

155th LIAISON SQUADRON

LINEAGE

Constituted 155th Liaison Squadron, 31 Dec 1943
Activated, 10 Jan 1944
Redesignated 155th Liaison Squadron (Commando), 1 May 1944
Inactivated, 15 Jan 1946
Disbanded, 8 Oct 1948

STATIONS

Aiken AAFld, SC, 10 Jan 1944
Dunnellon AAFld, FL, 12 Jun 1944
Cross City AAFld, FL, 21 Jun 1944
Drew Field, FL, 17 Aug 1944
Lakeland AAFld, FL, 22 Aug-23 Oct 1944
Kalaikunda, India, 16 Dec 1944-4 Aug 1945 (a detachment operated from various bases in
Burma, 8 Feb-19 May 1945)
Okinawa, 15 Sep 1945-15 Jan 1946

ASSIGNMENTS

III (later I) Tactical Air Division, 10 Jan 1944
2nd Air Commando Group, 1 May -1944
United States Army Forces, Pacific, 4 Aug 1945
Fifth Air Force, 15 Sep 1945
Pacific Air Command, US Army, 15 Dec 1945-15 Jan 1946

WEAPON SYSTEMS

C-64, 1944-1945
L-5, 1944-1945
L-4, 1945

ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT SERIAL NUMBERS

ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT TAIL/BASE CODES

UNIT COLORS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

Central Burma

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

None

EMBLEM

Over and through a white disc, narrow border gray, a caricatured, light green chicken hawk with yellow beak, feet, and comb, wearing a black and brown revolver in holster strapped about the waist by a white cartridge belt, a black radio head set with two red and one blue electrical flashes emanating from each ear phone, and peering through a pair of black binoculars held in tip of left wing, while perching on a two-bladed airplane propeller brown, all resting on a sphere marked with water indications light blue and land areas medium brown, with lines of latitude and longitude indicated by thin white lines. (Approved, 10 Jun 1944)

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Evacuation, reconnaissance, and light transport services for ground forces in forward areas in Burma, 8 Feb-19 May 1945; not manned, Nov 1945-15 Jan 1946.

In the spring of 1944, the 155th Liaison Squadron, based at Aiken, South Carolina, was an overstaffed organization of men and flying machines. Liaison (L) pilots, flying L-5 light planes, were undergoing training in aerial commando tactics, polishing such skills as low-level cross-country flying, short-field landings and message-retrieval from slings. The light-cargo and troop-carrier UC-64s were also being tested for extended capabilities. The 155th was one of a number of squadrons, including fighter and troop carrier, to make up the newly-activated 2nd Air Commando Group.

In April and May 1944, the nature of the air commando mission was being brought into focus in lectures by a number of visiting combat veterans and others. On May 12, the 155th first met the CO of the 2nd Air Commando Group, Colonel Arthur DeBolt. When the squadron was advised that it was to be "all volunteer," and that it was now on overseas alert, the ranks diminished to a need for several additional officers, Sergeant L-pilots and others to raise it to combat strength. It should be mentioned that liaison pilots held the rank of Staff, Technical or Master Sergeant.

Captain Jack S. Zeigler assumed command of the 155th at this point. In an aerial transfer using L-5s, UC-64s and C-47s the entire squadron, now consisting of 89 men, moved from Aiken to Dunnellon, Florida on June 11, 1944. Heavy equipment, including vehicles, were transported by rail. Within eleven days of arrival at Dunnellon, another move by air was made to Cross City AAF at Cross City, Florida.

Combat-readiness training pressed on. L-pilot Douglas I. Kaften recalls: "A one and a half hour 'Short Field Landings' entry in my log for this period could mean as many as 20-25 dragged, power on, full flap landings over a barrier. What bomber pilot could land on a wet grass field with toe brakes full on to shorten the runout, and then release the brakes just before nose-over?"

With all the related packing, unpacking and aircraft maintenance on the run, ground personnel, as well as pilots, were now totally involved in the readiness exercise. Subsequent moves were made to Lakeland AAF and Drew Field in Tampa, Florida. If combat operations were to require a mobility in squadron location, the 155th was sure doing its homework.

On June 27, during a bivouac in Jasper, Florida, a violent thunderstorm struck the area overturning three aircraft and ruining a great number of parachutes.

