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The Air Transport Command¹

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FROM THE earliest times, Minnesota has stood at the crossroads of great arteries of travel. The Indians and fur traders alike made on Minnesota soil a meeting place for a continent. The pioneers of a century ago, traveling by steamboat and stagecoach, converged there from streams of travel that originated in the East and the South and then led ever westward. When the railroad age arrived in the last century, Minnesota was made the starting point for two of the great transcontinentals.

The twentieth century witnessed the emergence of the automobile age and the phenomenon of cars for everyone. The automobile was a powerful influence in the movement for good roads, about which you have heard at other meetings today. The work of men like Charles M. Babcock placed Minnesota among the leaders in the movement for better roads, and demonstrated again Minnesota's interest in the problems of transportation.

This century has seen the appearance of still another form of transportation, and in its development, also, Minnesotans have played an important part. The airplane was born within a decade of the

¹ This paper was presented as the annual address before the ninety-sixth annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society in the Historical Building, St. Paul, on January 15, 1945. The author, who is on leave of absence as superintendent of the society, is now stationed in Washington, D. C., where he is serving as assistant historical officer of the Air Transport Command. Since he represented that branch of the armed services in an official capacity, he was obliged, for reasons of military security, to omit many significant details about the activities of the command. The publication of his address will make available to readers of this magazine an official and authoritative review of the Air Transport Command. *Ed.*

automobile, but it matured more slowly, and only in the last few years can it be said to have come of age.

Within the decade and a half before the outbreak of the present war, this nation was crisscrossed by a network of air lines, and extensive air routes had been laid out across the seas. What was true of the United States, of course, was true also of other nations. The rising young giant of air transport was compelling the cartographers of the world to redraw their maps to suit the needs of aerial navigation. By chance of geographical location, Minnesota lies athwart one of the great new global air routes, and so we find a good reason for Minnesota's interest in the most modern problems of transportation.

When war struck this nation, it was but natural that this comparatively new transportation agency should be adapted to the purposes of war. The critical nature of the situation in which we found ourselves, and the immensities of the scale on which the war is fought, forced us to use it in ways and to extents undreamed of except by visionaries. The story I wish to tell you is the thrilling one of how the nation adapted air transport to military purposes, and how air transport has served the nation at war. That is the story of the Air Transport Command of the United States Army Air Forces, as whose representative I appear here tonight.

The Air Transport Command is only a little more than three and a half years old. It was established in the spring of 1941, when the nation decided openly and finally to give its assistance, through lend-lease, to the United Kingdom and any other nations resisting the aggression of the Axis. It had its beginning in a letter written by the President on May 28 of that year, directing the secretary of war to take over the ferrying of aircraft destined for the British from the factories to the point of ultimate take-off in Canada. In accordance with this directive, the Air Corps Ferrying Command, the forerunner of the Air Transport Command, was created the very next day.

In the plans division at Air Corps headquarters there was an alert, energetic, peppery colonel named Robert Olds. To him was given the task of organizing the Air Corps Ferrying Command. The story is related that Colonel Olds was called into the office of his chief for a conference. Returning to his own office, he turned to his secretary

with the remark, "Well, Jennie, here's a new job to do." So simply and casually was the organization born.

May I at this point add a parenthetical remark? That secretary was one link between Minnesota and the Air Transport Command, for Mrs. Jennie K. Smith, who was Colonel Olds's secretary and is still the secretary to the commanding general of the Air Transport Command, is a Minnesota girl who grew to young womanhood in our northern Minnesota community of Hibbing.

Colonel Olds did not wait for formal orders to activate his command. They were not issued until June 5, when a letter from the adjutant general officially constituted the Ferrying Command and announced its activation, effective as of May 29. Immediately upon receipt of his verbal orders, Colonel Olds had assumed his new post. To assist him at the start, he had only Mrs. Smith, one other officer, and his own determination to do the job.

The assignment was tremendous. A less forceful leader would have found it overwhelming. Pilots and crews had to be procured, administrative and ground forces had to be obtained, and all the work had to be done incidental to laying out a series of airways from factories to inspection points and modification centers, and thence to places where representatives of the Royal Air Force could take over the planes. On June 7, 1941, nine days after Colonel Olds received his verbal instructions to organize the command, he issued the first ferrying order, and two days later the first plane was delivered under Ferrying Command control. By December 7, 1941, this fledgling outfit had delivered twelve hundred aircraft to nations fighting the Axis.

