

# **37<sup>th</sup> ARMY AIR FORCE BASE UNIT**

1343d AAFBU 2nd Air Transport Sq, Mobile Luliang 1 Aug 44-12 Oct 45

AAF BASE UNITS BY COMMAND ON 1 May 1945

1343rd (India-China Division, ATC) Luliang, China (430 NY)

**LINEAGE**

**STATIONS**

**ASSIGNMENTS**

**WEAPON SYSTEMS**

**ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT SERIAL NUMBERS**

**ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT TAIL/BASE CODES**

**UNIT COLORS**

**COMMANDERS**

**HONORS**

**Service Streamers**

**Campaign Streamers**

**Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

**Decorations**

**EMBLEM**

**EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE**

**MOTTO**

**NICKNAME**

## OPERATIONS

430311	L-4A	42-36358	1343AAFBU		Luliang AF/CHI	TAC	Bell, Lawrence J	
430311	L-4A	42-36414	1343AAFBU		Luliang AF/CHI	TAC	Lombard, Joseph L	Kunming AF

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Air Force Order of Battle

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### Sources

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

Shortly after sighting Lake Ehr at the foot of Mt. Tali off to the left of the course, "Sylvester's Circus" went down beneath the overcast, past the walled city of Kunming and over a large stone forest to land on the very long runway of Luliang.

This was the home of the 1343d Army Air Force Base Unit located in the western province of Yunan, a primitive province on the East. The altitude was above 6000 ft. and the soil was acid and the area vast. Underlying the top soil of a few inches was solid rock. Trees were few and the wind was constant. The airbase was surrounded on all sides by mountains.

The people were known as Miaos, an ancient race of people from the Himalayas. These people were being assimilated very slowly by the Chinese who were apparently newcomers to the area. These people were friendly but being away from the traveled world were somewhat wary of white strangers. They were basically a courteous, hospitable and cheerful people and predominantly of the peasant class. They worked from dawn to dusk on their meager farms and their clothing was mostly patchwork, the cloth being made by hand from cotton grown in the Chengtu area. Every bit of labor was accomplished by manual labor or with the help of large water buffalos. Occasionally we would see a woman with bound feet, a custom outlawed years ago. The village or city of Luliang was located approximately three miles north of the base, it was truly an ancient city. It was surrounded by a wall about thirty feet high made of stone. The ramparts on top were styled much like the castles of feudal Europe. A tower or blockhouse was situated at each corner. The gates, located on the north, south, east and west were tremendous, standing twenty feet high with each section ten feet wide and about two feet thick. The streets were cobbled and rocky and only wide enough for the average vehicle. In the center where the street intersects was a high pagoda shaped tower known as the "Drum Tower."

Immediately outside the main gate of the airfield was "Boom Town", a village of mud huts, consisting mostly of restaurants and wine shops. The occupants were mostly refugees from Japanese occupied parts of China, who have fled to live in peace and to get rich off the Americans.

The Luliang Air Base consisted of a main runway over 12,000 ft. long and 240 ft. wide, the longest in China. It could accommodate planes as large and heavy as the B-29's. The C-47 pilots jokingly claimed that they could get in a half hour flying time before reaching the end of the runway. The field had an altitude of 6,064 ft. and formed the floor of the valley. The runway was constructed of a rock base, crushed stone with a holder of mud, dusty when dry and muddy when wet. Two fighter strips were built parallel to the main runway located to the northwest. They were used by fighter type aircraft mostly P-51's and a few. F-5-E2's. The B-24's of the 373 Bomb squadron and the B-25's of the Chinese Air Force used the main runway. The 373 Bomb squadron occupied the east side of the main runway where they dispersed their aircraft in hard stand revetments. The west side of the main runway also contained hardstands, which were used for offloading of cargo and passengers.

When the 2nd ATS arrived at Luliang, the 1343 AAF Base Unit had 10 C-46's assigned to it, which were kept busy continually, a shortage of flight crews did not slow them down. With the arrival of the 2nd ATS, the ten base aircraft were transferred and operations were carried on by the 2nd ATS, this time using the twenty C-46's and flight crews of the 2nd ATS. This caused an increase in operations. Capt. Floyd W Jones the squadron chief pilot became unit chief pilot.

