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## What is an Airlifter?

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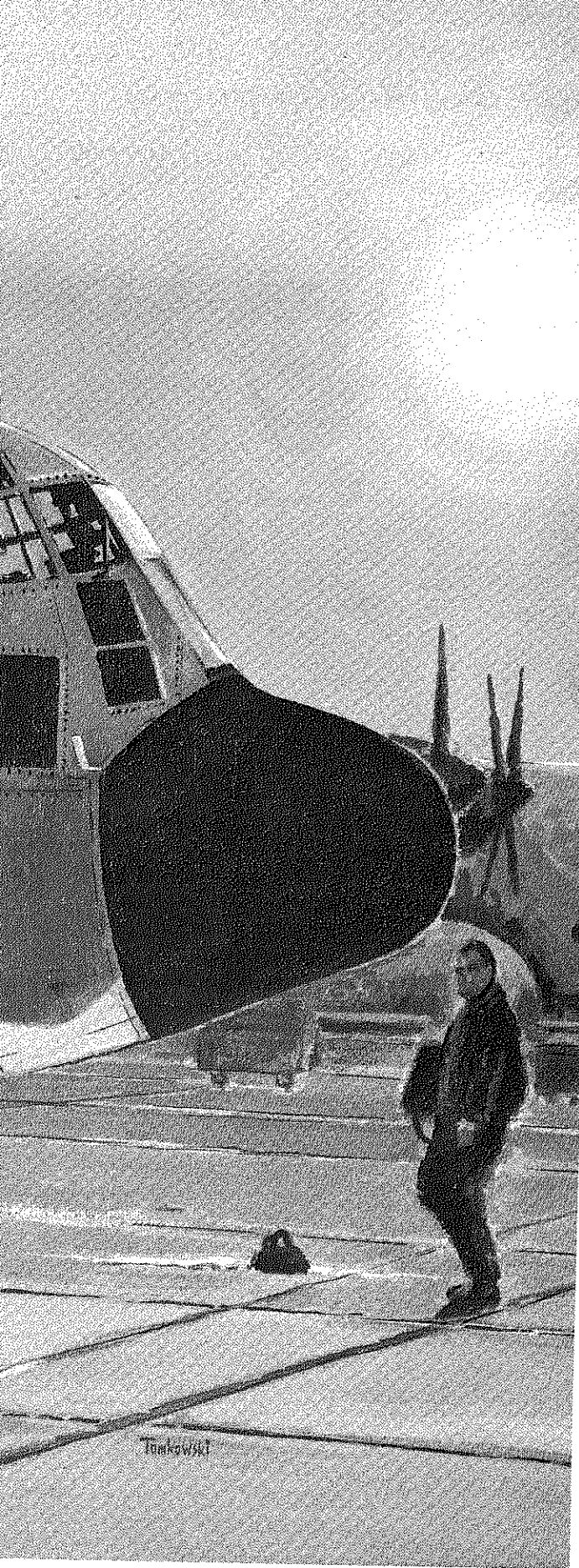
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# WHAT IS AN AIRLIFTER?

by MAJ TIM BRADY

illus 4-6

*This issue is the last one for Major Tim Brady as Editor of TAC ATTACK. During the past two years, under his outstanding leadership the safety message has continued to be heard, as evidenced by the TAC accident rate. He now moves on to bigger and better things at Air Command and Staff. We believe this article reflects his pride in TAC airlift and proudly present it. Tim — you're an airlifter! — FROM THE STAFF*

For the past fifteen years or so the TAC airlifter identity has been tied to that magnificent machine, the C-130. Men have served almost entire careers living the C-130 story, drawing from the greatness of the airplane, and inputting the thing that makes the airplane great — themselves. So the question posed in the title cannot be answered unless a large chunk of the answer involves the Hercules.

AUGUST 1973



And in the same vein, one cannot answer the question without considering the tactical airlift mission. And to determine what the tactical airlift mission is, take a look around the world. Over the past few years you could have seen TAC airlift crews sleeping in tents in Turkey, living on the airplane in the Congo, delivering disaster relief supplies everywhere, dropping troops and equipment in practically every free world country during exercises or actual contingencies, riding in follow-me trucks when transportation was available but reserved for MAC crews, trying to sleep in steaming quarters when their MAC counterparts were "crew-resting" in air conditioned rooms, spending half the year or more on sixty, seventy, or ninety day rotations to Europe, PACAF, and Panama, and compiling a noble list of achievements in a war. That's the mission, or at least a part of it. I haven't even mentioned responses to domestic crises. When the troops are called in they don't walk, TAC C-130s get them there. And when the fighter types are bugged out, their maintenance people don't grab their toolboxes and hop on the nearest Greyhound, TAC airlift takes care of them. Without airlift, TAC has no mission.