The command rendered material assistance to the British in facilitating the delivery of aircraft. This aside, its chief value, and perhaps its chief function, was that of giving training to American pilots and crews in flying combat planes. The mission of the Air Corps Ferrying Command was soon expanded, however, and the outlines of the present organization emerged.

As the spring of 1941 wore on, American military and diplomatic missions in the United Kingdom became increasingly aware of a need for rapid communication between Great Britain and the United

States so that diplomatic mail and important military and diplomatic personages could be carried back and forth more readily. The American government determined to establish a special air service between the two nations for that express purpose, and the task of operating it was given to the Air Corps Ferrying Command. On July 1 the initial flight of the transatlantic passenger and mail shuttle left Bolling Field at Washington, D. C. It was made in a type of plane which has become familiar to Americans the world over — and, for that matter, unpleasantly so to our enemies as well. It was a B-24, or Liberator, remodeled for passenger service, and it was piloted by Colonel Caleb V. Haynes, an officer whose name appears again and again in the pages of the history of the command, although he never was assigned permanently to it. The service continued throughout the summer and until cold weather in the autumn forced its suspension.

These were the first steps in the development of the organization, and while they were being taken other events of great importance were occurring. During the summer months the British, hard-pressed by Rommel's forces in North Africa and faced with a dangerous threat to their possessions in the Middle East, sought to augment their air forces in the eastern Mediterranean by ferrying planes directly from American factories to their Mediterranean bases. It was agreed that Pan American Airways, which already operated extensive Caribbean, South American, and transatlantic services, should be permitted to develop air routes across central Africa and deliver aircraft for the British. Under this agreement, Pan American began a program of extensive airport development along the routes contemplated, and in the late autumn it started to deliver aircraft to the British on a small scale.

In the meantime the Air Corps Ferrying Command undertook a number of special flights which were destined to be of great importance in its future development. In September, 1941, the now famous Harriman mission was sent to Moscow. The personnel of that mission traveled as far as the United Kingdom in two Ferrying Command planes and one Navy PBV. From Britain some of the personnel proceeded to Russia by surface vessel, but the two planes of the Ferrying Command flew from Scotland to Moscow, passing north of the

Scandinavian Peninsula over the Arctic Ocean at night to avoid the danger of German interception. When plans to land at a base in northern Russia went awry, the planes had to make the entire journey to Moscow—a distance of 3,100 miles—nonstop. Perhaps you remember the story of that journey. It was told by Quentin Reynolds under the title *Only the Stars Are Neutral*.

The journey to Moscow was eventful and record-breaking. The return journey of the two planes was even more noteworthy. One plane, piloted by Captain A. J. Harvey, who now is a colonel in the Army Air Forces, circled the world, going by way of Singapore, Fort Darwin, Port Moresby, Wake Island, and Hawaii, on its return to Washington, blazing trails which planes of the command were to follow in increasing numbers within a few months. The other plane, flown by Lieutenant (now Lieutenant Colonel) Louis T. Reichers, proceeded to Cairo, and then came home by the new route which was just then being laid out by the men of Pan American across the deserts of Africa and along the northern coast of South America. These were pioneer flights, providing important information for the expansion of the command a few months later. They were daring flights, for these men piloted four-engined aircraft over routes which never before had been flown by planes as heavy. Much of the region was inadequately mapped, and when the pilots left the ground they neither knew with certainty that they would be able to find their destinations in the places shown on their maps, nor were they sure that the fields on which they planned to land could accommodate their craft. They flew by luck, dead reckoning, and the grace of God.

Up to this time the Ferrying Command had not delivered any aircraft to overseas destinations. In the late autumn of 1941, however, when the need of the British for heavy bombers in the Middle East became desperate, the Ferrying Command promised to deliver them with military crews. The flights of Lieutenant Reichers and Colonel Haynes had demonstrated that the job was feasible. Actually, five aircraft had been delivered when the attack on Pearl Harbor converted the United States from a status of neutrality to that of belligerency in the war against the Axis.

