

2 AERIAL PORT GROUP

MISSION

LINEAGE

2 Aerial Port Group constituted, 21 Feb 1966

Organized, 8 Mar 1966

Inactivated, 31 Jul 1972

STATIONS

Tachikawa AB, Japan, 8 Mar 1966

Tan Son Nhut, South Vietnam, 8 Nov 1966

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Vietnam Air Offensive

Nov 1966-Mar 1967

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Presidential Unit Citation

21 Jan 1968-12 May 1968

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award

8 Nov 1966-30 Apr 1967

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

The 2 Aerial Port Group, headquartered at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, was a 2,000 man group that that was made up of three aerial port squadrons, located at major cargo generation points in South Vietnam: the 8th Aerial Port Squadron at Tan Son Nhut, the 14th at Cam Ranh Bay, and the 15th at Da Nang. There were 39 detachments and operating locations assigned from these squadrons throughout Vietnam. Many of these were broken down even further when mobility teams are sent out to support "front line" combat movements.

The aerial ports provided terminal services support including loading and off-loading of cargo and the processing and manifesting of passengers. The three combat control teams in Vietnam provided air traffic control facilities and operations at remotely located airfields. The 2 Aerial Port Group also deployed mobility teams to assist with large unit movements whenever the need arose.

The 2 Aerial Port Group consisted of seven sections. In each of these, a specific purpose and a set goal were established.

In the Administration and Training section, an abrupt increase in the work load was felt as a result of rapid expansion of personnel in the infancy of the Group.

In the same way, the Operations Division's mission was made clear to those on its staff. That mission is to monitor, coordinate, and initiate procedures to make effective, efficient operations within the aerial port squadrons. With such a large area of responsibility (aerial delivery, air terminal operations, mobilities, unit moves, and air traffic control of landing, drop and extraction zones), it is apparent why a set of standards and goals is necessary. The section has continued to function along these lines since its inception it should be noted that it was the Operation Division's effort and planning that brought into existence the orientation briefing called the "Roadshow."

The Materiel Division is a tight-knit group of qualified personnel having the responsibility for the formulation of materiel plans, policies, and procedures, implementing policies and directives concerning materiel handling equipment and supplies; keeping the commander fully advised as to the status of materiel activities within the Group, and maintaining liaison with host base commanders to insure adequate squadron support. It is also the office of primary responsibility within the 834th Air Division for implementation and control of the 463L MHE (Material Handling Equipment) system. Throughout the Group's history, this Division has continued to maintain contact with not only the squadrons under its jurisdiction, but has attended many different conferences and meetings, even as far away as Hawaii, to insure that the 2 Aerial Port Group and all of the squadrons have the equipment necessary to perform their

missions.

To be sure, in an organization as complex as the 2, a division or section with the sole purpose of planning and associating various programs to the overall needs of the Group is a necessity. The 2 Aerial Port Group has such an office, the Plans and Programs Division. The mission of this division encompasses the development of all plans and programs; monitoring operational mobilities and alert functions; advising the Commander and Staff on the economical and effective use of manpower resources; monitoring all facility programs to improve mission capabilities; preparing and submitting all budget estimates; and monitoring all reports of inspection by higher headquarters. This may seem a rather large task, but the staff assigned to this division has spent all of its energy in promoting a sound system of control over the numerous plans and programs already in existence and those of the future.

Although the job of gathering statistics and analyzing them is a very tiresome one, it has an important effect on the overall efficiency of the organization for which these facts are acquired. In the 2 Aerial Port Group, this is especially true, for without the constant computation of past records in freight and passengers handled, it is impossible to estimate the needs of the future. Because the workload of the units subordinate to the Group is kept in a constant state of flux by enemy activity, a factual analysis of recorded passenger and freight tonnage is a tool to set requirements for the future as close to actual needs as possible. In the 2 Aerial Port Group, the division that accomplishes this vital task is the Terminal Services and Analysis Division. They have, from the beginning, compiled reports consisting of figures on passengers, cargo, and mail transported, which must be reviewed, consolidated, and then forwarded to higher headquarters. At the same time they note the areas in need of improvement within their own organization.

