

June 2009

# The DZ

Headquarters  
95th Squadron  
96th Squadron  
97th Squadron  
98th Squadron

By Mark Durivage

## Fall 2009 Reunion and Other Stuff

All is set for the WWII Troop Carrier Community Reunion October 8th-11th, 2009. Enclosed with the newsletter is an informational sheet and registration form. Please register early! I will give a 100% refund until September 30th—no questions asked. So again, please register early so I can properly accommodate the group. We have some great activities planned that you will be sure to enjoy. On Friday, October 9th, we are going to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway to tour the museum and take a ride around the world-famous race track. In the afternoon, we are traveling downtown to the Indiana War Memorial. On Saturday, October the 10th, we will be traveling to the Indianapolis Executive Airport to view a WWII style demonstration jump by the Liberty Jump Team from the vintage C-47 'Black Sparrow'. Hopefully, the weather will cooperate this year! After the jump, there will be an opportunity to ride in this historic aircraft. The rides will be \$95 per person. This is a great opportunity to take your families for a ride in a aircraft which played such an important part in the War as well as your lives. Saturday evening, we will travel downtown to the War Memorial Museum for a private viewing of the museum followed by our banquet.

We will be having some additional guests at the reunion this year. Several people have been helping to 'find' other squadrons and groups. To this end, we will have people attending from the IX Troop Carrier Command Pathfinders, the 439th Troop Carrier Group, and the 442nd Troop Carrier Group. Please make sure you welcome and embrace our newest Troop Carrier Community members. If there are others that you would like to add to our mailing please do not hesitate to forward the information to me. My contact information is available on the back cover of the newsletter.

A few weeks ago, I received a call from Mark Foster, President of the Lyon Air Museum in California. As it turns out they have a C-47 from the 440th Troop Carrier Group 96th Troop Carrier Squadron in their fleet that is still flying. The C-47 'D-Dog' tail number 42-100931 is painted in an American Airlines scheme. Once I had the information, I was able to locate Charlie Yahn, the aircraft's navigator. He was very excited to hear that his plane was still flying. We will have a more detailed report and photos in the next issue of the DZ.

As I am putting this newsletter together, I am packing for my trip to Normandy to participate in the 65th anniversary of the D-Day invasion. Although I have been there several times, I am truly humbled to be able to jump where so many men lost their lives to protect and defend freedom. We have jumps planned for the 4th at Angoville au Plain 101st Airborne Drop Zone 'D', on the 5th a night jump at Amfreville 82nd Airborne Drop Zone 'T', and on the 7th at the La Fièvre Causeway 82nd Airborne Drop Zone. I also hope to visit the Merville Battery and see the 'SNAFU SPECIAL'. A full report and photographs will be included in the next issue of the 'DZ'.

See you in October!

## D-Day Survivors Recall Fateful Day 65 Years Ago

By Tech. Sgt. Jeffrey S. Williams Staff Writer 934th Airlift Wing Public Affairs

On a dreary, overcast June afternoon in Exeter, England, Cpl. William Wildes attached nozzles to the wings of the green and white C-47 Skytrain aircraft formerly known as the “Pride of Minnesota.” Pouring approximately 100 gallons of fuel into each wing, he did it exactly like he had done several times before in the previous months for the training missions to prepare for the Normandy invasion. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, except the white invasion stripes and the large “6Z” that was painted onto the fuselage earlier in the day.

“The planes were fueled in the afternoon of June 5th. We didn’t know where they were going. We just fueled them like normal,” said Cpl. Wildes, a special vehicle operator for the 96th Troop Carrier Squadron. “One pilot had ‘Pride of Minnesota’ inside an arrowhead painted on the nose, but they made him take it off when they put the invasion stripes on for D-Day.”

By evening, each of the 45 aircraft belonging to the 440th Troop Carrier Group was laden down with paratroopers from the 3rd Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division for the flight across the English Channel.

Among the notables flown by the 96th TCS was the famed “Filthy 13,” a demolitions platoon from the 3rd Battalion Company Headquarters. Each member wore a Mohawk-style haircut and face paint and collectively they were tenacious fighters. They also dropped Cpl. Bobbie Rommel, a relative of General Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, who was leading the German resistance in Normandy. But not everything went without a hitch.

“I heard that somebody ran into the deicer boot and tore it up. They replaced this one plane and put another plane in its place. The crew chief was a guy named Bluestone. I remember him well and I fueled his plane,” the corporal recalled. “It was all an unknown for us,” said Maj. George Johnson, who was an operations officer with the 98th Troop Carrier Squadron during the invasion. “We dropped at night and daytime for the preparations. When we went into Normandy, it was agreed that Col. Krebs, the group commander, would lead.” Maj. Johnson was promoted to lieutenant colonel a short time later as the 96th Troop Carrier Squadron commander. After a stellar career, he retired in 1975 at the rank of major general.

Shortly before 11 p.m., Col. Frank X. Krebs, 440th TCG commander, took off from Exeter in aircraft number 292717, the “Stoy Hora,” followed by 44 other aircraft from the 95th, 96th, 97th and 98th troop carrier squadrons that comprised the group. Capt. William R. Cooper led the 96th TCS in chalk 19, aircraft number 100965.