America's entry into the war found the nation in more desperate circumstances than anyone cared to admit. Before the haze of Pearl Harbor's burning wreckage had drifted away, America was engaged in war on a global basis. It was fortunate that the Ferrying Command had behind it six months of training for the job it was about to assume. For half a year its pilots had been flying the combat planes with which our forces would have to fight. They had gained a precious backlog of experience in flying in out-of-the-way places of the world. Global warfare required transport that was speedy, flexible, and elusive. Air transport satisfied these needs. It was the only way to send supplies to some sections of the world and it was the fastest method of sending them anywhere. The things that were lacking were airplanes and the crews to fly them.

The immediate problem that confronted the nation during those bleak days of late 1941 and early 1942 was that of supply for our beleaguered forces in the Orient. After Wake Island and Guam were taken by the Japanese, the only way to reach the besieged Philippines was over a roundabout route from Australia or from India. The attack on MacArthur's outnumbered forces moved so swiftly that effective help could not get to them in time, and while the conquest of the Philippines went on, the Japanese were overrunning the rest of the Far East. First Singapore fell, then the Dutch East Indies, and finally Burma.

Through all this tragic period, the Ferrying Command played its part, vainly flying supplies to fronts which shortly collapsed and to bases which had to be abandoned almost at once. They flew Army and Navy personnel out of the southern Philippines only a jump ahead of the Japanese. Loaded to capacity with badly needed munitions and supplies, unarmed Ferrying Command planes shuttled in and out of Java and Burma. Storm and darkness and clouds were often their only protection, as again and again they evacuated the last personnel from bases under fire. They used whatever planes were at hand, and they packed as many as seventy-two people into craft with a normal capacity of twenty-four. When Rangoon fell, planes of the Ferrying Command and those of the China National Aviation Corporation evacuated more than five thousand persons, military and

civilian, by flying both day and night without pausing for rest. They kept up their work until the Japanese took the airport, and the last planes that took off were under fire.

But these were emergency activities. During the same hectic months, the Ferrying Command was performing herculean tasks closer to home. After Pearl Harbor it was necessary to rebuild the decimated air force in the Pacific. To the Ferrying Command fell the task of delivering the big bombers to points on the west coast where combat crews took over and flew them to their new stations. But the combat flyers were unfamiliar with the route and untrained for long-distance over-water flying. The work of shepherding them to the island bases was given to the Ferrying Command, and its experienced pilots led the combat flyers across the water. Deliveries of planes to the British continued, although for a time they all but stopped while our own inadequate forces were built up.

The scale of the operations now undertaken by the Ferrying Command required a tremendous expansion in its organization and personnel. The task of building up our air forces in foreign theaters was increasingly important. Equally so was the work of transporting strategic, critical supplies, since our armies were fighting on fluid, rapidly shifting fronts. It served no useful purpose to send strategic supplies and munitions by surface vessel to a theater which could not be reached in less than six weeks if the supplies were critically needed during the first week of that period. Only the airplane could get them there in time.

The Ferrying Command could not hope to carry out the tasks assigned it without the assistance of the veteran civil air lines. Immediately after Pearl Harbor, therefore, the War Department contracted with a number of domestic air lines to transport strategic air cargo chiefly to foreign destinations. Outstanding among these early contracting air lines were Pan American, — which, as described earlier, built an air line across the heart of Africa to the Middle East in 1941, — Transcontinental and Western Air, and American Airlines. Eventually the number of contractors included most of the larger carriers, among them Northwest Airlines, an institution which is well known in Minnesota. Top-ranking officials of the air lines of

the country were called into military service, as were pilots, ground crews, and lesser administrative officers.

On December 13, 1941, the President delegated to the secretary of war authority to control civil air lines. Much of the administration of this control passed eventually to the Ferrying Command. The transport planes of the nation — those used by both military and civil air lines — were put into a common pool from which enough planes were allotted to the domestic air lines to ensure adequate, but much curtailed, service. The remainder were taken over for use in the national emergency. Some were turned over to the Ferrying Command, while the rest went to other agencies of the armed forces. But all America's air transport facilities were immediately put into use. Near the end of March, 1942, the Ferrying Command was directed to operate all air transport lines extending beyond the Western Hemisphere, and instructions were given to gradually militarize their personnel.