On 8 Mar 1966, the 2 Aerial Port Group assumed the function of the 315th Air Division Traffic unit, which was previously identified with the 7th Aerial Port Squadron headquarters at Tachikawa Air Base. On the same date the 2 Aerial Port Group was activated, five aerial port squadrons were placed under its command. In this change, the 7th Aerial Port Squadron (name only) was transferred from Tachikawa Air Base, Japan, to Naha Air Base, Okinawa. In addition to the 7th, the 6th Aerial Port Squadron at Don Muang Air Base, Thailand, fell under the operational control of the 2 Aerial Port Group, as did the three Vietnam Squadrons (8th, 14th, and 15th).

With this collection of organizations, the 2 Aerial Port Group was ready to start improving existing facilities and increasing the working capabilities of its subordinate units. Therefore, on the 19th of April 1966 the first 2 Aerial Port Group Commander's Conference was held. This meeting was held at Clark Air Base, the Philippines. Present were all the Directorates and Squadron Commanders affiliated with the Group. Under the direction of the project officer, Major Thomas A, Olson, Director of Operations, they united to establish a common goal for the aerial port operations throughout the Far East and Southeast Asia. One of many projects stemming from this conference was the development of an orientation program for newly assigned Troop Carrier loadmasters. The orientation was a briefing, called the "Roadshow." It

consisted of a two-hour presentation explaining 463L Materials Handling Procedures and operating policies peculiar to this theater.

Shortly after the Commander's Conference, a major manpower review was accomplished for all aerial port units in the Southeast Asia area. The review, held in May 1966, resulted in a monthly audit of each aerial port squadron's Unit Manning Document. This systematic check allowed the 2 Aerial Port Group to affect the most up to date realignment actions in relation to each terminal's workload.

Within the first three critical months, the 2 Aerial Port Group sent several traffic assistance envoys throughout the Far East and Southeast Asia. The purpose of these visits was to improve management practices; to update manpower, equipment, and facility standards; and to evaluate terminal operations. Through this program, a pattern of standard operational procedures was established giving a new boost to the airlift services offered by the 2 Aerial Port Group.

The aerial port system in Vietnam experienced a period of continued expansion after 1966 although at a less frenzied pace than earlier. When the 2d Aerial Port Group headquarters moved to Vietnam, it afforded a clear chain of command under the 834th Air Division for the three port squadrons. The number of port detachments and "operating locations" leveled off in mid-1967 at approximately forty. Cargo handled by the aerial ports rose steadily from 130,000 tons monthly in late 1966 and peaked at 209,000 tons in March 1968. Thereafter it stabilized at about 180,000 tons per month. The efficiency of the port detachments improved slightly during the period, including the percentage of on-time departures and the average pallet loading. One aircrew officer, who had flown a previous airlift tour in 1965, observed that aerial port effectiveness had vastly improved and that most of the time loads were ready and waiting for the transports upon their arrival. Cam Ranh Bay surpassed Tan Son Nhut as the principal air cargo point of origin in December 1967, while Da Nang remained third followed in delivery order by Bien Hoa, Nha Trang, and Qui Nhon.

Manpower authorizations remained level at twenty-five hundred spaces throughout 1967, and they scarcely reflected the growing workload. The authorizations were well below the nominal formula of seventy-five tons per man per month. Temporary-duty augmentees from off shore helped bridge several periods of saturation. Inexperience remained a severe handicap. Any reserve of aerial port experience in the Air Force had been previously consumed by the need to replace all persons in Vietnam every twelve months. The workloads of individuals could be grueling, and sometimes they labored sixteen consecutive hours in dust, mud, or rain. An Air Staff visitor in late 1967 reported a serious lack of motivation among aerial port enlisted men. He recommended an infusion of enthusiastic junior officers, perhaps recent Air Force Academy graduates. Moore cautioned against selling short his men. Certainly few had performed aerial port work before and most hoped never to do it again. Nevertheless, the men understood the importance of their mission and individually they did their jobs well.

