



Editors' note: During September 1944, a number of men from the 58th Bomb Wing were placed on detached service with a C-109 Provisional Tanker Group in order to haul gasoline from India to China.

**DIARY OF ARMY AIR FIELD B-2 OPERATIONS
1 September 1944 to 31 October 1944**

This cargo activity of XX Bomber Command is an afterthought and one which apparently was not originally contemplated. The support in hump tonnage which this activity provides XX Bomber Command was believed to be the responsibility of Air Transport Command. However Air Transport Command had other theater commitments and XX Bomber Command was limited to a nominal hump quota. The augmentation of the two attached Air Transport Command Squadrons was carried on by B-29 tankers and the thirty eight (38) C-46 Air Transport Command aircraft together fell far short of XX Bomber Command tactical requirements in the Chengtu area, and therefore limited the frequency of bombing raids on Japan.

Requests to Headquarters Army Air Forces for alleviation of this shortage, with the thought of increased Air Transport Command "over the hump" tonnage quotas, resulted in the modification, in the states, of some seventy (70) B-24J aircraft into "C-109" tankers. These B-24s, fully loaded, carry 4,900 gallons of gasoline, or a gross takeoff overload of almost 7,000 pounds (gross operating takeoff weight 68,000 pounds – Air Transport Command limit – 61,000). XX Bomber Command made every effort for Air Transport Command to operate and maintain these aircraft in their system; however, Headquarters Army Air Forces directed that this was the full responsibility of XX bomber Command, and with no additional personnel allocated for this new project.

XX Bomber Command had previously acquired Army Air Field B-2 and now began a construction project on this ex-British fighter base to facilitate C-109 operations in addition to the two Air Transport Command Squadrons. The personnel were singled out of various XX Bomber Command service groups and bombardment groups sent to B-2 on detached service, to run the Base, maintain the seventy (70) C-109s, and fly them over the hump – (1350 miles). The two Air Transport Command squadrons of C-46s had been operating on the base, as mobile squadrons, with limited OEL because of their mobility. The housing which existed upon the arrival of the Air Transport Command squadrons in May and June 1944 was ample at that time. This increase in personnel and the formation of a Service Group (Cargo Service Unit) and the C-109 Provisional Group in September required much additional airplane parking space, maintenance equipment, tools, transportation, housing, messing, latrine and other facilities. Flight crew personnel were withdrawn from the B-29 groups and placed on detached service at the new base. Mechanics and other maintenance personnel were a fair cross section in experience in XX Bomber Command. About 220 of the maintenance personnel were without previous training and this necessitated on the job as well as other supervised training.

Personnel pouring in to the Service Group soon totaled 39 officers and more than 460 men, some experienced, some over age in grade, and some who could be "spared". These were made available in the reorganization of two standard service groups and four bombardment groups in the XX Bomber Command. The enlisted men were not below average. The B-29 crews arrived as requested, and greatly augmented other



maintenance personnel of the service group, with the three experienced mechanics in each B-29 crew. Housing in tents, and messing, such as it was, kept pace with the influx of personnel. C-109 aircraft arrived about the first of September.

By 30 September about 30 C-109s had arrived. A production line maintenance system was being set up, along with crew briefing, personnel equipment, unit administration, base staff section, post utility expansion and so forth.

The first month of operation was experimental for the flight crews, maintenance organization, and operating procedure. Great difficulty was experienced in getting buildings for production line sections. There were practically no tools or equipment immediately available. No one experienced engineering officer was available to organize and supervise a production line set-up. Transportation was difficult. Vehicles were begged and borrowed. Equipment to operate was begged, borrowed or stolen. A total of three (3) spark plug wrenches were available for thirty (30) airplanes. No work stands, tow bars, jacks and so forth. No spare parts were on hand. The service group had no shops, no machines, and no equipment. Four C-109s were lost during the first month due to crashes. Several were damaged requiring third echelon repair. Seventeen crew members were killed.

