



# Firebird Flyer



Volume 1

The Firebird Association

May 1997

## FIREBIRDS FLOCK TO BILOXI IN '98

It has been fourteen years since the Firebirds migrated to Abilene, Texas, in 1984, for their last reunion. After surveying all of the Firebirds currently on the Internet, in addition to John Parker, Firebird Association President, it has been decided to hold the next reunion in Biloxi, Mississippi, during March 12-15, 1998.

### Planning Session

Firebirds interested in participating in a reunion planning session, are invited to Biloxi on June 9th, 1997. Special room rates are available. Please contact Sid Marcus at 1-800-468-2102 as soon as possible.

Why Biloxi? Sid Marcus, former Firebird pilot, is a manager for the Holiday Inn Express in Biloxi, and has volunteered to serve as host. The month of March has been chosen since it is off-season, the temperatures are mild—around 70 degrees, and the humidity bearable—approximately 52%.

The Biloxi-Gulfport area has

remade itself from a sleepy summer destination, into a 24-hour, nonstop gambling center with five casinos on the location complete with floor shows.

Other attractions include eighteen golf courses in the area, deep sea fishing, half or full day trips; parasailing, the Wonderland Entertainment Park, which has go-carts and an eighteen hole miniature golf course; Beauvoir, the final home of Confederate president Jefferson Davis; the 138-year-old Biloxi lighthouse, which is on the National Register; and the Biloxi Mardi Gras Museum; among many others.

All scheduled events will be casual dress with no coat or tie required. A centerpiece of this reunion will be a twenty-four hour hospitality room. This popular feature will provide a place for everyone to gather when things get slow and for Firebirds to share “war stories.”

Normal room rates at the Holiday Inn Express are over \$70.00 a night, but Sid is setting up a special price of \$59.00 for the Firebirds. Seventy-five rooms have been reserved at this price; first come, first served.

In addition, the hotel will provide a free Continental breakfast each morning and a complimentary Manager's Reception, open bar, from 5:30-7:00 each night.

Contact Sid Marcus at 1-800-468-2102 to make a room reservation. If Sid is not in, tell the desk clerk that you want to make a reservation for the “Firebird Weekend.”

The hotel's address is Holiday Inn Express, 2416 Beach Boulevard, Biloxi, MS 39531, (601) 388-1000.

Reserve your place today. We're looking forward to seeing every Firebird at the reunion.

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## **Last Firebird Reunion in 1984...**

# **Ex-Dyess Troop Carrier Unit Reunites**

By SSgt. Jimi Jones  
463rd TAW Public Affairs

The 17th Troop Carrier Squadron's third annual reunion will be held in the Dyess AFB area June 15-17. Activities will be on Dyess and at Abilene's VFW and Briarstone Manor.

According to the 463rd Tactical Airlift Wing's chief engineer, CMSgt. Samuel L. Arnold, who was a member of the 17th TCS, the squadron's first "ski bird" reunion was held in Abilene in 1982. They elected officers at that time and another reunion followed in

**"The squadron was the tightest outfit I've been with in 30 years of service."**

1983. "Both went well," the chief said, adding, "same stories, just stretched a little longer. Invitations for this year's reunion have been sent around the world," he said.

The 17th TCS was activated at Dyess AFB in March, 1961, with C-130D's— "Ski Birds" from Sewart AFB, Tennessee, under a new wing, the 516th Troop Carrier Wing—then attached to the Tactical Air

Command. Chief Arnold shared his memories from those days. "Flight crews and maintenance people were thrown in from all over the Air Force," Chief Arnold said. "We acquired a few qualified crews from the 61st TCS at Sewart who had operated the planes, so a big training program went into effect."

"However, our lesson plans were a far cry from the complex training program we enjoy today," the chief said. "The squadron was the tightest outfit I've been with in 30 years of service. A few of us had started our C-130 days at Ardmore AFB, Oklahoma, with the 463rd TCW, then to Sewart, Dyess, Elmendorf, and finally, like me, back to Dyess to finish my Air Force career."

The 17th TCS, now the 17th TAS and still in Alaska, flies the newer C-130E with the Military Airlift Command. "The New York National Guard has picked up the mission, and I've been informed by the 109th Tactical Airlift Group commander, Col. Stanley W. Hemstreet, that he and a crew will fly in for the reunion, bringing one of the old birds."