Established under the 2d Aerial Port Group was a traffic management office within the airlift control center to serve in the daily management of the airlift system. The management office monitored aerial port backlogs and special movements on a twenty-four-hour basis, and worked closely with the control center schedulers and duty officers. The management officers attempted to maintain communications with port squadrons and detachments, sought to "take the pulse" of operations and to assure that shipments were ready at the proper time and place. The office also became the nucleus for alerting combat control teams and aerial port mobility teams for field developments. The office was redesignated the directorate of traffic operations in January 1968, and continued its former role. The aerial port group also performed staff visits to each squadron, detachment, and operating location.

Improvement in aerial port facilities continued. Many dirt storage areas, vulnerable to alternating cycles of dust and mud, received hard surfacing. The 2d Group reported that in the twelve months beginning with October 1966 over eighty thousand square feet of covered air freight terminal space was erected; meanwhile, seven times that amount of open cargo-holding space was in use. Passenger terminal buildings were built at such points as Kontum, Dong Ha, and Tuy Hoa. And fencing and lighting improvements promised to reduce pilferage. Aerial port construction requirements still suffered in competition with the needs of other combat and support units, but improvements had been made. Helpful in winning approval for aerial port construction was the 834th Air Division, now that the most pressing needs of other units were satisfied.

Strong action by Moore and the staffs of the 834th Air Division and the Seventh Air Force brought definite improvement to the deplorable condition of material-handling equipment, i.e., forklifts and vehicle loaders. Upon visiting the Seventh Air Force materiel control center, Moore discovered that although out-of-commission strike aircraft were lavishly monitored, the status of equipment was largely neglected. Upon Moore's urging, Momyer in late 1966 informed General Harris that the poor condition and shortage of the equipment was affecting the ability of the ports to provide satisfactory airlift service in Vietnam. Momyer solicited the support of PACAF, Air Force Logistics Command, and Air Force headquarters to correct this matter. Harris promised to increase authorizations and to provide strong help in several proposed areas. Equipment and spare parts began to arrive by air shipment from the United States, and Moore succeeded in acquiring additional items from Military Airlift Command units through informal arrangements.

Other measures focused on maintenance. A component repair program opened at Clark, contract overhaul began in Bangkok, and parts stock piles were increased. Especially beneficial were visits by temporary-duty maintenance teams from the Air Force Logistics Command and PACAF. The number of incommision forklifts for example rose from 134 in November 1966 to 234 the following spring. For the time being, the 2d Group accepted the viewpoint that material handling equipment maintenance responsibility should remain outside the aerial port structure and remain within the respective host base vehicle repair units. During late 1967 the debilitating effects of heavy and strenuous usage began to outstrip the efforts toward improved

maintenance, indicating that forklift life expectancy in Vietnam was well less than the eight years used in programming replacement items.

Recommendations were widespread for better designed handling equipment, especially with tougher hydraulic systems, transmissions, and axles for rough terrain work, and with radiators and tires protected against damage by shrapnel. Early in 1968 several dozen forklifts designed for adverse terrain arrived in Vietnam, replacing standard and rough terrain lifts at forward locations. The new diesel-powered equipment quickly gained recognition for its superiority. But the lifts had large, air-filled tractor-type tires and were therefore vulnerable to shrapnel.

The problem of pallets, nets, and tiedown chains being sequestered away from the airlift system received considerable attention. The ingenuity of ground troops and local civilians in finding uses for these materials seemed unlimited. The 834th did not favor a system of hand-receipt accountability. Instead, in strongly worded statements the air division urged aircrews and port personnel to locate this equipment. Teams from aerial port squadrons traveled to forward locations to search for and recover misappropriated pallets. Transports occasionally landed empty at forward points simply to pick up stacks of recovered pallets. The pallet repair facility at Tachikawa was enlarged, and provisions were made for minor repair capabilities in the field. It was obvious that without constant emphasis the situation would again quickly deteriorate. A cheaper expendable cargo pallet was officially requested by the Seventh Air Force in 1968.