All pilots agreed that from the beginning the maintenance of our aircraft was superior. One of the contributing factors, they believed, was the practice of the unit to require that the crew chief fly on the aircraft as flight engineer.

After the 20th of November, one officer and eighty enlisted men plus seven crews and aircraft were all that remained behind. Of the main body in China, officers were quartered in the Chinese-operated hostel section. Enlisted men were housed in a tent area and except for headquarters office and operations, all sections were set up in tents. For a while the weather seemed very cold, and wool clothing not thought of as being a practical issue up to this time came out in a hurry.

The first mission of importance came on the 21st of November, the day after arrival when the "Circus" completed in twenty-seven hours a "hot" priority mission of moving an anti-aircraft battalion, complete with guns, men and equipment from Myitkyina, Burma, to Chengtu, China, to protect certain B-29 bases in that area, being subjected to Jap bombing raids almost nightly.

Major Sylvester began to prove that he, too had broad shoulders when he assumed the command of the 1343 Army Air Force Base Unit at Luliang on the 21st of November, in addition to his squadron command. On the 22nd of November, the squadrons next higher command echelon was officially designated as the China Wing (provisional) India China Division, Air Transport Command, with headquarters in Kunming.

As previously indicated, operations began immediately as a normal function, hauling gas to support forward bases for the Fourteenth Air Force and performing reverse hump shuttle runs to obtain gas from the ATC's India bases in the Assam Valley.

On 22nd Nov. Chief Warrant Officer "Jimmy" Harris was sent to Ksian, a forward base in Northern China on thirty days temporary duty. This was for the purpose of acting as operation's officer and general coordinator on a large scale movement of Chinese troops to meet the demands for a strategic rush counter-offensive move against the threatening Japanese lines moving from the Kwelin - Linchow -Hockin area toward Kweiyang and Kunming.

Hsian had very few facilities for efficient operations. The mission had to be accomplished during the worst period of weather in what weather men called "The Winter Monsoon of the North" bringing with it driving snow and sleet. The icing level was often on the ground. Many times pilots were forced by the raging winds and ice aloft to turn back. Despite this tremendous hazard, a steady flow of troops kept moving.

The crews were aware that should they overshoot the field at Hsian, they would be out of the pan into the fire. Japanese fighter planes based along the yellow river eagerly enjoyed shooting down slow-moving unarmed transport planes.

Lt. Al Fisher in ship number 42-96779, had been unable to get into Lo Ho Kow on 10th December with his load of gas. Somewhere in the vicinity of Hsian he was attempting to establish his position. About thirty minutes after he had made contact with a field in the area, he called in to describe a town later established as being Poai in the Honan province. Ten minutes later he re-reported that an unidentified aircraft with "Red Balls" on its wings was approaching.

Fisher's plane was attacked and shot down. The crew bailed out and all with the exception of Co-Pilot George McGuire fell into the Chinese hands and were brought out after many unusual experiences.

A close-up view of operations pertaining to the engineering section during October, November and December revealed some interesting items, these went back further than Luliang.

October was a routine month of Hump and Forward Area (China) flying. During the month 172 Hump trips were made, each equal to 3,000 miles of flying. By the month's end the squadron had flown a total of 726 Hump trips carrying over 400 tons of supplies into China since coming into the CBI Theatre.

S/Sgt. Grover Elsensohn, crew chief, on ship #42-61049 led the others with 270.40 hours of flying time on his plane. His energy paid off for he was one of the first crew chiefs to rotate back to "Uncle Sugar Able".

Despite the fact that only 16 assigned aircraft were available throughout the month and despite the fact that 16 engine changes were made effecting ten of these ships, the overall picture of flying time showed 3,489 hours, a record month at that time.