Tragedy struck on July 21, 1944 when L-pilot Frank Minnick was killed when he crashed his L-5 into the Gulf of Mexico off the end of the runway. Another accident occurred the following day when L-pilot John Basile suffered a broken back in a crash on takeoff.

The squadron was plagued again by its old nemesis, the weather, when a hurricane lashed across Florida on October 18. All airworthy aircraft were flown north getting as far as Charlotte, North Carolina. In Lakeland, the gasoline trailers were dispersed throughout neighboring fields and woods. Personnel were placed on evacuation alert around midnight and finally, at 5:00 a.m., were trucked to the municipal auditorium.

On October 22nd, all flying personnel went to Hunter Field, Georgia for final overseas staging, returning to Lakeland on the 26th. With the other squadrons of the 2nd Air Commando Group, the 155th proceeded by train to Los Angeles, boarding the USS Gen. John Pope on November 8. Running alone, without the aid of a convoy, arrival in Bombay, India occurred 32 days later, on December 10th. The newly formed British Fourteenth Army, commanded by Field Marshal the Viscount Slim, had, just a week before, begun its offensive in Burma, 30 miles north of Kalewa.

After a memorable three-day train ride across India (with all the comforts of a wooden box), the squadron's home base, with the other 2nd Air Commando squadrons, was established at Kalaikunda AF Base in Bengal Province, India.

On the evening of Christmas day, 1944, greetings were delivered to the 2nd Air Commando Group and to the nearby B-29 base at Salua by three Japanese Sallys. It was definitely not a message of peace as some ten men were killed and approximately 30 injured in the aerial bombardment.

For the 155th Liaison Squadron, the month of January 1945 was a period of eager anticipation and continued training. One flight was sent to central India for maneuvers with the British Special

Forces, veterans of Burma and earlier campaigns in North Africa. Another flight trained with Chinese troops in Assam, another with the British in Agra. The four L-5 flights in the squadron were designated A, B, C and D. Flight leaders for A were 1st Lt. Edgar I. Boone and L-pilot John F. Kenfield. Flight B was led by 1st Lt. John Murphy (LtCol. Ret.) and L-pilot William J. Klein, Flight C by 1st Lt. Benedict Lu-kacs and L-pilot Joseph Payne (Maj. Ret.), and Flight D by 2nd Lt. Will R. Danehower and L-pilot Cornelius Feyen.

On February 8, when Klein was assigned to duties with the 2nd Air Commando fighter squadrons at Cox's Bazar, India Klein flew a number of courier and reconnaissance missions for the 2nd ACG Intelligence Staff. The British Fourteenth Army, now in the vicinity of Mandalay, was approaching the Irrawaddy River and preparing for crossings.

The IV Corps of the Fourteenth Army, under the command of Lt. Gen. Sir Frank Messervy, having secretly separated from the Mandalay area with the help of air attacks by the 2nd Air Commando fighters on February 14. A strong bridgehead was established two days later.

Simultaneous assaults were carried out six miles south of Nyaungu at Pagan opposite Myitche, and at Pakokku 20 miles to the north. Having firmly established these bridgeheads, the Fourteenth Army was now in a strong position to carry the offensive to Rangoon.

On February 21st, the 155th Liaison Squadron Commando was committed to the support of General Messervy's IV Corps. The forward operating base in Burma for the squadron was at Pauk, just above Pakokku. The Japanese were now counterattacking and threatening the route from Pauk to Nyaungu.

Early missions with the 7th and 17th Divisions of the IV Corps consisted of reconnaissance and courier flights with some evacuation of wounded. The L-5B, with a litter behind the pilot, could carry just a single wounded soldier with each run. As for getting the wounded off the battlefield, the liaison pilots' commitment was clear and frightfully urgent.

The forward base of operations for the 155th was moved within a few days from Pauk to Myitche on the Irrawaddy River. Two of the squadron's UC-64 light cargo aircraft were used at the front during February. These were flown primarily by 2nd Lt. Francis A. Doyle (BGen. Ret.) and 2nd Lt. James R. Larson. Numerous flights were also made by the squadron's CO Major Zeigler and operations officer Capt. David W. MacMillan.

