

THE FORGOTTEN PILOTS WHO FLEW B.C. (Before Choppers)

The Liaison Plane, as we knew it, was introduced to the military during the Louisiana Maneuvers in 1942. Subsequently most every infantry unit and especially artillery units either had their own Air Section assigned or were allocated pilots and aircraft from other units for specific duties.

Pilots were acquired from many sources:

1. Washouts from the Cadet Program.
2. Artillery Officers School, Ft. Sill, Ok.
3. CPTP (Civilian Pilot Training Program).
4. Direct assignment of pilots already trained.
5. Civilian pilot volunteers.

The majority of pilots were enlisted (SSgt). Some were given Field Commissions such as the Artillery Officer graduates.

1st Air Commando Gp. Formed in March 1943 to support Brig. Gen. Orde C. Wingate and his Chindits behind the Japanese lines in Burma. Commanded by Col. Philip Cochran (Flip Corkin, of Terry and the Pirates comic strip). Consisting of 12,000 men (all volunteers). In addition to the transports, C-47, B-25 Bombers, and P-51 Fighters, CG-4 Gliders and 4 squadrons of light aircraft, made up of L-1s, L-5s, and a few Nordyns. The liaison planes flew around 7,500 sorties and evacuated 2,200 wounded troops. About 85 percent of the gliders were damaged or lost. 40 L-1s and L-5s and five pilots were lost due to the rugged conditions. The first helicopter of WWII was used to evacuate wounded at near the end of this campaign in 1945. (SIKORSKY YR-4B)

2nd Air Commando Gp. April 1944. Consisting of 2 Fighter Sqs, P-47 and P-51s, 1 Transport Sq, C-47 and CG-4 Gliders. 3 Liaison Sqs of L-5s. Sent to Burma to act as Special Forces Operations. Launched attacks across the Irrawaddy River for the reconquest of Burma and Thailand.

3rd Air Commando Gp. December 1944. 2 Ftr Sqs. 1 Troop Carrier Sq. and 3 Liaison Sqs of CG-4 Gliders and L-5 aircraft. Consisting of 15 Officers and 125 enlisted pilots. SSgt. Operated in Nadzab New Guinea, Leyte, PI., then in February 1945 moved to Mangalon Air Field on Luzon. Then to Loag in the northern part of Luzon, 150 miles behind the Japanese lines. The Liaison Squadrons evacuated wounded and spotted targets for the fighters and bombers. They brought out more than 28,000 wounded from the Cugayen Valley operations.

25th Liaison Squadron. January 1944. Nadzab, New Guinea where they were known as the "Guinea Short Lines.". 125 L-5s and 142 enlisted pilots. SSgt. Commanded by Maj. Lirpaugh (Rush's father). Performed 65 rescues, 94 assists, 8,000 hours of flying 5,000 passengers and 200,000 pounds of freight. On 10 December 1944 moved to Tacloban, PI., to support the 11th Airborne Division, fighting to retake Leyte. Aerial resupply was the only means of support for the ground forces in the mountainous terrain. The L-4s and L-5s were indispensable to the 11th Airborne Div. The 25th L. Sq. dropped and resupplied 2 complete Field Hospitals. In addition to the Field Hospitals, they daily resupplied the ground troops with mortars, howitzers, bazookas, grenades, small arms ammunition and first aid supplies. In 15 months of combat the 25th flew 1,250 sorties and dropped a total of 396,000 pounds of material. In January 45,

25th L. Sq. cont'd

the 25th moved to Mindanao to support the X Corps. From April to June they flew more than 2880 hours, carried 2,444 passengers and 125,000 pounds of supplies.

In 1945 near the end of hostilities on Okinawa, L-5s of the 3rd Air Commando Gp. completed the longest over water non-stop flight on record at that time, by installing a 75 gal. wing tank in the area used for stretchers. 30 L-5s, piloted by SSgts and one Army Captain took off from Loag, PI., and flew non-stop to Okinawa without a loss. Some 750 Miles.