The difficulty at the beginning was that neither the C-109 group nor the service group were officially authorized units, therefore had no Table of Organization or Organization Equipment Lists. Requisitions for equipment could not state basis of requisition, therefore none was “authorized”. The Commanding General alleviated this “authorization” bottleneck when it was brought to his personal attention.

By using maintenance personnel, prefabs and Nissons were constructed on the maintenance line. All this September operation was carried on around Corps of Engineer construction equipment and personnel who were in the process of pouring concrete for apron and taxi ways, grading, and drainage work.

Operation and maintenance troubles diminished by the beginning of the second month (October). About this time, because of C-109 crashes, four (4) pilots refused to fly the overloaded C-109s until bomb bay tank modification was completed to make them jettisonable for the reason that several crashes occurred during three (3) engine operation when fully loaded.

This project was being pushed locally as rapidly as possible, along with tank off-loading hose line modifications, but the process was slow without shops. After twenty eight (28) days of operation, one C-46 machine shop airplane arrived with limited equipment considering the scope of the modification underway. Off loading modification was necessary to speed up the turnaround time in the forward areas, which varied from two to twenty hours per airplane. One hundred twenty (120) C-109 departures were made the first month, with seventeen (17) aborts, which put one hundred and three (103) loads over the hump for a total offload of 136,576 gallons of 100 octane (quota: 115,000 gallons).



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By the middle of October, three (3) of the four pilots who refused to fly changed their minds and went over the hump. The fourth appeared to be a psychiatric case.

About the tenth of the second month of operations, water began to appear in the gasoline from the pipeline in great quantities. Eight (8) C-109 tankers ready for takeoff had to be drained entirely (4,900 gallons each). All ships were then routed to other fields for servicing. The District Engineer and XX Bomber Command Engineer worked more than a week on this difficulty. Large traps finally installed seem to be segregating the water fairly well at this writing (17 October). During the water trouble period, only one (1) C-109 was lost. Several were rerouted over the hump when the water was first discovered and all were warned by radio.

Minor difficulties experienced to date concerned: (1) The inadequate post utilities. Water could be used only during certain limited periods. The two 30 gallon pumps could not possibly supply sufficient water for a post strength of 2400 during extremely hot weather. The failure of the lights at night was the rule and not the exception. (2) The food was often uneatable. It appeared that the cooks supplied from XX Bomber Command units were of a quality that made them entirely dispensable to the unit. (3) The Special Services Office endeavored to provide movies, but often closed down in the middle of a showing because of power failure from old generators. If the power did not fail, the old projector did. (4) It seemed impossible to get the Post Engineer any equipment. No dump truck or any other transportation, except that made available from general purpose vehicles obtained by the Base through various methods. (5) No building materials available, units begged and stole from various Army activities in the general locality to satisfy their minimum requirements. This shortage exists throughout the area. (6) The slowness and inefficiency of native labor. (7) Considerable rain and very poor roads. (8) The lack of the "will to work" on the part of many personnel who were on detached service in a tough job with an unauthorized outfit away from their parent organization, where facilities were not present for their immediate comfort and operation.

During September the two Air Transport Command Squadrons failed to meet their combined quota of 800 net tons over the hump, by 72 tons. The 1st Squadron more than met its quota of 400 tons even though airplanes of that squadron carried out fifty four (54) China shuttles or miscellaneous "not planned on" extra trips. The 2nd Air Transport Squadron fell 91.42 tons short of its assigned 400 ton quota because of eighteen (18) engine changes during the month and thirty eight (38) extra China shuttles. The available pilots of this squadron averaged 115 hours each during the period. The eighteen (18) assigned aircraft flew a total of 2550 hours, or 142 plus hours per aircraft despite the eighteen (18) engine changes. The undersigned was asked to explain to higher headquarters his tonnage discrepancy. No control of the diversion of aircraft in the forward area is possible at this station. Note enclosure No.1 which indicates a combined total of ninety two (92) China shuttles during the month. This represents a loss of fifty six (56) hump trips for a total of 220 tons, which, if not lost for the above reasons, would have exceeded the established quota by 134 tons. All maintenance is performed without shelter. Rainfall for September was 10.32 inches.