Chief Arnold explained that since the ANG is about to phase out the old C-130D and pick up new H model ski birds, plans are under way to acquire one of the D models to help dress up the

Dyess Historical Museum. "If we should succeed in getting one, I'm sure we'll get plenty of laughs when they see it parked here in West Texas, but we had the same reaction twenty-three years ago when we came here. We all cussed the old bird, but I'll be the first to admit a lot of fond memories will surface."

"We are looking forward to a bigger and better reunion this year and hope a few people will want to see the old bird again," he said.

Dyess Air Force Base

***The Peacemaker***

June 8, 1984

### **- In Memory -**

Please keep the following Firebirds who are no longer with us in your thoughts and

Bill Deboe, Milt Chorn, Bud Albert, Ralph Hamilton, Don Bray, Buzz Carr, Bob Dalton, Bob Jurasek, Ed Lafon, George Langfield, Lester Langston, Bob Morrissey, Woody Myers, Walt Ott, Igor Prokofieff, Larry Sharrow, Eugene Soeder, James Surber, Roger Sweatman, Francis Termin, F. E. Ransford, Tom Lewin, Art Spooner, Larry Lange, Marion Hendrix, George Gregelein, and Ken Stockard.

**Anecdote...**

## Cheers to Mike

It was an evening in the summer of 1966, and all missions on the Greenland ice cap had been finished for the day. The flight crews not on alert had gathered together in the Fox and Hare club at Sondrestrom to share *war stories* and to have a Tuborg or two. It was a time for the squadron to wind down from the pressures of the day. Several Firebirds, along with Royal Air Force exchange pilot Mike Nash, were in a dark corner of the club fulfilling *squadron tradition* when I arbitrarily and capriciously decided that it was

time for a bit of levity. Mike had an excellent sense of humor and seemed to be in good *spirits*, so I stood as if to offer a toast. Instead, I said in the best pseudo British accent that any Southerner could be expected to offer, "Chaps, my name is Mike Nash, and I can whip any three Yanks in the place." All of the Firebirds went into hysterics, laughing until tears ran down their cheeks, and Mike sank into the shadows emanating a red glow...chuckling along with us. Another Firebird prank had been perpetrated.

In 1984, the Firebirds gathered in Abilene, Texas, for a reunion. After registering for the event. I was walking back to my room across the motel parking area when I heard a familiar British voice come from a nearby door, "My name is Nolan Bailey, and I can whip anybody in the place." It was good friend Mike Nash, and it was a pleasure to hear his voice. Obviously, Mike had not forgotten the incident even though eighteen years had passed. Here's to Mike...good sport...excellent pilot...member of the fraternal Firebird fellowship... Cheers!

Nolan Bailey  
Firebird Pilot: 1963-1967

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## Last Picture of a Ski-Bird

Journal American Aviation Historical Society, Volume 18, Number 2, featured two photographs representing a portion of the service career of C-130D 57-0495, but the story is not complete, I feel without her last formal portrait. "495" was reputed to be the best "ski-bird" assigned to the 17th Tactical Airlift Squadron, and this accolade was accorded her by maintenance personnel who are normally very critical of an aircraft.

The career of this fine aircraft came to an abrupt end at 0655 hours, local time, on 5 July 1972, at DYE III, a remote radar

site 200 miles east of Sondrestrom Air Base, Greenland. The aircraft was on final approach during a routine resupply mission when it entered a stall at low altitude and airspeed and impacted the ground (snow). The landing gear, skis, outboard fuel tanks, and the number one engine were torn from the aircraft, twelve feet of the left wing tip and six feet of the right wing tip were sheered. Fire destroyed the left inboard engine and the remainder of the left wing, as well as a portion of the right wing in the area of the fuel tank pylon. A blade from the number two propeller sheered, cutting a

six foot gash in the left side of the fuselage, killing a Danish workman who was assigned to the site. The crew survived with no injuries.

With 6,258.7 hours on the airframe, 495 was considered beyond economical repair and useable components were salvaged at the crash site. The wreckage has been totally obliterated by the year's snowfall. Perhaps this is a more fitting end for a fine aircraft than the cutter's torch.

JOURNAL American Aviation Historical Society, Spring 1974.

Article courtesy of Fred Brackbill, Firebird navigator.

## Firebirds On The Internet

In April of 1997, the Firebird Association Home Page became reality on the World Wide Web when Nolan Bailey, Firebird Association historian, and former Firebird pilot, began putting together an extensive history of the 17th Troop Carrier Squadron, 17th Tactical Airlift Squadron, and the DYE sites that they supported from 1961 through 1975. At the same time, the historian began a search on the Internet for former members of these units.