Once airborne, the only navigational aids used were blue lights on the tops of the wingtips and fuselage, as the aircraft rendezvoused with other Skytrains from the IX Troop Carrier Command and Royal Air Force. With only the moonlight to navigate them in complete radio silence, the American and British forces joined together to make the big jump across the English Channel as the lighthouses of England slowly slipped away beneath them. Once they reached the coast of Normandy, a cloud cover enveloped the planes, followed by the blue hue of searchlights and flak from German anti-aircraft batteries.

Col. Krebs honed into the radio signal from the Pathfinders who jumped in an hour before to mark the drop zone. At 1:36 a.m., the paratroopers received the command, “stand up and hook up.” Four minutes later, the green light came on giving the okay to jump. In a matter of seconds, the sky was filled with the billowing white parachutes of the 101st Airborne Division heading for Drop Zone D, near Ste. Mere Eglise, France, 400 feet below.

In his memoirs titled, "The Filthy Thirteen," Jake McNeice wrote the following regarding his flight into Normandy, "Those Germans were firing ammunition up at us that went all through the plane, our chutes and things like that. Those stinking automatic weapons had tracers about every fifth round. It just looked like a string of fire coming up at us. I did not know that there was any other color of tracer than orange but it looked like the greatest display of fireworks that I ever saw in my life. It was beautiful. They would have a blue one then a couple of red then a couple green. There was every color in the rainbow rising up to meet us. We lost several planeloads of paratroopers but the greater part came through it."

According to "Invaders: The Story of the 50th Troop Carrier Wing," a pamphlet published by Stars and Stripes magazine in 1945, "Lt. John Prince, Cherokee, Iowa, didn't have even one engine left in his plane; he was forced to land "deadstick" in the darkness of Normandy's tree-lined hedgerows. The Lieutenant's cool skill set the crew down safely, got them away with enough emergency supplies to return to friendly lines." Lt. Prince flew for the 96th TCS.

Cpl. Wildes remembers the scene when the aircraft returned. "I was on guard duty when they left and was still up when they returned," he said. "Some of the guys they brought back were shot up quite a bit. One of them got shot in the privates from flak that penetrated underneath the aircraft. It was a real mess. Tech. Sgt. Edward Bluestone, the crew chief whose plane I fueled earlier that day, well we lost him on that day at D-Day."

While other troop carrier groups were scattered due to the cloud covering at the coast, misplaced their drops by flying in too fast, or were shot down by the Germans, only the 3rd Battalion of the 506th P.I.R. landed in close proximity to their designated drop zone. At 6:30 a.m., the main landing force of the 1st, 4th and 29th U.S. Infantry Divisions, 2nd Ranger Battalion, 3rd and 50th British Infantry Divisions and Canada's 3rd Infantry Division landed at Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword beaches making a 60-mile long front.

But the battle was not over for the 96th TCS. At dawn on the morning of June 7, Maj. Johnson flew the lead aircraft in the resupply mission. "All of we operations officers were to fly on the resupply mission," he said. "We carried ammunition, food, medical supplies and water." "We went in about 15 to 20 miles behind enemy lines, descended to 500 feet for the drop and came back across Omaha beach. We had a beautiful view of the landing craft," the general said. "There was lots of flak and small arms fire and aircraft damage. We were fortunate that we didn't lose any aircraft. We were so low that all the people on the ground could shoot at us with small arms fire. I led them down to treetop level and then got out of there and back up to the proper altitude," he remembered. "It was quite an event in our lives. We got out of there quickly after we did our jobs. We were very fortunate," he concluded.

Little did anybody know, on the evening of June 5, that there would be heroes in the making who jumped out of the aircraft early the next morning. Of the 231 soldiers of the 506th P.I.R. who lost their lives at Normandy, 103 were from the 3rd Battalion, including those who died in three of the 440th TCG aircraft that perished in the operation.

The 96th Troop Carrier Squadron was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation, the precursor to the Presidential Unit Citation, for their efforts 65 years ago.

Editors note: The 934th Airlift Wing "The Flying Vikings" derives its lineage from the 96th Troop Carrier Squadron 440th Troop Carrier Group. The Wing is based at the Minneapolis-St Paul Airport, in Minnesota.

## Nunquam Non Paratus - Never Unprepared



440TH TROOP CARRIER  
GROUP ASSOCIATION

For questions, comments, or submissions  
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The primary mission of the organization is to record, preserve and disseminate historical documents, photos and related materials of the 440th Troop Carrier Group, 9th Troop Carrier Command, 9th Air Force, European Theater of Operations during World War II.

Normandy\*Southern France\*Northern France\*Rome-Arno  
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[www.440thtcg.org](http://www.440thtcg.org)

## The President's Corner

It is rolling around again on the calendar, that summer is soon making its arrival. Certainly spring let us know it was approaching with all of the tornadoes through parts of the country. The sever weather was also accompanied by floods and fires.

I regret to inform you that one of our long-time active members was recently called to the Lord. Art Suhr, 96th TCS recently passed away. We will miss Art and Betty at the reunions. Major General Johnson is now feeling fine like yours truly, thanks to the addition of an electronic device that keeps our tickers perking along.

It is time to be thinking of our forthcoming Troop Carrier Community reunion in October. The reunion in Indianapolis promises to be the best one yet!

We need to thank Mark for all of his work for the 440th as well as the Troop Carrier Community. He somehow manages to balance, his job, wife, two young boys, and parachuting into his busy schedule.

Bill Walsh  
96th TCS