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By the latter part of October, the line developed into a smooth operating maintenance set up. There was considerable concern regarding the rotation of the maintenance crews every sixty (60) days because that would thoroughly disrupt the production line system. This would affect 90% of the line personnel.

All three units of the Base have come through with excellent quota records this month. The C-109 "in commission" status reached 98% on 28 October. Seventeen (17) C-109 trips were dispatched on the record high day. The 1st Air Transport Command Squadron exceeded its hump tonnage quote by 62.1 hump tons of gasoline. The combined Base quota was exceeded by 370.8 tons, which was 185% of the prescribed quota. Of the total net "over the hump tonnage" delivered to China, 358,488 gallons of gasoline were off loaded. The Average flying time per assigned aircraft was 181 hours. The average flying time per assigned crew was 123.1 hours (per available crew: 139.5 hours).

On 26 October, this headquarters was advised that the 2nd Air Transport Command Squadron would be detached intact from this post, and would be moved and attached to India-China Division, Air Transport Command (Assam) for operational control. Likewise, the C-109 Provisional Tanker Group would be transferred to India-China Division, Air Transport Command, along with the flight and maintenance personnel. This involved thirty two (32) C-109s. The movement of both these units was completed on 1 November, except for those few aircraft not flyable which were undergoing 3rd echelon repair and which were made flyable as quickly as possible and delivered to their respective new stations. The transfer of these two units left the base with one (1) Air Transport Command Squadron.

In summarizing the activity over the two months operational period from 1 September to 31 October, it can be said that considerable progress was made in all units. The post functions progressed rapidly, morale was on an up grade, a Special Services facility was put in operation, a splendid outdoor theater was built, an officers' club was opened, the maintenance line reached a high state of efficiency, motor vehicle maintenance and control were good, the Post Exchange was enlarged, housing improved, utilities were expanded and kept pace with the influx of personnel. A line mess was built and was ready for operation when the news came that the above named units would be transferred. This meant that the bottom fell out of the whole project and the post activity was reduced to a one squadron, small temporary operation. All construction was stopped and the base awaited complete evacuation.

The organization which had been operating as a Provisional Service Group became an officially authorized and activated unit, and was designated "Cargo Service Unit" by general order dated 9 October. At the close of this period and the fold up of activities mentioned above, this unit is still without Organization Equipment List or Table of Equipment authorization.

The Adjutant General authority to activate a unit for the operation of the seventy (70) C-109 tanker aircraft was never received.

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IRISNUM= 01034288
CLASS= UNCLASSIFIED
BEG_DATE= 09-01-1944
END_DATE= 10-31-1944
MAIN= SAILOR, L. L.
TITLE= DIARY OF ARMY AIR FIELD B-2 OPERATION
CALL= 761.13-2
REEL= 0000034445
FRAME= 715
Numpages= 7
INDEXID= 05
REL_DATE= 02-01-1982
ABSTRACT= PART OF A DIARY OF ARMY AIR FIELD B-2 OPERATIONS. IT TELLS THE
STORY OF THE C-109
TANKER THAT WAS A MODIFIED B-24J (LIBERATOR) BOMBER. THIS AIRCRAFT WAS
USED TO CARRY
GASOLINE TO THE B-29'S IN CHENGTU, CHINA. THE DIARY WAS DICTATED BY
THE
COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE FIELD, COL LLOYD L. SAILOR.
ADMIN= NONE
DNOTES= DIARY.
SUBJECT= KALAIKUNDA, INDIA ARMY/0020/BOMBER COMMAND C-109 AIRCRAFT