After being contacted, several Firebirds forwarded newspaper articles, photographs, and slides which have been duplicated and posted on the page. Over 4,000 visits have been recorded in the twelve months that the Firebird page has been available.

**The URL of the Firebird Home Page is (<http://members.aol.com/>)**

If you don't own a computer and would still like to visit the page, please consider the following options:

- Contact a friend who is on the Internet and impose upon them.
- Attend a local computer club meeting and find someone who is on the Internet.
- Call your local public library

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See **E-MAIL** / Page 5

and ask if they provide Internet services.

- Enroll in a community college continuing education course on the Internet (after hours).
- Visit a computer store and ask if they can demonstrate the value of having a computer and Internet service (ask them to go to the Firebird page address).
- Stop by the offices of a local Internet Service Provider and ask them if they will demonstrate the advantages of being on the World Wide Web (give them the Firebird address).
- Find a faculty member or student from a local university – most have access to the Internet and World Wide Web - and offer them a *bribe* to show you the page.

If you already have a computer, please consider the following tips.

- An Internet computer should have a 486 processor as a minimum. A Pentium 133 Mhz would be much better.
- The computer should have no less than 16MB of Random Access Memory (RAM).
- Acquire a 28.8 or faster external modem.
- Contact a local Internet Service Provider and establish an account. Or, if there is a local access number in your town for AOL or Compuserve, join them at a rate of \$19.95 per month with unlimited time.

*Help us find....*

## **Firebirds Lost**

In the past few months, there has been an intensive campaign to locate all personnel who were members of the 17th TCS, 17th TAS, **Firebirds**, or units assigned to the C-130D. In spite of this effort, the following persons have not been found to date. **If you have addresses for these individuals, or for others known to qualify as Firebirds, please forward such information to the Firebird historian.**

Marlin E. Adolphs, Jerry F. Adrian, Steven M. Ahrens, James W. Alexander, Scott Allen, Lynn L. Alsbury, Celestion M. Alvarez, Robert T. Anderson, Gary E. Andrejak, Henry J. Angelbeck, Jr., Robert D. Anthony, and Steven G. Arrowood.

Olanza Badger, Joseph C. Bair, James A. Banas, Larry A. Barnes, James J. Baroni, Anthony V. Barrett, Barry R. Baugher, Dennis L. Bealer, James W. Bell, Jr., Frank E. Bendrick, Albert E. Benson, Jr., Carl J. Berg, Jr., and Vern Berry.

Ronald H. Bethea, Robert L. Blayney, Leroy Bohlen, Oliver D. Bottrell, Al Brashear, John V. Bricker, Jr., Joe D. Bright, Thomas L. Brooks, Kenneth R. Browder, Charlie Brown, Archie C. Bryant, William J. Buchanan, Richard L. Burr, Lloyd O. Burrell, and Howard W. Burton.

John J. Camacho, Phil Campbell, Charles Carroll,

Harry C. Cashwell, Douglas F. Cave, Jr., John J. Cayton, Andrew M. Chamskas, Richard B. Clary, Robert S. Clayton, Ernest C. Conn, Jr., Herschel D. Coombs, Bernard P. "Lucky" Coyne, K. D. Crill, Thomas J. Currier, Jackie E. Davidson, Ralph T. Dorman, Mike Doyle, Walter R. Drake, Larry Dunkin, and Clifford E. Dykes.

Robert E. Edgell, Billy R. Emmert, Dennis Farris, Robert A. Fowler, Ronald G. Frazier, Stony Gastonquay, Arnald J. Gionet, John Hall, William W. Harper, Gerald M. Harris, Jerry H. Hatfield, Edward A. Highfill, Lee K. Hilgendorf, Odie C. Hinson, Raymond C. Hollingsworth, Edward A. Hopkinson, Sanford L. Hudgins, Harold R. Hudson, and James E. Hughes.

Hershal F. Jackson, Lloyd Jacobs, Jr., Al Janis, George R. Johnson, Ernest R. Johnson, Andrew E. Jones, K. S. Jones, Martin E. Kinna, Richard D. Kiper, Lionel E. Lavoie, Jack E. Linn, Ora C. Littleton, and Robert Lorentz.