A large bird almost accounted for Doyle's UC-64 when it collided with the leading edge at altitude. The damage required a landing to be made at cruise speed. What the bird did not do to Doyle's plane, a gasoline fire eventually did total destruction. During a refueling from a 55-gallon barrel, Norman Behrends discovered water coming through the glass splice in the hose. Halting the operation to drain the tanks, gasoline had gotten on his coveralls. When the small pumping engine was re-started, a backfire ignited Behrends' coveralls, the UC-64, a jeep and two or three hundred barrels of gas which exploded. Behrends, who was a crew chief on another UC-64, suffered severe burns on his arms and chest.

The light-cargo UC-64, like the L-5, was unarmed. Its primary mission was to maintain an aerial supply line to the forward strips of the liaison L-5s and the variously-located elements of the British

and Indian troops of the Fourteenth Army. Carrying maximum load at tree-top level to avoid ever-present machine gun and artillery fire, flight operations were generally carried into and out of hastily-constructed strips with ever-present bomb craters. While the UC-64 did not have the short-field landing and takeoff capabilities of the L-5, it was capable of landing 1,000 lbs. of cargo inside 1,000 feet. A shortage of gasoline prevented the squadron from operating in full force at this time.

The IV Corps overcame the Japanese resistance at the Irrawaddy bridgeheads and was now advancing toward Meiktila, and Japanese supply bases, ammunition dumps, airstrips and railroad and roads leading to Rangoon. Meanwhile, during this last week of February 1945, the XXXIII Corps of the Fourteenth Army crossed the Irrawaddy 80 miles to the north, at Nga-zun, thereby threatening Mandalay. This assault was coordinated with the IV Corps drive on Meiktila and was intended to draw the Japanese to the Mandalay front where they would hopefully underestimate the strength of the IV Corps.

While the Japanese were reacting to the threat against Mandalay, the spearhead of the IV Corps overran Taungtha, and then Mahlaing 20 miles from Meiktila. Field Marshal Slim's strategy of surprise had worked. The Japanese counter-offensive under Gen. Kimura, was aimed at Mandalay. On February 28, the 255th Indian Tank Brigade of the IV Corps, with the infantry following, pressed into Meiktila against a garrison of some 14,000 Japanese troops.

While the Operations and Engineering Sections of the 155th Liaison Squadron were undergoing maddening Group technical inspections at the rear base at Kalaikunda, India, the squadron was at full-readiness for its commitment to the IV Corps. Assignments of additional aircraft and personnel to the front were now moving rapidly.

Meiktila was captured on March 3d and the main airfield was operating by the 5th.

The 155th operations, at this time, were carried out from Myitche. As the IV Corps thrust to Meiktila was direct and on a somewhat narrow path along the railway between Taungtha and Meiktila, Japanese resistance continued all along this route behind the spearhead. A surprise Japanese air attack was carried out against the airstrip at Sinthe, 20 miles from Myitche, on March 4, with the attackers boldly entering the regular traffic pattern. Two British Spitfires were destroyed and 14 Hurricanes were damaged on the ground with the enemy losing three aircraft. A number of 155th L-5s had left the Sinthe airstrip before the raid, with Raynak and Payne returning to Myitche and landing on the unlighted strip after dark.

Numerous missions of reconnaissance, artillery spotting, evacuation of wounded and supply were being flown by the 155th at this time in the area of Pauk, Sinthe, Myitche, Onwan, Pakokku, Nyaungu and Letse, route of the 28th East African Brigade of the IV Corps.

The strategic importance of Meiktila and the threat its loss imposed on all of the Japanese forces in Burma made clear the necessity of a counter-offensive by the Japanese. Lieutenant-General Honda was given the task of re-taking Meiktila. Troops, now under his command, converged on Meiktila from all directions. As the Japanese came in from different locations, including the Mandalay front, so too did the 17th Division of the IV Corps strike out to meet them. The 17th was going in all directions to prevent Honda's troops from reaching Meiktila and so the firefights were everywhere,

as were the wounded. As one of the L-pilots recorded, in a then-prohibited diary, "Zeigler's Beavers now saving lots of lives."

At about 7:00 p.m. on March 12, the sky over Kalaikunda, India suddenly turned dark and was punctuated with occasional lightning flashes. Within ten minutes, severe rain and winds tore the thatched roofs from the bashas, collapsed buildings and destroyed all tents while incredibly-large hailstones pummeled the base destroying or severely damaging all aircraft on the field. While nine lives were lost in this storm, with many injured, the men of the 155th miraculously escaped without physical harm.