Accurate knowledge of the weight of each item of cargo was directly related to safety of flight, and was the subject of several formal operational requirement actions. Weighing facilities were available at only four Vietnam bases in early 1967; elsewhere aerial ports had to accept weights stated by shippers or resort to guesswork. Stated weights during unit movements were often notoriously inaccurate, since ground force vehicles were frequently loaded down with unspecified supplies. By late 1967, five-ton capacity scales were installed or programmed for fourteen locations, and early the next year pit scales capable of weighing vehicles and K loaders were installed at several points. For loading elsewhere, several trailer-mounted C-130 transportable electronic scales were tested. The scales gave direct and accurate readings, although they were inclined to malfunction. An alternative method incorporating a direct attachment to the fork-lift's hydraulics appeared promising in tests offshore, but the device had not yet been employed in Vietnam.

Air Force aerial ports maintained only a small capacity for rigging parachutes and loads for airdrops, generally only sufficient in number to permit aircrew and combat control team training. Until 1966 the rigging of parachutes and loads for airdrops in Vietnam was done by the agencies being supported, principally the Special Forces and the Vietnamese airborne brigade. The same agencies performed aircraft loading under the supervision of aircrew loadmasters. Airdrops were in decline in late 1965 because of landing-strip improvements at many Special Forces camps and because of the availability of more Caribous and Chinooks. Nevertheless, Westmoreland directed that planning be undertaken for a substantial and sustained airdrop resupply capability which envisioned operations in the northern provinces. A

capacity for rigging 250 tons per day was established, an amount sufficient to resupply a brigade task force. The MACV airdrop resupply plan published March 7 and revised July 15, 1966, established procedures for forming a provisional unit at Tan Son Nhut and for consolidating rigger personnel from in-country airborne and quartermaster units. The unit formed in June 1966 while awaiting the arrival at Cam Ranh Bay of the 109th Quartermaster Company (Aerial Delivery). The latter had materials and manpower sufficient to rig 250 tons daily for fourteen continuous days without reusing items. Rigging skills improved steadily after improper work caused several malfunctions during early 1967 drops. The company opened a second facility at Bien Hoa later in the year, seeking an overall rigging capacity of five hundred tons daily. Augmentations from off shore brought capacity to six hundred tons during the expanded drop effort in 1968. Air Force officers warmly praised the work of the Army riggers, and both Moore and his successor recommended against shifting this important function to the Air Force.

Each of the squadrons under the 2d Aerial Port Group organized several aerial port mobility teams, designed to deploy to smaller airstrips during unit movements and tactical resupply operations. Teams typically consisted of approximately six persons, and each team was equipped with one or two adverse terrain forklifts. During January 1968, for example, 108 port mobility personnel were simultaneously deployed to thirteen different locations. Mobility teams generally included the unit's best qualified and most dedicated individuals who were disciplined and had high morale. The teams served in nearly all significant field operations during this period including Khe Sanh, Delaware, and the later battles in 1968. One airlift mission commander, who lived and worked in the mud with several teams, reported: I have never seen a group that [was] so highly motivated, so keen to do a job under the most adverse circumstances that you can imagine. They will put up with anything. They will work and work continuously to keep this thing going.

The indispensable aerial port contribution in Vietnam was accomplished with little guidance from prewar doctrine. Those who served in these units were forced to overcome the exigencies of their inexperience, insufficient manning, inadequate equipment, and low priorities in acquiring better facilities. The National Defense Transportation Association bestowed its annual award, both in 1967 and 1968, upon the squadrons of the 2d Group thus rendering them much-needed recognition. For the future the demonstrated need for greater preparedness brought an expansion of the aerial port function in the Air Force Reserve forces. Reserve aerial port units provided much of the manpower for the 1968 expansion in Korea following the Pueblo incident, and over the next four years the units expanded from twelve squadrons to a strength of thirty-nine squadrons and twenty-nine flights. It thus appeared that the Air Force had taken note of the troubles in aerial port mobilization in Vietnam.