Thomas L. Maxon, Allan C. McCollor, James W. McCowan, Dimitrie Milinovich, Elmer A. Miller, Robert C. Miller, Donald R. Miller, Slaughter D. Mimms, Jim Mitchell, Carl A. Mix, Jerry E. Morgan, and Lawrence E. Morris.

Kenneth Morris, Jerry D. Mullens, Haig B. Nalbandian, Virgil B. Nay, Jr., C. C. Nichols, William Nielsen, Michael F. O'Brien, David A. Owens, Jose Padilla, Jr., and Gregory J. Palin,

Roger C. Piner, Charles E. Portis, Elmer E. Potter, Huston Powers, Myles Richmond, William D. Roberson, and Jack M. Roth.

Joseph C. Saher, William Salazar, Joseph C. Salter, Elijah Scates, Robert L. Schaffer, Ernest M. Scott, Phillip O. Shearouse, Richard F. Schultz, William R. Simms, Hubert G. Smiley, Jr., John W. Smith, Bob Snyder, Raymond Stock, Jr., Danny W. Stone, David L. Strange, and Charles Swaney.

David M. Thompson, J. A. Tony, Frank Van Henert, Bruce A. Vice, Arnaldo M. Villareal, George M. Waldron, Don B. Walther, Hubert E. Ward, Robert W. West, and Frederick L. White.

William N. Wilburn, Ed Wilcock, Gordon L. Wilke, Gordon Williams, V. B. Willis, Thomas L. Wilson, Billy E. Wood, M. J. Worley, Richard Wright, and Stephen W. Zebruck.

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## **Ski Bird 490**

I received your E-Mail today requesting information on aircraft 57-0490. I personally flew that aircraft to Chanut AFB, IL, around 1984 or 1985. Then, I flew it back to Stratton Air National Guard Base, NY in 1995 or 1996 to be displayed near the main entrance of our Air National Guard facility, where it is today, looking fine.

Col. Marion G. "Graham" Pritchard, Air/Base Commander, and I flew the C-130D's with the 17th TAS in Alaska before the planes were transferred to our unit years ago. As of this date, we are two of a handful of C-130D pilots remaining that flew them in support of the DEW line stations (DYE II and DYE III).

We presently have seven ski aircraft, four 1983 LC-130H2's and three brand new (48 million each) LC-130H3 ski aircraft. The unit is presently in the process of taking over the Navy's Antarctic Deep Freeze Mission down at McMurdo Station located on the Antarctic continent. In two years, we will be receiving two more LC-130R's from the US Navy when the transition-conversion is complete.

We used to have an Air Force advisor named Lt. Col. Don Moorman who flew the C-130D with the 17th TAS.

Thomas F. Noel  
Lt. Colonel  
NYANG

**Editor's Note:** The "D" models 492 and 494 are in storage at AMARC in Tucson. Tail number 493 is being placed on permanent static display at Pima Air Museum, and 491 is parked at the end of the runway in Lima, Peru. The wreckage of 495 is buried on the Greenland ice cap.

## **Firebirds....**

# **Why Have a Reunion?**

Those of you who served in the military know that those years were among the most intense, unforgettable, and influential of your life. And the largest part of that experience, the part that keeps coming back time and again, is the people—those men or women you served with. Served with? What a strange term. That actually meant eating, working, playing, joking, yelling, and suffering and celebrating together, day in and day out. Good times, bad times, great times, boring times, and times that scared you to death. At first you were strangers but you became friends, even with some you might have avoided or never met in "the real world."

But it was more than friendship. Your present sense of camaraderie and nostalgia is not really focused around happy and casual memories like (say) those of high school, but on uncommon bonds forged under unusual conditions. You depended on each other to get the job done; you needed each other to survive battles and boredom and you came away with an experience known only to those who have been there.

Then, many of you were catapulted from military service directly back into civilian life. After your discharge, you scattered to towns and cities across America. When you try to remember your military experience and the people you

served with, there are blank spots and a sense of incompleteness because no one is around to remember with you and there is a lot you have forgotten.

Your experiences and thoughts may not be easily shared with people you now love and live with. Friends and family may have long ago begun to yawn over old war stories, never realizing their subtle yet profound importance to you.

A reunion offers you a chance to remember, fill in the blanks, rediscover long-lost friends, compare experiences, ask a friend that important question, spend time with someone you had previously overlooked, be with those who understand and finally put into proper perspective that most profound and powerful part of your life.