The remainder of March was to see the siege of Meiktila, and while the 155th Liaison Squadron Commando was to play a major role. Daily squadron reports at this time had the L-5s everywhere on the heels of the divisions and at the bridgeheads of the IV Corps: "Kamyé, March 4 battle rages, many tanks"; "Ywatha, March 17, artillery spotting. Japanese fail to open up with their heavy guns, obviously aware of the 'eyes' of the L-5"; "March 18, direct hit large gun"; "March 19, Letse under fire"; "Kinmogen, March 22, eight direct hits on a monastery, suspect Japanese using."

On March 16, L-pilot Kirk Hoover smashed his heavily loaded L-5 into a stone pagoda on takeoff at Myitche. The aircraft was completely destroyed and although Hoover was hospitalized for injuries suffered in the crash, he fully recovered.

During the Battle for Meiktila, when the only planes able to land were our L-5s, one of the 155th L Sqdn's planes was hit by ground fire and the pilot made an emergency landing. Damaged by the ground fire were the prop, tire and wing and immediate repairs were needed. Sgt. "Swede" Johnson, our dope and fabric man, and I were flown to the emergency field and began to repair the L-5. It was an easy job to replace the prop and tire but the end of the wing was crushed so we got permission from the pilot and cut off the end of the wing and covered the exposed end with dope and fabric. The normal drying time for the dope used was two hours, but we allowed only 10 minutes between coats of dope as we did not know how close the Jap ground troops were to the emergency field. I forgot the name of the pilot but he successfully flew the L-5 from the emergency field - - "A Gutsy Fellow.

By mid-March, the enemy had advanced to the edge of the airstrip at Meiktila bringing it under intense artillery fire. Large aircraft were now unable to fly in or out. Supplies diminished and the wounded could not be evacuated. It was then that the 155th Liaison Squadron L-5s began their Job at Meiktila, they were the first of the light-planes to land on the strip.

While the field at Meiktila was completely surrounded, Sherman tanks on the perimeter were able to give some protection to the squadron's L-5s which were now carrying on their mission. For a period of about ten days, urgent medical supplies and reinforcements were flown in and wounded were flown out. A number of Japanese prisoners were flown out for interrogation.

L-pilot Douglas Kaften recalls, "It seemed as if each time an L-5 approached, that was the signal for a couple of knee mortar rounds." Field Marshal Slim's description of this ticklish type of flying says it best: "Only those who have landed in such circumstances can realize how quickly it is possible to empty an aeroplane of passengers." Finding refuge in a slit trench with Brigadier-General John Masters, his passenger, Kaften and Masters watched for about two hours as the tanks routed out the

enemy's mortar locations.

The L-pilots were now flying as much as eight and nine hours a day; landing and taking off from five or six different locations. Typical flight record extracts on consecutive days during this period show 7:15 (hrs:min.), 5:40, 8:40, 7:55, 4:55, 9:20. Flying conditions were always variable. Missions were often flown at tree-top level for hours at a time to avoid detection and anti-aircraft fire. Contact navigation is one thing when visual points are sighted from a reasonable altitude allowing time to check one's map. Contact navigation at tree-top level permits no time for a re-check.

The pilots could not afford even the tiniest margins of error in navigation as they were more often than not over enemy-held territory. Bullet holes from small arms fire in wings and fuselage were becoming commonplace so it became the pilots' choice - fly higher and gamble with the anti-aircraft guns or stay on the deck.

The Japanese were driven from Meiktila by the end of March. The Air Evacuation Report for the month showed a total of 1,201 wounded evacuated. No less remarkable was the number of other missions flown, such as reconnaissance, courier, artillery spotting and supply.

During the siege of Meiktila, the Japanese had taken a prominent position near Taungtha, where the 17th Division had driven through on the way to Meiktila, thereby closing the road to Meiktila. Given the urgency of the situation, the IV Corps struck to open the road, and so the battle raged between Taungtha, Myingyan, 20 miles to the north and Kamyne, 10 miles to the west. The L-5s of the 155th supported this offensive.

Maintenance and repair, under the direction of 1st Lt. Paul H. Lenz, was done at the forward operations bases such as Myitche. Occasionally, the mechanics were flown to some remote area where a plane had been disabled in order to repair, or, if destruction was necessary, to salvage all usable parts. Lenz remembers flying to one such location with Elwood "Dope & Fabric" Johnson for the repair of a damaged wing tip. The result was that the end of the wing was sawed off and quickly patched. The plane was flown out and the drying time for the coats of dope was left to the airstream in flight!