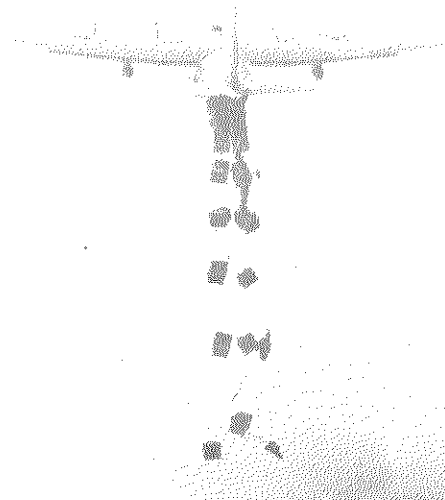
But what is an airlifter? That question still remains unanswered. OK. First of all, an airlifter is not necessarily a pilot. He can be a navigator, a flight engineer, or a loadmaster. He is part of a crew and he does his thing to enable the crew to achieve its objective. Each crewmember has his own speciality, each knows his duties and responsibilities, and each is an indispensable part of the crew.

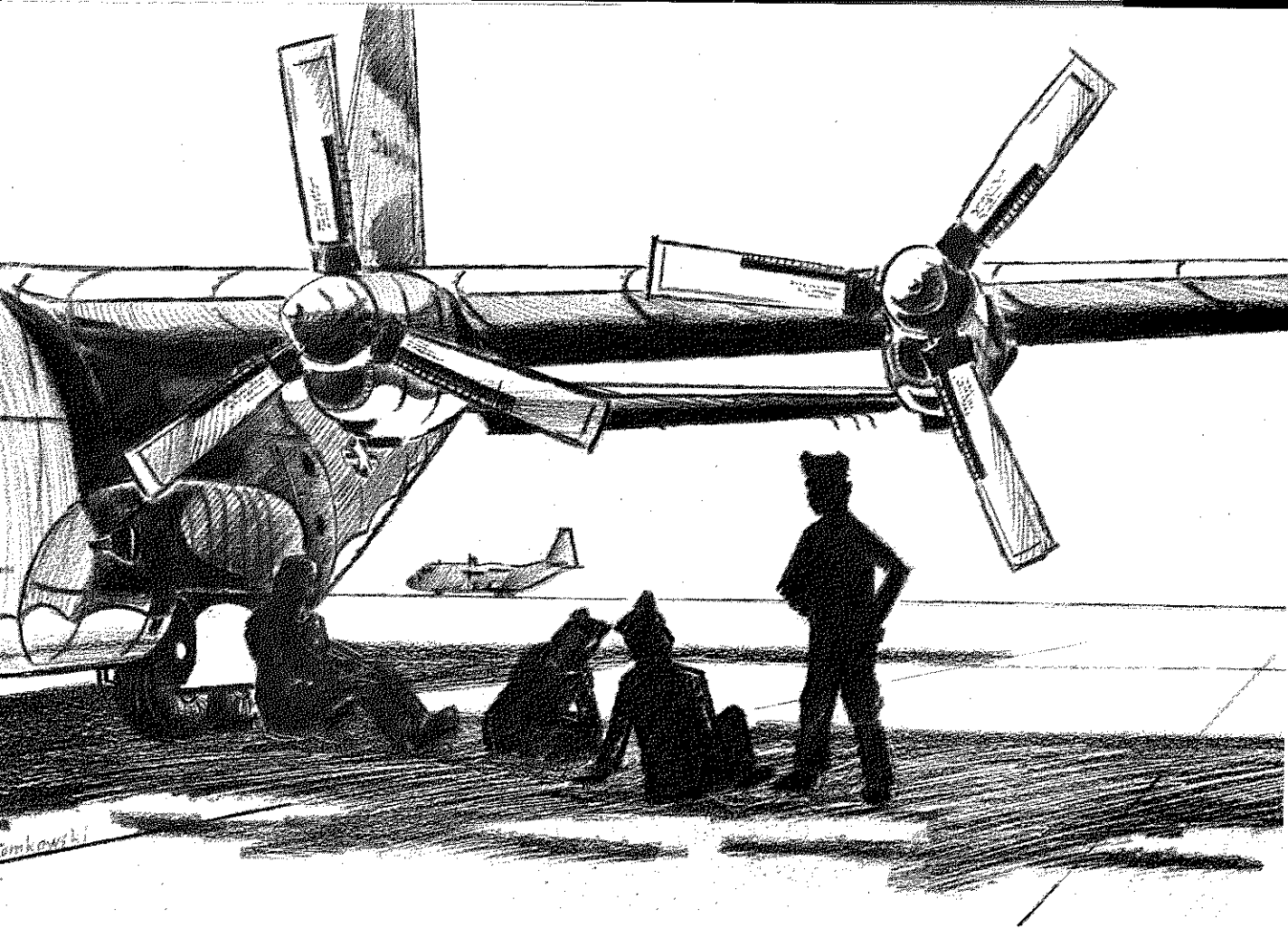
Take the loadmaster for example. When the Army wheels up behind the airplane with two or three jeeps manifested at 2500 pounds apiece but loaded down with twenty cases of small arms ammunition, two cases of C-rations, and about fifteen hundred pounds of mud hanging onto the tires, transmission, and underbody, the loadmaster is the one who looks at the Army type and says, "YGBSM." He then proceeds to estimate the weight