In April, 1942, General Olds — by that time he had become a brigadier general — was relieved of his command and Colonel Harold Lee George was named to take his place. Colonel George was made a brigadier general shortly thereafter, and in August, 1942, he was promoted to the rank of major general. Like his predecessor, General George was well prepared to carry out a difficult assignment. He had served as chief of the war plans division of the Air Staff, and he knew the difficult problems that faced the organization he was about to head. More than that, he was an energetic, hard-working officer — no visionary, but keen and ambitious for the success of the undertaking.

During the early months of the war the Ferrying Command worked out the four major routes along which its planes travel. First, there was the route across the North Atlantic to Great Britain, extending from Presque Isle, Maine, to Prestwick in Scotland. This was the route over which planes and supplies were flown to our Eighth Air Force in Britain and lend-lease planes to our British ally.

The second great air trail to be marked out was the long and difficult South Atlantic route to India and the Middle East. Following the route blazed by Pan American, it started at Miami, Florida,

passed over the islands of the Caribbean, and along the northeast coast of South America to Natal, on the bulge of Brazil. It was at Natal that the ocean hop began, and at first land was sighted only when the low African coast at Accra appeared. During the summer of 1942, however, a mid-Atlantic stopping place was constructed on the lonely rock at Ascension Island. From Accra the route cut through the heart of Africa to Khartoum in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, and there it divided. One branch followed the Nile to Cairo and thence led to the Middle East and India. Another branch skirted the southeastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula to Karachi, India. There the route ended, and the Tenth Air Force took over.

The third air route reached across the Pacific. The shock of battle was felt first in our Far Eastern possessions. To deliver planes, supplies, and personnel to that area, the Ferrying Command had to make the initial long and hazardous water flight from San Francisco to Honolulu. As the Japanese pressed the allied forces farther and farther to the east and south, a number of routes from Hawaii to Australia and the Dutch possessions were developed. One led southward to Christmas Island and thence angled off by a circuitous route toward the west and Australia. A more direct one went by way of Canton Island and then struck off to Australia, where gradually an army was being built.

The fourth major route was marked out during the early winter months of 1942. When the Japanese struck so suddenly and treacherously at Pearl Harbor, we were made uneasily aware that the Alaskan frontier was none too well protected. The building of its defenses, therefore, became a project of high priority. The people of Minnesota, I am sure, remember vividly the flurry of enterprise and excitement that produced the plans for the great Alaska Highway and the cordial international co-operation that was displayed by this nation and its great neighbor to the north.

The Alaska Highway was but a part of the defenses provided for our northern frontier. Much less is known about the great air route leading from the United States to Alaska. The Permanent Joint Board on Defense — Canada and the United States — decided in the autumn of 1940 that a string of airports should be constructed at

Canadian expense between the city of Edmonton in central Alberta and the Alaska-Yukon border. Late in 1941 the Canadian government reported that rough landing fields had been completed. With the outbreak of war, American lines of communication with Alaska by sea were seriously threatened and alternative routes had to be opened. The string of airports through the lonely tundra and forests of northern Canada provided an air route to Alaska which was practically invulnerable to attack, and it seemed to be in the best interests of international defense to develop them and open a highway which would at once be a service road for the airports and a means for transporting essential supplies to our Alaskan outposts. But, in their existing condition, the air fields were totally inadequate, and there was no highway beyond Fort St. John in northern British Columbia. A huge program of airport construction and road making, therefore, was undertaken.

The Alaska military installations, however, could not wait for supplies until after a road was completed or paved landing strips laid. Supplies had to start flowing in at once. The rough fields had to do. In February, 1942, a contract was negotiated between the War Department and Northwest Airlines, and a short while later another was signed with Western Air Express. The contracts provided for the operation by the air lines of a transport service over the route to Alaska. By early March, Northwest Airlines planes were pioneering the route and its employees were dispersed over the line, and by the end of the month a scheduled service from Minneapolis to Edmonton and Fairbanks had been started.

Some new routes have been added to the four major ones— notably one across North Africa to Cairo, established after the reconquest of the continent, and another from Karachi across India into China. But the main routes of this gigantic military air line were outlined by the spring of 1942.