In November our planes flying out of Deragon started flying without crew chiefs. The bad element here was that minor troubles developments normally detected while flying by the crew chief might be neglected longer simply by ignorance of the existence of the problem by the ship's crew chief. To the men personally, it meant that radio operators were piling up flying hours, while they were forced to sit on the ground.

S/Sgt. Howard McWhorter led the squadron in maintenance by keeping ship #42-61055 flying 271 hours out of the month.

During December a total of nine engine changes were made, seven of the engines had given an average of 733 hours of operating time. Two of the engines were rebuilt jobs of the Central India Air Depot and had an average time of 366 hours. During the month 22 plane days were lost to maintenance and six plane days due to aircraft grounded for parts.

S/Sgt. Michael S. Plecas' ship #42-61977 led the month with 237 hours flying time.

A wire of congratulations received December 2nd from Brig. Gen. Tanner, India China division, Air Transport Command, for "one hundred percent" of our ships in commission for two consecutive days, Dec. 4th and 5th put a feather in the engineering hat and a source of pride to the squadron.

On 7th December, the status of the squadron was definitely defined when orders came assigning it officially to the XX Bomber Command and attaching it for administrative and duty to the India, China Division of the Air Transport Command and more locally to the 1343 Army Air Base Unit.

The remainder of the squadron left at Deragon, came to Luliang on the 13th of December, making the move complete.

About this time, buildings were found available with supplemental housing in tents at a lake generally located about six miles north of the base. We were allowed a three-day visit to this area, where we could relax and hunt duck and geese. Weapons were made available for the hunt, food was prepared and served American Style and resulted in a new outlook on life.

Of course not all of our new experiences could be told to the folks at home, but the fact that alerts (Jing Baos, as the Chinese called them) put everyone in the slit trenches almost nightly for a while after arriving in China. This was never noticed to have dampened the high morale of our outfit. If anything, it quickened the interest in the war and increased the efforts of the general personnel to doing the job better. Actual combat was much nearer here than it had seemed back in India.

Morale was high, no one remembers seeing any sadness coming from the first eight pilots to finish the required theatre flying hours, as they boarded one of the old reliable yellow nosed ships for India and finally home on the 10th of December. This was the rotation policy working and although it seemed like part of the family splitting up, everyone was glad to see them reaping the fruit of their efforts. They had done a good job and were definitely missed.

Another sad day in the history of the outfit occurred on the 16th December. Lt. Bob Cole and his crew left on a routine flight to Hsinching, China, and was never heard of again.

On the 19th of December while Major Sylvester and Captain Moore were away on a cross-country flight, Chief-Pilot, Capt. Jones, got a taste of the heavy weight of command. Capt. Jones wondered why he got caught with jobs like that at the particular time, when Wing Commanders and other such rank were out leaving their calling cards.

One ship visiting the Calcutta area before Christmas brought back some welcome supplemental "B" ration foods for the Holidays. Local duck and chickens formed the nucleus for the meal that was classified by all as pretty good, especially considering the remoteness from home.

January, 1945, presented to the squadron a month of variety both in activity and weather conditions. Its participation in one mission in particular, which will be mentioned later, brought out the proof of the flexibility that had become part and parcel of the stamina and interest constantly maintained in all of our operations.

During the month a total of 4,730 flying hours was accumulated on the total of twenty assigned aircraft. S/Sgt. Bob Garrett, crew chief on ship #42-96685 kept his ship flying 355 hours before January's bugaboo engine changes.

Cargo of all types, including troops and passengers, were carried over the rock pile (Hump) without loss of a man or aircraft. Two minor accidents marred the record for the month, but the ships were soon back in commission, piling up lost time. Primary mission for January was Hump-in-reverse cargo hauling.

A special mission served to break the routine when a total of fifteen ships were sent to assist in evacuation of Fourteenth Air Force Bases in Eastern China. This was known in the squadrons annals as the "Suichwan Deal".