The efficiency and bravery of the Gurkhas assigned to guard the various strips was admired and appreciated by all air and ground personnel. Salvatore "Monty" Montorio will always remember completing a repair job at dusk, jumping backwards off the wheel into a vise grip of one of the Gurkhas. It was a time when Japanese infiltration was heavy. This Gurkha was taking no chances on who the "mechanic" might be.

L-pilot Raymond McGinty, descending in tight circles after he and his passenger, Major-General G. C. Evans, Commander of the 7th Indian Division, observed the shelling of Japanese in caves of the Chin Hills, approached what appeared to be an abandoned landing strip along a river. The sudden appearance of men standing six to eight feet apart, completely surrounding the strip, was a startling surprise to both before they recognized the ever-protecting Gurkhas.

Though hampered by intense pre-monsoon heat, winds and storms, the 155th continued to aid the swiftly moving offensive in Burma. Forward operations were still being carried on from Myitche

which was quickly being left behind and almost out of effective, efficient range of the L-5s because of the accelerating pace of the British Fourteenth Army's drive. On April 8, the squadron was joined by the 156th Liaison Squadron which had been delayed by extensive equipment losses in the Kalaikunda storm.

In the urgency to take Rangoon before the monsoon, normally expected by mid-May, the Fourteenth Army could not pause for mopping-up operations. Therefore, as the army advanced southward in its narrow path, much fighting was still to occur behind the advance.

Actually, the offensive was carried on through two narrow lines of advance with the IV Corps assigned to follow the Mandalay-Rangoon railroad out of Meiktila and the XXXIII Corps the Irrawaddy River.

Continuing its slashing drive toward Rangoon, the 20th Division of the XXXIII Corps struck south of Meiktila overrunning Taungdwingyi on April 14. This offensive, now sweeping toward the Irrawaddy, continued to the northwest, west and southwest joining with the 7th Indian Division which was advancing down the river. The L-5s, during April, were flying into and out of such newly-captured and half-captured locations along the Irrawaddy as Seikpyu, Chauk, Salin, Yenangyaung, Magwe and Longyi, penetrating as far south as Prome.

Originally assigned to the IV Corps of the British Fourteenth Army, the 155th Liaison Squadron was now supporting the XXXIII Corps in the action along the Irrawaddy.

The Japanese were now withdrawing from the Arakan, seeking escape routes across the Irrawaddy to the east. Hard fighting continued at numerous attempted bridgeheads along the river as the L-5s continued reconnaissance, supply and the evacuation of wounded.

Lieutenant-General Sakurai Seizo was commanding the Japanese Twenty-eighth Army in charge of the defense of the Irrawaddy Valley. Two of the 155th L-5s, flown by Raymond McGinty and Douglas Kaften set off on a "bombing mission" over Sakurai's headquarters. The "bombs" were four large boxes containing food, medical supplies and ammunition, two to each plane. The purpose of the flight was to attract the attention of the Japanese, then drop the boxes hoping to fool the Japanese into thinking there was some sizable patrol activity in the area.

The ploy probably worked and the pilots accepted the risk it involved. Of greater concern to them was the fact that the boxes were large, heavy and square, almost causing a stall on take-off. To add to Kaften's chagrin, one of the boxes under his wings did not release but hung up by one of its two clamps. Efforts to shake it loose were to no avail. His return flight was a perpetual severe skid and an extremely rough landing. While taxiing to the line, the box fell off!

Versatility and the L-5 were synonymous. With a K-20 camera clamped to the open window on the left side, the pilot would now do photo missions. More spectacular, but less successful, was the attempt to mount rocket launchers under the wings. The rockets were fired, but so was the fabric of the L-5! It could not be said that the 155th lacked imagination. The L-5 and UC-64 were considered combat aircraft, although they were unarmed except for a .45 caliber pistol carried by the pilot.

As the Fourteenth Army pushed on, some positions were taken with such haste that there was not sufficient time to construct suitable airstrips. For the most part, landings and takeoffs were made from unprepared fields and clearings. One spectacular instance was the strip at Yan which measured only 125 feet long.

During the Japanese retreat, small patrols penetrating behind Japanese positions would secure an area and scratch out a piece of level ground, often not very large - or very level. The L-5s would then fly in reinforcements and bring out the wounded.