Up to that time the Ferrying Command shared with the Air Service Command the job of transporting cargo, mail, and personnel for the armed forces. It had become apparent, however, that a single agency could do the job better and with greater economy of airplanes, men, and money, than could two, with duplicate and some-

times competitive services. On June, 20, 1942, therefore, a general reorganization was effected in the United States Army Air Forces, and the big task of ferrying aircraft and the even greater one of transporting strategic cargo, mail, and personnel were assigned to the Ferrying Command, which emerged from the general shuffle with a new name as well as greatly enlarged responsibilities. Henceforth, it was to be known as the Air Transport Command. The organization which previously had borne that name became the Troop Carrier Command. The control of priorities for air traffic, formerly a function of the Transportation Service of the Services of Supply, was added to the duties of the new Air Transport Command.

The command was now a full-fledged military air transport organization. The critical nature of its mission earned for it an exemption from the control of theater commanders, who normally gain command control of all personnel and materiel within their jurisdiction. Had theater commanders been given this control, the service of the Air Transport Command would have been seriously threatened, for in the early months of the war, when transport was performed by B-24's converted for that purpose, hard-pressed theater commanders were loath to see valuable bombers and well-trained pilots leave their jurisdiction. The principle was established that the command should be subject only to the commanding general of the Army Air Forces. Only thus could an uninterrupted flow of supplies be assured to all theaters.

The command had been operating over foreign routes on a rather casual basis up to this time, for its overseas operations developed almost in advance of planning. Shortly before the reorganization, however, steps were taken to regularize the administrative structure of the overseas routes by establishing a series of foreign "wings." The wings organized during this period included: the North Atlantic Wing, which operated the route leading to the United Kingdom; the Caribbean Wing, which operated from Florida to Trinidad; the South Atlantic Wing, which had charge of operations from that point to the coast of Africa; the Africa-Middle East Wing, which assumed charge of the remainder of the route to India; and, in the Pacific, a South Pacific Wing, which became the Pacific Wing.

Additional wings were created as routes were established or as increasing work loads made them necessary. Thus the Alaskan route was not organized as a wing command until October, 1942. That fall the Air Transport Command was called upon to take over operations in India and China. In December, 1942, therefore, the India-China Wing was established. In January, 1943, the European Wing was created from the segment of the North Atlantic route which included the air bases in Great Britain. Air Transport Command service into North Africa was established in December, 1942. Allied victories permitted its extension in the spring of 1943 from one corner of North Africa to the other and thus opened a new route to the Orient. Late in the year this route was organized into a separate North African Wing, while the remainder of the African operation was designated as the Central African Wing.

The men who administered the affairs of the Air Transport Command divided its work into two distinct parts, on a functional basis. The Ferrying Division specialized in the delivery of aircraft to our own forces at home and abroad and to those of our allies who participated in the benefits of lend-lease. The transportation of cargo, personnel, and mail was administered by the Air Transportation Division. Over all, co-ordinating the work of the wings and the two operating divisions, was the headquarters of the Air Transport Command.

Such was the organizational picture of the command in the summer of 1942. It has been modified with the passage of time. The Air Transportation Division disappeared from the structure in March, 1943, when it became evident that the wings, operating under the administrative supervision of headquarters, could better handle the responsibilities of air transport. The transportation of military cargoes within the continental limits of the United States, however, seemed to require a separate organization. The Domestic Transportation Division, modeled after the foreign wings, was established to take over that function. In November, 1944, the Domestic Transportation Division was absorbed by the much larger Ferrying Division, which for over a year had been flying important through transport routes to India and other points. Only one other organizational de-

velopment need be mentioned, and that involved principally a change in nomenclature. In the summer of 1944 the various wings of the command were redesignated as divisions, and subordinate units called wings were created in some of the larger divisions.

The Air Transport Command of 1945 is a far cry from the infant organization of 1941 or from the rejuvenated command of 1942. Today Air Transport Command routes stretch over more than 160,000 miles, or more than six times the distance around the world. Each month the planes of the command and of the civil air lines operating under contract with it fly more than 50,000,000 plane miles. Most of this mileage is over water or over foreign lands. It is about equally divided between flights by transport aircraft and flights by planes ferried either to our own air forces or to those of our allies. The incomplete figures so far available to us indicate that during 1944 Air Transport Command planes flew more than 600,000,000 miles—the equivalent of 25,000 trips around the globe at the equator.