and you can bet your bottom dollar he won't be too far off. As a matter of fact, you do bet your bottom dollar. When the crew is faced with getting that big machine off of a very short runway, say 3000 feet, the weight had better be right or else the departure end of the runway may be to the aft while takeoff air speed is still somewhere out front. Is the loadmaster important? You bet your life he is . . . every day.

Or take the flight engineer. He's the guy who's the resident expert on the airplane and what makes it tick or what is happening to make it untick. There are hundreds of cases where the flight engineer, by virtue of his knowledge and experience, was able to pull the crew out of critical emergency situations. And that goes for in-flight as well as on the ground. Then there's the plush side of the flight engineer's job. He gets to see more sunrises than the rest of the crew. While the pilot, copilot, and navigator are cooped up in base operations worrying with the flight plan and clearance, the flight engineer is luxuriating in the open air, communicating with nature, while going through the pre-flight. Nevermind about drizzly weather, sub-zero temperatures, or steaming hot jungle climates. Nevermind when nature talks back by placing a cobra in the wheel well to greet the flight engineer as he crawls around trying to inspect the gear. It's all part of the job of the flight engineer . . . an airlifter.

Now we come to the navigator. Airlift pilots will tell you there are two useless things in the world: the first is the navigator and the second is undefined but immensely more useful. But you don't hear too many pilots saying that when they are out over the middle of the Atlantic, at night, and the winds have turned sour and the fuel plot is starting to drop below the planned line and the Equal





## AIRLIFTER

Time Point is behind the airplane. And you don't hear them saying it when it comes time to fly a low level route, figure a computed air release point, set up the computer, navigate to the drop, and plunk the troops in the smoke. Matter of fact, the only time you'll hear it is when the pilot has just lost a particularly strenuous round of Liars Dice and the navigator is collecting all the drinks. The navigator is an essential element of the airlift crew and his importance cannot be undermined (regardless of what was said in the opening sentence of this paragraph). To the core he is a TAC airlifter.

Next we find the copilot. He's the one in the right seat hiding behind the checklist with his hand on the gear handle waiting for the command that will stir him to action . . . GEAR UP! He also gets to do a lot of the dog work. Call for wheels, pick up the flight lunches, fill out the 175, paperwork, paperwork. But in flight every crew action is coordinated by the copilot through the checklist. In the right seat he trains for the skills, both as a pilot and as a manager, that will lead him to the left seat. Wishing for no evil to befall the aircraft commander, he secretly dreams of the pilot suddenly being smitten with a severe attack of the gout, at which time he can assume control of

the crew, command of the aircraft, and show the true stuff he's made of. A dreamer? Yes. A go-getter? You bet. An airlifter? You better believe it.

Now the troop in the left seat, the pilot, the aircraft commander. He's the man who pulls it all together or lets it all fall apart. He has to solve the people problems, the maintenance problems, the ops problems, and his own problems. If he's a good aircraft commander he knows what each of his people can do and he lets them do it. He knows that to try to do the work of five men is folly and will alienate the rest of the crew, to say nothing of blowing the mission. He is the director, the decision maker, and something else. What was it? Oh yeah . . . he also flies the airplane. And he does it well. He's a TAC airlifter and damn proud of it. Proud of his talents, proud of his crew, and proud of his airplane.

The crew is the hub around which the rest of the airlift function rotates. How well the mission is accomplished depends upon how each crewmember functions and how it adds to or subtracts from the crew effort. It's called crew coordination. So what is an airlifter? He's the troop who'll tell you to cram it if you try to call him anything but . . . an airlifter.