Under the reorganization proposed by the Seventh Air Force on September 16, and effected on December 1, 1971, the airlift control center preserved its separate existence, becoming a division of a new Seventh Air Force directorate of airlift under the operations deputate. Other divisions were set up for aerial port and special requirement matters. Units formerly assigned to the 834th (the 315th and 483d Wings, and the 2d Aerial Port Group) were placed directly under the Seventh Air Force. General Germeraad became head of the new directorate, and its

personnel were drawn from the 834th and from the old six-man airlift division within the Seventh Air Force. A headquarters manpower saving of sixty persons was achieved. Airlift operations were unaffected. Routine mission requirements continued to flow from MACV's traffic management agency, while the MACV combat operations center proceeded to exercise approval authority for emergency requests. In the inactivation ceremony held December 1 at Tan Son Nhut, the 834th Air Division received its second Presidential Unit Citation, earned during the spring 1970 Cambodian campaign."

The number of detachments and operating locations under the 2d Aerial Port Group and its three squadrons declined from forty-two in early 1969 to seven at the end of 1971. Port functions at many of the deactivating sites were turned over to Vietnamese Air Force terminal personnel, usually after a period of overlap. Upon inactivation of the 834th Air Division in late 1971, the 2d Aerial Port Group functioned directly under the Seventh Air Force, which included an aerial port division under its new directorate of airlift.

To win confidence among shippers and to reduce excessive use of high priorities, port officers stressed reforms designed to move routine cargo in reasonable time. The average backlog of overage cargo (on hand more than two days) declined from sixteen percent in 1969 to under ten percent in late 1971.

The application of data automation to aerial port activity (like the airlift management system of which it was a part) proved disappointing. Port personnel prepared a separate data card for each loaded pallet awaiting movement, and each card required fifteen items of information. The chore was especially burdensome since the old cargo backlog reports were still required. Late in 1970 the four principal ports received punch card equipment, housed in modernized and air-conditioned buildings. Port management thus became "fully mechanized." This resulted in marginal improvements to local documenting but none to overall traffic flow. Aerial port personnel viewed the decision to return to manual reporting in September 1971 with satisfaction. In contrast, the mechanization of reporting between the aerial ports in Vietnam and the out-of-country MAC system appeared worthwhile, because the relationship was less variable than that among the more dynamic in-country port operations.

The installation of an exclusive aerial port radio net was more successful. Single-sideband, high-frequency radios were placed at thirty-eight sites during 1969-70, linking the port detachments, the parent squadrons, and the traffic managers at the control center. This net ended reliance on landline communications, which had proven hopeless for exchanging immediate load information. Another successful piece of equipment was the ten thousand-pound, diesel-powered, four-wheel drive adverse terrain fork-lift. A shipment of sixteen arrived in early 1970, in time for strenuous service during the Cambodian campaign and proving, according to General Herring, "the backbone of forward area operations." The arrival of several dozen sets of shrapnel-resistant forklift tires in May 1970 increased forklift effectiveness. Whereas in the Cambodian campaign twenty-four tire changes had been required, the new foam-filled tires withstood a week of shelling at Kham Due in July with only a single flat. Forklift maintenance, continued to be a chronic problem, requiring the assistance of logistic repair teams at Tan Son

Nhut, Cam Ranh, and Da Nang. Although teams from the transportation squadrons attempted preventive and emergency maintenance at the outlying fields, incommission rates held barely above a marginally satisfactory seventy-five percent. The problems eased only upon the drawdown of equipment, which allowed retention of only the newer units.