At specified points in the United States—usually at the airports from which Air Transport Command planes leave for foreign lands—there are busy, mysterious places known as Ports of Aerial Embarkation. There passengers about to embark—and they are for the most part military passengers—are readied for the journey. The Army has a word for it. It is called “processing” the passengers. Papers are scrutinized; proper immunization is given against the diseases prevalent in lands to which passengers are destined; baggage is checked and weighed and the last-minute adjustments made whereby a favorite pair of shoes, or a typewriter, or a rare bottle of liquid refreshment intended for a far-off friend is discarded because the total weight of the baggage exceeds the paltry sixty-five pounds allowed. There, too, the prospective passenger receives assistance in putting his personal affairs in shape in anticipation of a long absence.

The total number of passengers carried by Air Transport Command planes amounted to more than 100,000 per month during 1944. Much of this travel was in and between foreign theaters, but about a third of it was from and to this country. At the end of 1944 more than 5,000 seriously wounded men were being returned to this country by air each month, and each day planes of the command flew

1,500 pints of whole blood to the European Theater to save American lives.

The main business of the Air Transport Command, however, is the transportation of strategically important cargo. Each month its planes carry more than 50,000 tons of high-priority cargo, about 5,000 of which consist of mail for American soldiers on battle fronts and in isolated places all over the world.

The India-China Division is the largest overseas unit of the command. After the Burma Road was cut by the Japanese in 1942, the continuation of effective Chinese resistance depended upon air transport. At first the work was done by planes of the Tenth Air Force and by a civil air line known as the China National Aviation Corporation. When the Air Transport Command undertook to supply Chinese needs in December, 1942, less than 1,000 tons of cargo were reaching that nation by air each month. The planes of the India-China Division have done their job so well that now about three times as much cargo is carried by air as ever passed over the old Burma Road. It was because of its magnificent effort to keep China supplied that the entire India-China Division received a presidential citation in January, 1944. It should be pointed out that not only was this the largest unit ever to receive such a citation, but it was the first time in American military history that a noncombat unit was so decorated.

The traffic borne by the Air Transport Command is not all one way. Its planes bring back mail and some vitally needed raw materials. During the first six months of 1944, command planes brought back to this country more than 7,500 tons of strategic materials without which certain war industries could not have functioned. A single illustration will serve to show what I mean. Sometime in June, 1944, the War Production Board informed the Air Transport Command that there was in this country only enough talc, used in the manufacture of radio-radar tubes, to keep production going for another ten days. A slowing down of production would have wrought havoc with war plans at the time. The command, therefore, diverted three planes from its Central African Division, sent them to India, and brought back to the United States 23,000 pounds of talc. The first

lot reached Miami, Florida, just four days after it left India, and tube production continued without interruption. The strategic value of this cargo is in sharp contrast to the market value of the talc, which was worth only about three cents a pound.

Cargoes that are sent abroad by plane illustrate their strategic value still more sharply. More than one battle has been won because the Air Transport Command delivered special cargoes when they were needed.

In its transport operations the command makes use of a variety of planes. The DC-3, known in the Air Forces as the C-47, is the familiar plane most frequently used by American air lines before the war. It has withstood ruggedly the test of wartime use and is affectionately known as the "workhorse of the air." The Curtiss Commando, or C-46, is almost as widely used. For long, over-water flights the DC-4, or C-54, and the C-87 are most used. Both are four-engined aircraft capable of long-sustained flight. In the earliest days of the war, before C-54's were available in quantity, aircraft engineers of the command remodeled Liberator bombers for cargo and passenger use. From those modifications came the C-87, lumbering and awkward on the ground, but in flight a thing of beauty, which lends assurance from the very sound of its four full-throated engines. It was in modified Liberators that Captain Harvey and Lieutenant Reichers made their historic nonstop flight of 3,100 miles between London and Moscow in 1941. It was in a C-54 that Lieutenant Colonel Henry Myers, during the past summer, made a widely publicized flight of 3,800 miles nonstop between Washington and London in less than eighteen hours.