Warning of the impending mission was received by Major Sylvester and Capt. Leonard at 17:30 hours, 21st January at wing headquarters in Kiinming. They desired fifteen C-46 aircraft to proceed from Luliang to Hsinching and to shuttle personnel and equipment from Suichwan and possibly other bases to Hsinching. First take off was scheduled for 0200 hours, 22 Jan. and as fast as safe for the following fourteen aircraft. , at 2300 hours, 21 January, a call was received by Major Sylvester changing the original destination from Hsinching to Suichwan.

In view of unpredictable circumstances that might have arisen and to assure that the mission would function in the desired manner and with all possible speed, personnel both officers and enlisted men were taken from operations, engineering, traffic, communications, and the medical section to handle any problem arising on the ground at destination or destinations and although in some instances the need did not arise, the planning and initial ground work proved to be wisely laid.

The first aircraft departed Luliang at 0210 hours, 22 January, and proceeded to Suichwan followed by the remaining fourteen at approximately twenty-minute intervals. The last ship to leave broke ground at 0730 hours, 22 January.

The first ship arrived at Suichwan at 0545 hours, 22 Jan, and after a conference with Col. Cassel at that base, it was decided that the personnel and equipment from Suichwan would be moved directly to the Kunming area instead of Hsinching as first planned. It was further decided to divert six aircraft to Kanchow to off-load their wet cargo and return to Suichwan for return loads. The last ship to arrive at Suichwan for loading touched the ground at 11:45 hours. Due to the scheduled arrival of additional transport type aircraft, it was decided to return two of the squadrons ships to Kanchow for personnel and equipment. The last ship departed Kanchow at 1700 hours 22 January, and arrived at Luliang at 2400 hours, 22 January, completing the mission.

AIM: 15 Aircraft, first departure to be 0200 hours, 22 Jan.

ACCOMPLISHMENT: 15 Aircraft, first departure 0210, 22 Jan.

All aircraft completed their mission successfully. One incurred damage to wing tip, but returned safely, carrying a light load.

During the mission, aircraft of Sylvester's Circus flew with no fighter cover over Japanese held fields, in weather that did not always afford good cloud cover, to within less than 100 miles of Hong Kong in the East China Coast. Participants in the evacuation reported that even before the last ship left the ground, Jap artillery would be heard a few miles from the base.

Commendations were received from the commanding officer of the 68th composite wing, 14th Air Force. We also received good publicity from theatre and stateside newspapers pertaining to this mission.

The engineering section recorded 515 flights during January, a rough average of 285 trips for each of our assigned aircraft. Average flying time of each of the ships was 236 hours. Twenty-one engine changes were made on thirteen ships during the month.

The beginning of the month saw several key-personnel changes in the squadron staff. Capt. Angelo T. Lack, Jr. joined the 1343d as executive officer. 1st Lt. Anthony S. Wolfe joined the 1343d to become ordinance supply and motor transportation officer. 1st Lt. Walter J. French became squadron adjutant. He was very fair and did a good job.

2nd Lt. Earl E. Smith joined our squadron from the 1343d as Asst. Engineering Officer. Also, ten new flying officers joined us to take place of those being rotated. Thirty-five year old officers were rotated at this time. The squadron maintained a total of sixty enlisted men (line personnel and flight engineers) on flying status during the month.

Seventy-five officers and enlisted men received a total of one hundred and thirty-five awards in participation in operational flights over the Assam-China air routes. To this group, awards included: 2 Oak leaf clusters to the D.F.C., 30 D.F.C.'s , 22 Oak leaf clusters to the air medal and 72 air medals.

Four were given to crew members missing in flight:

1st Lt. Robert M. Cole

2nd Lt. Robert E. Smith  
Sgt. Charles F. Flynn, Jr.  
1st Lt. David D. Hayden

Five were made posthumously:

Sgt. Charles R. Cooper  
Capt. Joseph G. Paxton  
1st Lt. James D. O'Neil  
2nd Lt. Ralph A. Wakefield  
Sgt. Emmett L. Redding

The 10th of January found 34 enlisted men receiving good conduct medals.

