of ground forces in northern Italy during the allied offensive in April 1945. After V-E Day, the Group transported personnel from Italy to North Africa for movement back to the U.S. The 483rd Bomb Group was inactivated in Italy on September 25, 1945.

The Group was redesignated the 483rd Troop Carrier Group (Medium) and activated in Japan on January 1, 1953. It was the operational arm of the 483rd Troop Carrier Wing (Medium) which was also activated on January 1, 1953 to replace the reserve 403rd TCW and its 403rd TCG which returned to reserve status on January 1. The 483rd was assigned to Tactical Air Command but attached to Far East Air Forces for duty in the Korean War. The 483rd Troop Carrier Wing controlled the 314th TCG as well as its own 483rd TCG. It assumed responsibility for C-119 troop carrier and air transport operations in a large area of the Far East. Based at Ashiya AB in southern Japan, the Wing used virtually every pilot and aircraft of both groups to move approximately 4,000 paratroopers and their equipment from southern Japan to Korea in June-early July 1953. The Wing was commanded by Colonel Maurice F. Casey, Jr. from January 1, 1953 to an unknown date. The Third Korean Winter Campaign Streamer was awarded to the Wing in the Summer of 1953. Unit decorations include the USAF Outstanding Unit Award for the period May 6, 1953-September 10, 1953 partly for transporting supplies to UN forces in Korea to the end of the conflict. The Wing was also awarded the Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation for the period January 1, 1953-July 7, 1953.

The 483rd Troop Carrier Group transported personnel and supplies by C-119s from Japan to Korea. During the final months of the war, it alternated with the 314th TCG to airdrop supplies to a detachment of the 502nd Tactical Control Group, located on a 5,000 foot mountain near Chongmongni. In late June 1953, the 483rd airlifted reinforcements and cargo behind the western half of the UN line. The official roster of Air Force Combat Units of World War II-Part 7 also notes that the group also assisted the French in Indochina by hauling supplies and training personnel for airlift operations in C-119s. The unit was assigned to Far East Air Forces in 1954. The 483rd TCG was commanded by Lt. Colonel Ernest J. Burton, 1 Jan 1953; Colonel George M. Foster, 1 Mar 1953; Lt. Col. Kenneth C. Jacobs, July 1955; and Colonel Horace W. Patch, c. August 1955 to an unknown date.

While the U.S. and its UN allies were fighting in Korea, the French had returned to Indochina after World War II. Their return led to an eight-year “war without fronts” and the French Union Forces, including French troops, Foreign Legionnaires, loyal Indochinese, North Africans, and Senegalese, controlled only the ground upon which they stood. Throughout the war, the French occupied several critical enclaves which required support from the air, both fire support and logistic support. The French air transport squadrons could not support it all. In addition, the French relied heavily on airborne forces and an Airborne Forces Command was organized in 1949 with headquarters at Saigon and Hanoi. The problem was that French air transport squadrons were chronically short of air and ground crews. The French Air Force had 69 C-47s in December 1953 but only 58 crews to fly them. Finally, flying and airborne operations were hampered by weak maintenance and logistic support. President Truman’s decision to assist the French in May 1950 threw the 483rd into the fray. The U.S. had loaned France C-47s and provided maintenance and logistics support. It was not enough.

One answer seen by the French was the use of the new American C-119s for airdrops. French officials requested some C-119s as early as 1951. General Mark Clark, the American commander in the Far East, visited Indochina in March 1953 and requested permission to send two C-119s with USAF crews. The Joints Chiefs of Staff decided not to support direct American involvement but agreed to loan six C-119s to the French and to train the French to fly them. Civilian crews from CAT in Taiwan were also to fly the missions. Crews from the 483rd promptly began training pilots and mechanics from the French Air Force and also from CAT. The six C-119s landed at Gia Lam on May 4-5, 1953. Eighteen ground crewmen went with the aircraft to instruct and assist in maintenance.

The American aircrews remained in Hanoi and flew about 80 missions as part of Project Swivel Chair. 315th Air Division commanders were not pleased with the continuation of Swivel Chair. Through an agreement between General Henri Navarre, the new French commander in Indochina, and the US mission in Saigon, the C-119s and 483rd Wing personnel left Indochina on July 28, 1953. Part of the agreement left six C-119s on ten-hour alert, ready for heavy drops in Indochina. French crews would also receive refresher training on the C-119s.

With the armistice in Korea on July 27, 1953, the Americans of the 483rd assumed heavier commitments to the French. Project Iron Age agreed to hold 22 C-119s available for short-term loan. 483rd Wing Operation Plan 4-53 sent aircraft to Cat Bi, Vietnam for loan periods of around five days. USAF crews were to ferry the planes to Indochina and return them to Japan as soon as specified airdrops were completed. General Macarty was afraid the French would misuse the planes for “champagne and ice runs” and this short-term plan was designed to prevent such misuse. The planes would have French markings but the 483rd personnel would wear their own uniforms while performing maintenance and technical supply functions. Training French aircrews resumed at Clark AB in the Philippines on September 23, 1953 with 483rd aircraft, instructors, and maintainers. Civil Air Transport, Inc. (CAT) crewmen received additional training at Ashiya. They were “exceptionally well qualified” according to Colonel Casey. Col. Casey himself instructed in the flight training program. Many CAT pilots were ex-Marine Corps, Air Force, or Navy pilots and one was a former member of the 483rd.