1st Cav. Div. Air Section. 1943. Formed at Ft. Bliss, Tx. Consisting of SSgt graduates of the Ft. Sill, Ok., Artillery School. Using L-4s and L-3 aircraft. Shipped to New Guinea then on to the Admiralty campaign. Then in 1944 to Leyte, PI., then to Samar. On 17 January 1945 the 1st Cav. Div. landed at Lingayan Gulf, Luzon, PI., and immediately consolidated operations with the 40th and 37th Divs., of the 6th Army which had landed on 9 Jan. Following Gen. McArthur's orders the three divisions raced for Manila and in just a few days, liberated 3,500 Allied Prisoners held in the Santo Tomas University Prison. The Air Section received a total of 53 Air Medals and 25 Oak Leaf Clusters. They flew a total of 13,821 flight hours in the retaking of Manila.

5th Liaison Sq. April 1944. Bombay, India. Operated in India, Burma sections until September 1945. Aerial taxis, cargo haulers, artillery spotters. Over 5,150 wounded evacuated. 32,000 operational flights. 42 planes lost.

Liaison Aircraft were operational in every organization in Europe. Between August 1944 and February 1945, Air Op sections of the 1st US Army flew more than 25,000 combat missions. Thirty six percent were adjustment of artillery fire, fifty four percent reconnaissance and ten percent were other combat missions. 6,591 admin. flights. Patton's 3rd Army depended heavily on the use of liaison aircraft. During the Battle of the Bulge the weather was so bad that liaison L-4s were the only aircraft able to fly.

The beachhead at Anzio was actually the first invasion of the European Continent. During this invasion the first "Baby Carrier" was used. It consisted of a Navy LST (Landing Ship Tank) on which a special runway was built on the forward portion of the deck. 6 L-4s were stacked on the deck, 3 on each side. The approx 900Lb. planes were then manhandled up to the runway, ship turned into the wind and off they would go.

When directing artillery fire, some aircraft could control multiple fire batteries. Depending on the radio equipment. Sometimes up to 35 heavy guns. No wonder some of these little green airplanes brought down more fire on the enemy than some of the heavy bombers.

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THE AIRCRAFT MANUFACTURED AND FLOW B.C. (Before Choppers)

Approximate number of liaison aircraft manufactured during WWII:

L-1	Stinson (Chance Vaught)	275
L-2	Taylorcraft	1,979
L-3	Aeronca	1,798
L-4	Piper	5,283
L-5	Stinson	2,483

One has to wonder if the helicopter pilots of today's military appreciate or even are aware of the Little Cloth Covered Planes and pilots who preceeded them more than 58 years ago.

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2nd Liaison Squadron. Consisting of 2 Fighter Sq, P-47 and 2 Bomb Squadrons. 3 Liaison Sq of L-5s. Sent 40 L-4s and L-5s. Launched attacks across the IJ to Japan. The first helicopter of WWII was used to evacuate wounded across lines in Burma and Thailand.

3rd Liaison Squadron. 2 Fighter Sq, 1 Troop Carrier Sq, and the fighters and bombers. Consisting of 15 officers and 100 enlisted pilots. Sent 40 L-4s and L-5s. Launched attacks across the IJ to Japan. The first helicopter of WWII was used to evacuate wounded across lines in Burma and Thailand. They brought out more than 20,000 wounded from the Gugsyen Valley operations.

25th Liaison Squadron. January 1944. Radaab, New Guinea where they were based on the Chained Short Waves. 125 L-5s and 142 enlisted pilots. CSgt. Commanded by Maj. Litchbach (Gus's father). Performed 65 rescues, 30 airdrops, 8,000 hours of flying 5,000 passengers and 200,000 pounds of freight. On 10 Dec 44 the 15th moved to Tualahan, N.G., to support the 11th Airborne Division, fighting to retake Leyte. Aerial resupply was the only means of support for the ground forces in the mountainous terrain. The L-4s and L-5s were indispensable to the 11th Airborne Div. The 24th L. Sq. dropped and resupplied 2 complete Field Hospitals. In addition to the Field Hospitals, they daily resupplied the ground troops with mortars, submachine guns, bazookas, grenades, small arms ammunition and first aid supplies. In 15 months of combat the 25th flew 1,250 sorties and dropped a total of 396,000 pounds of material. In January 45,