Special services activities hinged around three points: First, under the supervision of 1st Sgt. Ralph M. Hobbs, a farmer from Georgia, an old crashed C-46 fuselage was obtained and placed in the enlisted men's tent area to serve as a coffee shop. On a twenty-four hour basis such items as coffee, doughnuts, cream puffs and pie made a pleasant between meal snack. Second, the nearby rescue and search training camp provided rest and relaxation to a certain number of men each week. In the Third place came the beginning of a physical training program of three hours a week for every officer and enlisted man. This was worked out on a game basis; we had equipment and facilities to play baseball, basketball, football, volley ball, horse shoes, and went on hunting trips at the rest camp.

January, 1945, saw the first arrival of C-54 parts and the first C-109 arrival.

A number of special missions including Luliang were as follows:

Cottontail: 4 Dec. This movement was made up of the Chinese Fourteenth division from Myitkyna, Burma to Chanyi and Kunming, China.

Jack Rabbit: 6 Dec. to 29 Dec. This movement involved twenty C-46's from Luliang and fourteen C-46's from Myitkyna carrying 13,000 troops, ninety-nine tons of equipment of the Chinese Army from Myitkyna to Chanyi, Kunming and Luliang.

Dragon: 10 April to 18 March. This movement was for the fourth and fifth divisions of the Chinese Army from Paoshan to Luliang.

Blitz: 10 April to 12 April. This was a movement of the 490th Bomb Squadron from Yunnanyi to Luliang and then to Hanchung.

Rooster: 21 April to about 10 May. The movement of the Chinese 22nd division, personnel, animals, supplies and equipment from Chanyi, Luliang, Chenkung to Chihkiang.

Disc: 23 June to 2 Sept. The movement consisted of transporting Chinese troops from Burma to Nansung. Unit planes made 1936 trips carrying a total of 16,690 troops, 1960 horses and tons of equipment.



Avenger: 22 Jul to 26 July. This movement consisted of Chinese troops from Chabua to Linchow. Sixty-nine trips were made carrying 121 troops and 281 tons of equipment.

Cobra: 30 July to 30 August, 1945. This movement of Chinese troops was carried on from Myitkina to Kunming in 157 trips, carrying 1,992 troops, 1212 horses and 456 tons of equipment.

Rex First: 9 Aug. to 11 Aug. This movement was from Chabua, Barrackpore, Myitkina and Bhamo to Liuchow. Thirteen trips were made carrying fifty-six troops and twenty eight tons of equipment.

Rex Regular: 10 Aug. to 21 Aug. This movement was completed with five trips from Burma to Liuchow, carrying fifty-seven troops and seventeen tons of equipment.

From time of activation until June 20, 1945, when the 2nd Air Transport Squadron (Mobile) was deactivated the mission of the unit was not greatly changed. From time to time special missions were assigned, but the basic mission hardly varied from "Reverse-Hump" and "Intra-China hauling". When the 2nd ATS was deactivated, the personnel, together with aircraft and organizational equipment were transferred to the 1343d. Thus the famous "Sylvester's Circus" became a thing of the past and the 1343d received personnel with wide knowledge of flying and maintenance conditions in India as well as China, and equipment that was difficult to get within the theatre.

The office of flying safety acted in a secondary capacity as the aircraft accident office. Its main function was investigation of all accidents at the base and in the vicinity. Representatives from the 2nd ATS were 1st Lt. George W. Shoemaker and Capt. Leslie M. Lisle, M.D. Ex Efficio.

Among the accidents investigated by the section and thoroughly discussed at pilots meetings were as follows.

10 Dec. 1944, Fatal accident for one crew member of a plane, the number of which is not known, shot down by Japanese. The pilot, engineer and radio operator safely parachuted to earth and returned to the unit on 4 March, 1945.

21 Feb 1945, Accident to C-46 #42-107332 at Hsian in which pilot overshot runway and crashed into anti-tank ditch at night, Plane class 26.

27 Feb 1945, Accident to C-46 #42-96689 at Yankai, in which pilot landed downwind and overshot the runway. Plane class 26.