The Iron Age program was primarily tasked with drops at Dien Bien Phu. Other drops were made in Laos in emergency situations. Several members of the 483rd, including Colonel Casey, visited Dien Bien Phu. Col. Casey accompanied a maintenance team to recover a C-119 forced down for repairs. The maintenance detachment at Cat Bi kept the birds in good flying condition and the CAT pilots returned to missions in early March. The 483rd detachment numbered 121 men, most of whom served sixty-day TDYs. Viet Minh commandos can the 483rd a harbinger of its own Vietnam experience in March when a C-119 and several other aircraft were damaged in a night attack.

The situation at Dien Bien Phu became more and more desperate after mid-March 1954. The thousand mile trip from Clark to Haiphong took six hours by C-119. In mid-April a squadron of the 483rd moved to Clark with fifteen C-119s, tasked for six daily round trips to Indochina. Most of the 35 Iron Age C-119s hit by ground fire were hit in these last weeks of the battle for Dien Bien Phu. The only C-119 actually shot down was flown by the legendary CAT and ex-Air Force pilot James McGovern, also known as “Earthquake McGoon”, He was lost with four crewmen on his 45th mission over the valley.

Between 16 and 18 C-119s were kept at Tourane (later Danang) to fly the missions. Stray rounds into the base, occasional hostile fire in the landing pattern, and, finally, a determined perimeter ground attack kept the 483rd troops on their toes and three enlisted airmen and two US Army parachute riggers were captured, then released on August 31 after six weeks in captivity. The 483rd maintainers would fly to other bases to recover aircraft grounded for maintenance. Aircraft were recovered from Bientiane, Seno, Xiangkhoang, and Saravane, Laos. Lt. Col. Donald Spicer, Det commander, flew the relief plane on most of these occasions.

The 483rd closed out its role in Indochina with the departure of the last C-119 from Tourane on September 7, 1954. The Wing had maintained operations for nine months in a theater more than 2,000 miles from its home base in Japan. French and CAT crews dropped 14,800 tons of cargo in 2,750 C-119 sorties. Three C-119s were destroyed but no USAF lives were lost. Colonel

Casey called the mission the “highlight experience of his military career”. It was a sentiment another generation of 483rd airlifters would share a decade and a half later.

When the Korean War ended with a truce, the 315th Air Division remained in Japan as the primary air transport unit for the Western Pacific. The Division controlled two wings--the 374th Troop Carrier Wing at Tachikawa with C-54s, C-119s, and two squadrons of C-124s and the 483rd at Ashiya with C-119s. The 315th continued to fly both overt and covert airlift missions in Asia in the mid-1950s, usually with the C-119s. In September 1956, the 21st Troop Carrier Squadron became part of the 483rd. This squadron began re-equipping with the Lockheed C-130 in September 1958 and transferred its last C-119 two months later. During this conversion period, the C-119s, C-124s, and new C-130s of the 315th Air Division transported men and materiel into Taiwan in response to the crisis over the islands of Quemoy and Matsu in the Formosa Strait. Two squadrons, the 815th and 817th, were assigned to the 483rd at Ashiya and, in November 1958, the 21st Squadron moved to Naha, Okinawa.

Since October 1957 the U.S. had been supporting the Khamba tribesmen in their resistance to the Chinese communist forces which had invaded and occupied Tibet. The CIA had trained the Khamba at a base in Saipan and then returned them to Tibet. Later they trained at Camp Hale, Colorado. A CAT B-17 made the first airdrop and later C-118s were used in the effort. In the spring of 1959 the Dalai Lama went into exile in India. After this, the Eisenhower administration beefed up the program. The C-118s were having problems with the extreme weather and high altitudes common to the Himalayas and the C-130s appeared to be the ideal aircraft. The 483rd was back in the covert operations business. From July 1959 to May 1960, C-130As of the 483rd based at Naha were used to fly these clandestine airdrops. The C-130s (1-3 for each mission) were flown from Naha to Kadena, Okinawa, loaded by CIA personnel and then flown to Takhli, Thailand by Air America crews.

In Takhli, they were stripped of all military markings and “sanitized” to make them unattributable. From Takhli, the “quarantined” Air America crews flew them across Burma to Tibet. The used letter codes such as Able flight or Baker flight as call signs, made their drops of cargo and guerilla soldiers, returned to Takhli and then were returned to the 483rd unit at Naha. The flights temporarily stopped after the U-2 flown by Francis Gary Powers was shot down by a SAM over Russia on May 1, 1960. In 1960 Ashiya AB was closed and the 483rd was inactivated.

Air Force Order of Battle

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Updated:

Sources

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

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.