The Air Transport Command is more than a headquarters and air routes and airplanes. The heart and soul of the command are the men and women who make up its personnel. At the end of its first year the command had a strength of a little more than 10,000 military personnel. By the end of 1943 it had more than 85,000 officers and men. In 1944 the military personnel alone exceeded 150,000, and thousands of civilians labored side by side with them.

These men are, for the most part, specialists. Many of them had previous air-line experience as pilots, crew men, or administrative

officers. From Army Air Forces training schools a steady flow of flying crews and ground-service men has poured into the Air Transport Command. Before they could take their part in transport or ferrying work, however, it was necessary to give them further training in specialized fields. In September, 1942, when trained military pilots were extremely scarce, the command began the use of women pilots. Until late in 1944, when the organization was disbanded, members of the Women's Airforce Service Pilots, or WASPs, flew transports, training planes, fighter aircraft, and even bombers as they delivered aircraft in the United States for the Air Transport Command.

The 160,000 miles of air routes over which the planes of the command fly are studded with bases and airports. They vary in size from great stations with personnel numbering in the thousands, to lonely stopping places in the desert, the jungle, the frozen Arctic, or on small tropical islands. They provide the essential services of communications, weather observation, and repair and maintenance for the operation of aircraft.

The Air Transport Command is nominally a noncombat organization. Its planes fly to and through the theaters of operation, but, except under the most extraordinary of circumstances, they are not supposed to operate *within* the combat zone. They are unarmed, and yet the planes of the command *do* operate under combat conditions. Some of them have been fired upon and some of their crews have been killed.

The worst flying conditions in the world are encountered by pilots of the command flying between India and China. The lofty Himalayas, towering to tremendous heights, must be crossed. Terrific air currents threaten the big transports and jagged peaks "line the clouds with rock." Added to the danger of hidden peaks and ice that forms with treacherous suddenness on the wings of heavily laden planes is the ever-constant menace of the Japs, for the planes fly through enemy-controlled territory. Yet, day after day, heroic men flying unarmed transports loaded with ammunition, gasoline, or other supplies brave both the weather and the enemy. If they are forced down, they land in wild mountain jungles, where they must

fight starvation and the jungle until rescuers reach them or until they can walk out.

In the Southwest Pacific men and planes of the Air Transport Command have followed right on the heels of the advancing American armies. I should like to read an excerpt from a letter written by one of these men from a jungle island in the Southwest Pacific. "Well, chum," he said, "I love my country and California will suit me for a long time when this is over, but I'm not sorry I came. But I wish I were a war correspondent with a free ticket. Brother, the things I've seen. . . . There is a considerable jitter among the Wing ossifers who have just arrived. They talk it all off with loud and confident laughter after the lights are off at night; but they are worried about infiltrating Japs. . . . One sleeps with an eye open, because the devils really are all around us, sneaking up at night to slit a throat or two and retire. It's no way to live, frankly. Everyone sleeps with a knife under the pillow, a pistol hanging beside the cot and a carbine slung within easy reach." Such is life in a noncombat Air Transport Command unit.

Alone in the desolation of an Arctic outpost, a handful of men live through the long night of winter. I have seen men work out of doors repairing aircraft in temperatures so low that automobile radiators froze while the engines were running and axles became so brittle that they snapped at the slightest jar. The nature of their tasks made it impossible for them to work with gloves on, and the cold metal burned their fingers as though it were red hot. Yet they worked so that a badly needed fighter plane might be used against the enemy.

The desert and the jungle call forth the same fortitude. When temperatures in the sun reach 140° Fahrenheit, or more, the metal surfaces of airplanes become so hot that they cannot be touched. Yet men work in spite of the agony of blistered hands to keep the airplanes flying.

There are many details of the Air Transport Command's operations which must remain unrevealed because their disclosure would be gratifying to our enemies. But it is safe to tell you—and I am sure it is of no comfort to the enemy—that at least once every

thirteen minutes an Air Transport Command plane, either ferried aircraft or cargo transport, starts out across the Atlantic Ocean. At least once every ninety minutes a plane takes off to span the broad Pacific. During the time I have been talking to you, somewhere in the world five hundred Air Transport Command planes have been in flight. Fifty ferried aircraft were en route to their destinations. Behind those planes are thousands of devoted men and women who labor without thought of reward or decoration, who are willing to endure unheroic hardships and privations to "keep 'em flying."



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