Anonymous  
*Reunions Magazine*  
Winter 1997

## ***In Appreciation***

A special thanks goes to John Root, Richard Tinney, Richard Dodge, and Guy Ridgeway. Their generous financial support has made the publication and mailing of this newsletter possible.

**March 26, 1996....**

## **Letter to All Known Firebirds**

Dear Firebird Crewmember,

Please forgive the informality of this letter, but over a decade has passed since the Firebirds flocked to Abilene on June 15-17, 1984, to attend the association's last reunion. Apparently, there have been no further meetings to this date.

As I recall, my some stroke of "misfortune," I was elected to be historian for the group until the next "migration of the birds" --what a tenure of office--and the salary "ain't" bad either. Since then, I have spent some amount of time considering ways to gather and present pertinent historical information in an appropriate manner. With the advent of the World Wide Web, the ideal medium may have arrived. Due to the fact that I now teach computer literacy and computer science instead of

professional photography, this is possible for me to accomplish. With the encouragement and support of all past and present Firebirds, I am prepared to design an association homepage for our unique unit.

To design a homepage, I am requesting photographs; written, typed, taped, or word processed stories; Xeroxed articles; current addresses and phone numbers of any Firebird crewmember; and any other item deemed appropriate.

At present, I plan to post pictures, official historical information, names of crewmembers, flight orders, and anecdotes for easy access by interested persons. This is a tremendous undertaking and will be impossible without your involvement and assistance.

Recently, I called several Firebirds and all would like to

have an updated roster. Since I am providing the postage, computer time, impetus, and effort to initiate this project, it is hoped that each of you will take a moment to make it a success for all of us.

Please forward addresses, cassette tapes, photographs, Xerox copies, *bovine scatology*, and other 17th Troop Carrier Squadron reflections to me at the above address, or you may contact me via e-mail using [nolanwb@cp-tel.net](mailto:nolanwb@cp-tel.net) or [nolanwb@aol.com](mailto:nolanwb@aol.com). For further information please feel free to call me at 318-352-2610 after 5:00 p.m. (CST) during the week or at any time during the weekend. Greetings to those that I have not seen or heard from for many years, and please be assured that your taking part this "operation" will be appreciated.

Nolan W. Bailey  
Firebird Pilot: 1963-67  
Firebird Association historian

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### **Unique memento....**

## **The Firebird Pin**

At some time after the Firebirds moved to Alaska in 1964, Gary Lattin, Firebird pilot and artist who drew the official Firebird emblem, produced the first Firebird pin. Since gold was readily available in Alaska, it became the metal of choice. Many of the original Firebirds bought this unique memento.

After the 1984 reunion, Gary borrowed an original pin from Ernest Williams and did a redesign which is shown at right.

The current pin is available in 14k gold plated over sterling silver or in solid 14k. Since the price of gold fluctuates daily, please call 909-862-2731 to receive the current price.



**The New Ski Bird Pin**  
Designer: Gary Lattin



## Our Heritage...

### The 17th TCS

The 64th was activated as a Transport Group in December of 1940 and was moved from the west coast to Westover Field, Massachusetts, during the first part of June 1942. The Group consisted of the 16th, 17th, and 18th squadrons with the 35th joining the 64th in June. The air crew cadres were augmented with an estimated group of about fifty pilots from class 42E.

The Group was soon redesignated as the 64th Troop Carrier Group with its primary function to be transporting paratroopers and tow gliders. The primary aircraft assigned to the Group was the C-47. Extensive training was conducted in the next several weeks at Westover and at nearby Westfield. The first paratrooper drop, for some airplanes, was conducted in June staging out of Pope Field, North Carolina.

By the end of July 1942, the Group was ready for duty. The ground echelon left Fort Dix by ship during the first part of August, and the air echelon, with an estimated forty-nine planes, departed about the same time for England by way of Presque Isle, Maine; Goose Bay, Labrador; Greenland; Iceland and Scotland. By August 25th most of the Group air and ground echelons were operating out of Ramsbury RAF Station, which was about sixty miles west of London. The 64th

## E-Mail (Continued from page 5)

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arrived in England well ahead of the delivery of rations, so for the first several weeks we were on British Emergency War rations which seemed to be mostly tea, biscuits, and orange marmalade two or three times a day.

Our stay in England was about two-and-a-half months, and the Group conducted extensive training while flying cargo, passengers, and courier missions. During this period we were assigned to the Twelfth Air Force, which was to be used in Operation Torch--the invasion of North Africa.