In-country port operations reflected the changing character of the war itself. Except during the Cambodian and Laotian incursions, aerial port mobility teams were seldom sent to active forward airheads. New tasks grew from programs against illicit drug traffic. Passengers, baggage, and cargo moving to destinations out of the country were searched carefully. In-country missions required less care, but aerial port and aircrew personnel habitually watched for evidence of drug shipments, the presence of explosive materials, or hijackers. Increased port efforts followed the introduction of the C-5A to the transpacific routes. The new strategic transport, with triple the payload capability of the C-141, first landed at Cam Ranh Bay on July 9, 1970. MAC opposed landing the C-5s at other points in Vietnam because of congestion and unsatisfactory facilities, so reshipments by C-130 out of Cam Ranh increased. Also, cargo arriving by C-5 (unlike C-141 loads) usually required repalletizing for C-130 loading.

The men of the aerial port system followed the traditions established earlier. Some of the senior aerial port noncommissioned officers (NCOs) served second and even third tours in Southeast Asia, made necessary by Air Force-wide shortages in their career fields. On-the-job training was an unending way of life in all ports. Despite strenuous official emphasis on safety, accidents were frequent. During the spring of 1971, for example, the 2d Group reported sixty-three accidents, with six disabling injuries and one fatality. Instances of valor continued to accumulate. In 1969 the 15th Squadron alone was responsible for three such episodes. Five members of the 15th courageously rescued survivors from the wreckage of an Army craft downed at Kontum. One member of the squadron's Qui Nhon detachment was killed and three others wounded seriously while defending their positions during a night enemy penetration. Two NCOs were evacuated with wounds received during shelling at Tien Phuoc. Recognition for these and many other episodes of valor took the form of awards to individuals, repeated awards to squadrons by the National Defense Transportation Association, and a second award of the Air Force Presidential Unit Citation to the 2d Group and its squadrons as part of the 834th Air Division, for action during the spring 1970 campaign. (The first award was for operations during the 1968 Tet offensive.)

The Air Force aerial port system in Vietnam at the start of the Easter offensive was enmeshed in programmed work reduction and withdrawal. At most locations, ports had been closed or shifted over to Vietnamese Air Force operation. The 2d Aerial Port Group remained in existence (its headquarters personnel reduced by fifty percent) under its commander, Col. Raymond H. Gaylor. Also still active were the three subordinate squadrons which operated ports at Tan Son Nhut, Cam Runh Bay, and Da Nang, with detachments at Bien Hoa, Pleiku, and Can Tho. Personnel strength in field units was down seventy percent from the peak. Much of the equipment formerly assigned to all ports had been returned to supply channels.

The truncated aerial port apparatus found itself hard pressed to meet the fast-moving situation of the first week, especially during the movement of the marines and rangers north. Colonel Gaylor himself stayed almost continuously in the aerial port command center of the airlift control center, supervising the major unit movements and the deployments of port mobility teams and combat control teams to outlying locations. Aerial port personnel continued to schedule, coordinate, and follow port activities around the clock amid severe pressure on the countrywide logistics system.

High-volume aerial port activity was a consequence of the intensified countrywide airlift effort through April and May. Cargo handling rose dramatically from eighteen thousand tons in March, to forty-seven thousand tons in April, and fifty-one thousand in May. Air freight personnel worked straight twelve-hour workdays, with twelve hours between shifts, without break. Military Airlift Command deliveries at the major ports brought increased offloading and transshipment. The workload soared at Da Nang where C-5As now landed for the first time. Aerial port mobility teams were sent on more than one hundred occasions during the spring quarter to some twenty different outlying locations. Colonel Gaylor detected some decline in morale from overwork, and the 8th Aerial Port Squadron attributed a rising accident rate to individual fatigue. To sustain the effort, some seventy individuals due to leave Vietnam were held beyond their planned rotation dates. For the most part, these men recognized the important role being played by the airlift effort and accepted the tour extensions without bitterness. Materiel problems, chronic in the past, intensified. To meet shortages of cargo-handling equipment, some of the equipment turned in earlier was recalled from supply channels. Less easily solved was the problem of serious mechanical deterioration of available vehicles and forklifts, caused by heavy and continuous usage during May and June. Supervisors tried to remind personnel of the need for operator maintenance and preventive care but results were marginal. The consumption of chains, straps, and pallets soared, intensifying the usual shortages and necessitating pallet-retrieval visits by mobility teams to outlying sites. High-speed offloadings at Kontum and elsewhere made it necessary to repair three-fourths of the pallets used. Offshore ports also felt the pallet shortage, as the flow of cargo (and pallets) entering Vietnam far exceeded that leaving. The pallet repair facility on Taiwan raised its output, and additional pallets were sent from the United States, but shortages eased only with the decline in the critical in-country workload during the summer which allowed increased attention to pallet recovery and repair.