28 Feb 1945, Accident to C-46 #42-61068 at Luliang, in which pilot applied excessive brake in early morning landing and nosed ship up. Major damage.

5 March 1945, Accident to C-46 #42-61042 at Luliang, in which pilot lost control of ship on take-off in a strong cross-wind and run off of runway into ditch. Major damage.

23 March 1945, Accident of C-46 #4296685 at Luliang, in which pilot lost control of ship as tail wheel failed to lock, although in the locked position. Major damage.

29 March 1945, Accident of C-46 #43-47140 at Chihkiang in which pilot landed too long and hot and was forced to ground loop the ship off the side of runway, to avoid running off a high embankment at the end of runway. Pilot was under strain as he had just witnessed a mid-air explosion of a B-25 landing at night. Major damage.

7 April 1945, Accident of C-46 #43-47211 in which ship took off from Hanchung for Liangshan and was never found. The missing crew were: Pilot F/O R.W. Fiske; Co. Pilot, 2nd Lt. R.K. Hill; Radio Operator, T/Sgt F. Bufkin, Flight Engineer, T/Sgt B.W. Wright.

15 June 1945, Accident to C-46 #43-47166 at Chihkiang in which pilot undershot runway on landing. Class 26.

16 June 1945, Accident to C-46 #43-47094 at Laohwangping, in which pilot undershot runway at night on landing. Class 26.

30 June 1945, Accident to C-46 # 43-47125 at Luliang in which pilot lost control of aircraft in cross-wind take off and possible malfunction of brakes. Class 26.

6 July 1945, Fatal accident to C-46 #43-47126. At Luliang in which pilot is believed to have lost power in one engine upon night take off and crashed into surrounding mountains. Those killed were; Pilot, 2nd Lt. E.B. Wimmer; Co-Pilot, F/O W.E. Barnes; Radio Operator, T/Sgt W. C. Shaefer; Flight Engineer, Corp. J. Milezakowski.

18 July 1945, Accident to C-46 #42-61041 at Luliang, in which pilot landed ship with external strut brace on right gear broken, causing ship to crash into embankment on side of runway. Major damage.

In June 1945, a new maintenance area was opened on the west side of the field, about one-fourth of a mile south of the tower. For the first time shops were in buildings instead of tents. Assigned aircraft were parked in the maintenance area, thus making maintenance faster and more handy. This at the same time made more hard-stands available for transient aircraft. This was a far cry from conditions at the time the 2nd A.T.S. moved into Luliang.

From June until cessation of hostilities traffic increased by leaps and bounds and during the first week in August, we were averaging over two hundred flights a day at Luliang.

In the month of July, four squadrons were activated. The purpose was to facilitate the administration of officers and enlisted men of the 1343d A.A.F. Base Unit.

Squadron A was composed mainly of administrative personnel commanded by Capt. George C. Vaughn.

Squadron B was composed mostly of flying personnel commanded by Capt. Henry N. Baker.

Squadron C composed of maintenance personnel and was the largest squadron, commanded by Capt. Walter J. French.

Squadron D composed of medical section personnel, commanded by Capt. Leslie M. Lisle, attached to squadron A for administration.

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Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

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The squadron recently demonstrated the mobility of its type of aerial task force when it left a base in India and transferred to China. It got orders to move at 3 P.M. and by 8 o'clock the next morning had packed all equipment and supplies plus sixty-five pounds of personnel luggage for each man, had loaded everything on planes and was ready to depart. Though all set to go, the squadron did not get orders to leave until late in the day. The next day found the squadron in Yunnan Province in China. Within the hour after the squadron's planes had landed, loads and men had been hustled off, the operations staff and equipment had been assembled at one side of the airfield and planes had begun taking off on sorties connected with the squadron's new assignment. Within a few hours the squadron under the Executive's supervision, A.J. Luck of Tucumcari, New Mexico, had fully established itself at the new base. Tents had been erected for housing the men and plane maintenance was under way in and around a tent that sheltered the Engineering Section. As in other ATC Mobile Squadrons its equipment is specially selected or designed to facilitate quick packing and loading.