On November 9, 1942, the air echelon of the 64th flew to North Africa staying well out to sea and away from all land areas and made a landfall near Gibraltar. The main Group elements continued on to Algiers and were able to land their British paratroopers at dawn. While crossing the Algiers water front, Allied anti-aircraft gunners fired on the Group planes; however, there was only minor plane damage and a few light

See 17th TCS / Page 10

*Felix Maguire's ...*

## Alaska Update 1997

I am still in the flying business. Presently I am flying a Citation V (C-560) all over Alaska for AT&T Alascom, Inc. We even fly into such exotic places as Sparrevohn, Cape Newenham, Cape Romanzof, Cape Lisburne, and, of course, Indian Mountain. These names should bring back some memories.

Last week I was in Tin City, Point Lay, and Barter Island. Point Lay now has only one person, and Barter Island has two. Most of the other sites are run by a team of five...all under contract. As of March 31, 1997, the Navy is out of Adak, and the base is being handed over to a native group. They are looking for imaginative people to suggest what to do there. The Navy built about 200 new houses, a hospital, a school, and there was a McDonald's operating there up until two years ago. The buildings are of a new type designed to withstand the high winds. No more big rocks on the roofs.

Shemya is also being handed over to contractors and reduced to about forty-five people. Amchitka was reactivated for about three years, where there was an over the horizon was an over the horizon back-scatter radar. Now that the Ice Curtain has melted and we have lots of travel to Russia, the radar was dismantled a few years ago, and Amchitka has been returned to the birds and sea otters.

With the forthcoming demise of LORAN, the Port Clarence and St. Paul Island Loran Stations will close. Wainwright, south of Barrow, has closed and the village has its own 3,400 ft runway away from the LRSS Station. Barter Island will soon be handed over to the North Slope Borough.

The Lonely and Oliktok airfields have closed. Since the oil revenues came along, most villages have or are getting runways 3,500 ft long. They all have beautiful schools with gymnasiums which are used by the villagers in the evenings. Everyone has TV and a telephone. Most have cellular. ELT's are passe' as most have hand-held GPS and a cellular phone for rescue purposes. Village schools, especially in the North Slope Borough areas, all have computer classrooms with live video to Barrow, from which they receive some classes. There are also connections to the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, and, of course to the native hospitals in regional areas as well as to the major hospital in Anchorage.

Incidentally, there is a new native hospital under construction on Tudor Road. Yes, that same Tudor road which used to be a gravel road is now a major artery from Muldoon to the airport. There is also a new

hospital on the way at Elmendorf. Anchorage has changed much over the past twenty years. We have a very modern theatre complex...with three theatres in the "Town Square" along with a large Convention Centre or should I spell it Center. We also have the Sullivan Arena, which hold about 6,000, and draws ice hockey, commercial shows, and music (rock) shows.

Some of these items should bring back memories to the more senior Firebirds.

### 17th TCS

casualties.

Three more paratroop missions were flown successfully in November, 1942, to places east of Algiers called Bone, Souk-el-Arba, and Depienne. British paratroopers were dropped, and fighter escort was provided by American P-38's and RAF Hurricanes and Spitfires.

From November, 1942, until June, 1943, most of the Group was based at Blida, a French Air Field about twenty miles from Algiers. During the balance of the North African campaign, the Group was committed to evacuating wounded from the front lines to hospitals in Algiers and Oran and in carrying food, mail, cargo, and passengers. And, we conducted extensive glider training with the American Waco glider and the RAF Horsa.

In June, 1943, the 64th Group moved to a desert airstrip called Zena II, which was near Kairouan, Tunisia, to train for its next airborne mission--operation Husky -- the invasion of Sicily. The 64th was to join four other troop carrier groups in dropping 3,400 paratroopers outside the south coastal town of Gela to keep the Germans from that port until the US 1st Division landed. On July 9 and 10, 1943, the invasion of Sicily began. With very high winds and limited night visibility at 0025, the 2nd Battalion was dropped en masse. The paratroopers were under fire during and after the drop but they succeeded in clearing out the enemy forces.

On the night of September 14-15, 1943, we dropped the US 2nd Battalion of the 509th Parachute Combat Team at Avelino, Italy, which was in support of the Salerno beachhead. In January 1944, we supported the Anzio beach-head with supplies and patient evacuation. Glider training continued as we tried double glider tows and snatches of downed gliders from C-47's flying overhead.