The drops at An Loc and elsewhere created special problems, since the 8th Aerial Port Squadron at Tan Son Nhut had previously transferred away all air delivery personnel and nearly all rigging equipment and drop pallets. Colonel Gaylor quickly ordered air delivery specialists to Tan Son Nhut by air, primarily to prepare and load aircraft for drops. Personnel for the reborn aerial delivery section came from the Commando Vault section of the 15th Aerial Port Squadron and from the port at Ching Chuan Kang. Between April 11 and June 30, with rarely more than twelve men on hand, the section loaded up to seventeen aircraft each day for drops that totaled over nine thousand container bundles. Shortages of rigging items, along with changing drop methods, necessitated numerous improvisations.

Coexisting with the U.S. Air Force aerial port net throughout the war was a lesser chain of air terminals at thirteen bases including Tan Son Nhut, Da Nang, Nha Trang, Bien Hoa, and Binh Thuy. These were used principally by Vietnamese Air Force C-47s for passenger movements. At several of the thirteen locations, units shared facilities and workspace with the local U.S. Air Force port. Training and advising the Vietnamese terminal units, previously the responsibility of the Air Force Advisory Group in April 1967 became the duty of the 2d Aerial Port Group under the 834th Air Division.

Advisory group programs were largely limited to recordkeeping, planning, and safety, since the hand loading methods used with the C-47 were totally different from the American system. Technical assistance activities increased with the introduction of C-119s which had floor conveyers that permitted use of cargo pallets. In late 1967 the 2d Aerial Port Group gave classes at six different bases, teaching palletizing, loading, and the maintenance and operation of heavy forklifts. A Vietnamese civilian employee translated the applicable technical orders into Vietnamese. During 1968 the Americans transferred pallets, nets, and forklifts to the Vietnamese Air Force for use with C-119s.

The training effort under the 2d Group gradually expanded and became more systematic. Instruction at the transportation terminals stressed safety, load planning, and care of the basic equipment, including standard and adverse-terrain forklifts. Most American instructors approached their task with enthusiasm, appreciating that successful Vietnamization of aerial ports could end the necessity for second and third tours in Vietnam by U.S. Air Force port personnel. Instructors reported problems stemming from the language difference, and several criticized the short working hours habitual among the Vietnamese. Although student enrollments were smaller than expected (apparently reflecting low Vietnamese Air Force priorities), by mid-1970 about two hundred individuals had been qualified as air freight specialists. A Vietnamese transportation school offering aerial port training opened soon afterwards, ending the American role in basic instruction.

A final cycle of U.S. Air Force instruction coincided with closures of the American ports and the assumptions of full local responsibility by each Vietnamese transportation terminal. Volunteers from the 2d Group formed a training team, moving from one terminal to another during the periods of changeovers. The first turnover took place at Soc Trang on March 1, 1971, and by year's end eight more ports became all Vietnamese. At each location one or more American cargo specialists remained for three months after the official transfer. By mid-1972, at all points except Tan Son Nhut, Bien Hoa, and Da Nang, U.S. Air Force transports were onloaded and offloaded only by Vietnamese terminal personnel with only occasional American supervision. Not unexpectedly, the Vietnamese Air Force was bedeviled by the same problems that had troubled the American ports in past years forklift breakdown and shortages, under manning, and shortages of skilled equipment repair personnel. These conditions, along with loose ramp supervision, contributed to frequent aircraft delays.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE UNIT HISTORIES

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