The shift to China was the fourth in eight months for the squadron. It was organized in the United States from specially picked high-grade personnel collected from many air stations and was a Bomber Support Group for the XX Bomber Command. It picked up everything overnight at Homestead, Florida, and flew to Egypt, where it was set up in a few hours and operated for two and one half weeks. During this period the squadron pioneered in special Casablanca-to-Karachi air transport. When orders came suddenly for another move the men were summoned, some from their baths and others from Cairo hotel verandas, and the Squadron picked up and moved in a few hours to India. Present duties involve some of the most hazardous transport flying in the world, in comparison with which the squadron pilots call the Hump Route the Milk Run. Squadron planes are now flying supplies almost within artillery range of the Japanese, shuttling men and cargoes all the way from snow-covered Northwest China to the jungles of North Burma.

The Squadron Commander is Major Frank Sylvester of Santa Barbara, California, a lanky 37-year old flying man with a long record as a civilian pilot and in Army ferrying jobs. His outfit is known as Sylvester's Circus, a highly appropriate cognomen for a tent-living, fast-moving, free-and-easy, high performance organization such as this Mobile Transport Squadron.

ICD BASE, CHINA -- Flying in the face of imminent Jap air and ground attack, the newly organized Second Air Transport Squadron (Mobile) evacuated American airfields at Suichwan and Kanchow, accomplishing the mission without loss in less than 24 hours, it was revealed this week. The squadron received orders calling for utilization of 15 C-46A transports to proceed from the 1343d BU and shuttle men and material. Japanese ground and air forces were converging on Yank installations at Suichwan and Kanchow, in Kiangsi Province, hoping to knock out the bases which had been sending aircraft to attack Nip communication lines and installations. First call was received at 5:30 P.M. on Jan. 21, and plans called for the first takeoff at 2 A.M. the next morning, with the remainder of the mission fleet scheduled to leave the ground as soon as possible. Within three hours after the orders arrived Sylvester's Circus was ready to fly.

At 2:10 A.M. the first aircraft was wheels-up for Suichwan, with the other 14 ships following at 20-minute intervals. The transports flew in radio silence, sweating out not only the customary hardships of difficult terrain, sudden storms and adverse winds, but also some 130 miles of enemy-held territory without fighter support. The route led through a triangle of enemy fighter bases concentrated at Lingling, Hengyang and Paoching, but the aircraft passed over the Jap airfields in broad daylight without interference. Crews attributed their good fortune to element of surprise and the support of 14th Air Force fighters which flew against enemy installations in incessant sorties until noon. The pursuits used spare fuel which the transports brought with them in drums. First of the fleet of C-46s reached Suichwan 3 hours and 10 minutes after takeoff and began the shuttling of personnel and engineering, medical, photographic and miscellaneous equipment to the Kunming area. Cargo earmarked for evacuation had been dumped on the middle of the airfield between the taxi strip and runway. Capt. T.A. Miller, of P & T; Lt. Harry Dilts, his assistant, and four GIs handled the loading. They did their weight and balancing work on the spot. Cpl. Jack Blincoe, operations clerk, pinch-hitting for space control, checked passengers and equipment. The evacuees, bomb-weary but cool, posted themselves as enemy plane spotters before and during the flight back to safety.

Through the day and into the late afternoon, the arduous job continued, as ground crews struggled with bulky, unwieldy cargo and fliers fought sluggish controls of the planes loaded beyond ordinary allowances. The last plane departed from Suichwan at about 4 P.M. with the sound of Japanese gunfire rumbling in the distance. The final transport left Kanchow at 5 P.M. The mission was accomplished without loss of a ship or a piece of cargo. When the "Circus" departed, all unmovable equipment and construction had been destroyed. At midnight Maj. Sylvester landed at his base with the last plane load of cargo, the 1500 mile round trip completed, 22 hours after the first ship had taken off.

Narrative came from 2 air transport squadron mobile