Suddenly, on April 1, 1944, the air echelon of the 64th TCG was ordered to depart for the CBI theater of operations. The Group through April, May, and the first part of June was instrumental in supplying Merrill's Marauders, General Stillwell's American and Chinese Armies in the Naingwan section of Northern Burma and the 170,000 British troops besieged in the Imphal Valley, Burma. Every sortie was flown over Japanese

lines. One of the 17th TCS's C-47's was jumped by two Zero's and one crashed into the tail of the transport, the Zero crashed and the pilot, Hal Scrugham, received credit for downing one airplane."

On July 10, 1944, the organization was transferred to Ciampino near Rome, Italy. Training accelerated for Operation Dragoon, which was to be the invasion of Southern France. On August 15-16, 1944, the Group participated in the invasion. "The Group committed a lead serial of 36 aircraft and a second serial of 27 for airdrops. Later in the day, the Group participated in a very large scale glider operation, towing more than 300 Waco gliders. Due to obstructions that had been placed in the glider landing zones, all gliders were damaged or destroyed. Eleven glider pilots were killed, and approximately 100 glider troops were injured. There was some damage from anti-aircraft fire, but all Group planes returned safely."

On September 6, 1944, the air echelon was sent from Ciampino airport to Istres Le Tube in Southern France. From this large grass field we supplied our rapidly advancing ground forces and fighter units with gas and ammunition. Notification was received on September 5, 1944, to move to Southern France.

By the end of October 1944, most of the air echelon had been recalled to Ciampino airport. Due to heavy German army pressure on our northern Italy

battle lines, we were required to move an estimated 10,000 replacement troops from Chereburg Port in France to the battle area in Italy.

On January 9, 1945, the Group was transferred from Rome to Rosignano. We continued normal theater support missions and expanded resupply operations to partisan forces behind German lines in Italy and to those of Marshall Tito in Yugoslavia. We landed behind the lines on a number of missions to bring back various Allied personnel and an ever increasing number of US and Allied air crews.

On the night of April 20-21, 1945, the 64th conducted the last paratroop mission of the war when we dropped 220 men into the Po valley. The war did end during early May, 1945, and we continued theater support missions and added emergency missions to provide food and medical supplies to newly liberated cities such as Milan, and to POW camps such as, Klagensfort, Austria.

On May 21, 1945, the 64th left the Mediterranean Theater of Operations and flew planes and equipment to Trinidad. In June, 1945, the 64th Troop Carrier Group was inactivated, and personnel and planes were assigned to the Air Transport Command.

Compiled by  
Roger Coleson,  
September 1987

# The Firebird Association

In 1982, former members of the 17th TCS and 17th TAS officially organized the Firebird Association. It was their belief that this was a unique unit since the Air Force only ordered twelve ski-equipped aircraft. Additionally, it was the intent to share experiences with members of the 17th before and after the C-130D "lead sled."

At the 1983 reunion, it was decided that all persons who flew the C-130D (Ski Birds) would be eligible to join the Firebird Association as full members. All other 17th TCS/TAS personnel would be allowed to join as associate

members. Members voted to include all present and past members of the 17th, or individuals assigned or attached to this unit or other C-130D units, to become members of this unique association. The rule to be followed is once a Firebird always a Firebird.

The charter dues were set at \$10.00 per year. Each Firebird Association member will receive a distinctive Firebird Association membership card and all privileges associated therewith. All income is used to defray expenses associated with carrying out the association's business such as, planning for

reunions, mailing correspondence, and/or preparing association newsletters.

## *Editor's Comments*

Since the term *associate* member infers a membership of lesser quality than *full* membership, it is suggested that the association consider affording everyone the same membership. This could be done by following Air Force tradition and assigning all Firebirds to a specific flight such as, the Gooney Bird Flight, Ski Bird Flight, and Herky Bird Flight. Let the association president or historian know what you think.

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## FIREBIRD ASSOCIATION - MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Initial Membership

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

Renewal

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ FAX: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

UNIT:  17th TCS  17th TAS  517th AS  Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Please mail completed form and Firebird Association dues of \$10.00 to:**

**John C. Parker**, Firebird President  
HC-81 Box 341  
Junction, TX 46849-9102  
Phone: (915) 446-2044

### **Please check one block:**

I plan to attend the Firebird reunion in Biloxi, Mississippi, during March 12-15, 1998.  Yes  No