The nature of the narrow corridors of advance made by the Fourteenth Army usually required flights and even approaches to be made over the heads of the Japanese. Occasionally, a spiral approach from directly over the strip was the safest way. If the strip itself was a challenge, it simply compounded matters.

One very memorable strip required the pilots to call upon their most finely-honed skills in handling an airplane. While the location of this strip cannot be recalled, it will always be remembered. Located on the side of a steep hill, L-pilot John Newbern (LtCol. Ret.) recalls that it could only be approached from one end (to avoid the Japanese) and the takeoff made back in the opposite direction. Never mind wind direction. Because of the steepness of the hill, and with the strip following the contour of the hill, takeoffs curved to the right when landing and to the left when taking off. The strip was narrow, dusty, soft and not very long. A pancake-shaped area at the end allowed for a hard-rudder ground loop if landing speed could not be slowed.

On April 28, the IV Corps armored spearhead reached Pegu, just 40 miles from Rangoon. Meanwhile, the Japanese were counterattacking Toungoo, 120 miles behind the advance. Such was the nature of the war in central and southern Burma. The IV Corps had driven a path 300 miles long and only two miles wide from Meiktila to Rangoon. The XXXIII Corps advance from Meiktila covered some 200 miles over a somewhat wider corridor. The Japanese fought valiantly to recover lost territory, particularly the strategic points, and to assist the escape of their various scattered forces. The pilots of the 155th were almost constantly over the Japanese as a result. Intelligence data on the location of the enemy was ever-changing, and a morning briefing could not ever be held as certain by mid-day.

During the month of April, the L-5s of the 155th Liaison Squadron Commando evacuated 1,100 wounded in Burma bringing a 50-day total to 2,311. During these 50 days, 162,357 lbs. of cargo was flown to front line positions. The statistics given are remarkable when one considers that the evacuation of wounded could only be done one at a time. As for the cargo, the L-5 is a two-place aircraft with a 185 hp engine. While the squadron had four flights of eight L-5s each, they were utilized for reconnaissance, courier and various other missions as well. The light-cargo UC-64, of which the squadron had four, carried 118,600 lbs. of cargo during this same period. The UC-64s, flown by Doyle and Larson, 1st Lt. Morris R. Pilcher, 1st Lt. Wallace E. Gage and F/O Robert G. Reeths, hauled in the bulk. The L-5s made distribution in small pieces.

With a coordinated assault by land, air and sea, Rangoon was entered on May 3, 1945. The war in Burma had not ended as the Japanese were still scattered from Mandalay to Rangoon.

By the end of the first week in May the battle line, if it could be so-defined, ran somewhat as follows: Along the Arakan from Sandoway on the way on the Bay of Bengal north to a point west of Minbu, then east thru Magwe to the Mandalay-Rangoon railroad, with the exceptions of the great drives of the XXXIII Corps along the Irrawaddy from Magwe to a point 32 miles from Rangoon, and of the IV Corps along the railroad into Rangoon.

This widespread zone of operations necessitated moving the 155th Liaison Squadron's position from Myitche to Magwe. This move was done on the 7th and 8th of May. This was a point of interest, for the disaster which sealed the fate of Burma occurred at Magwe airfield on March 21, 1942 when the Japanese, in an air attack, destroyed Burwing, the mixed force of RAF Blenheims, Hurricanes and P-40s of the AVG, leaving the Allies without any air support. It was from Magwe that the night bombing attacks against Calcutta were carried out.

The accelerated drives against the Japanese during May greatly increased the artillery adjustment missions flown by the 155th L-5s. These flights were often made ten to 20 or more miles behind the Japanese lines, circling over gun positions while directing artillery fire. Twenty-eight such missions were flown between the 10th and 18th. During this same period, 504 reconnaissance missions were flown and 333 wounded were evacuated.

Casualties were being flown from Prome to Allanmyo and Magwe. One casual documented notation for May 14 reads: "Flew Schroepfer (mechanic) to scene of Robinette's crash in Tag then shuttled to and from Allenmyo with casualties, also parts of the wrecked aircraft. Dust was terrible during the evening." All in a day's work!

Sakurai's 28th Army, meanwhile, had established a bridgehead at Kama, 20 miles above Prome and were attempting to escape into the Pegu Yoma. The casualties continued. Suddenly, on May 19, the 155th detachment of aircraft and personnel at Magwe were withdrawn to the home base at Kalaikunda.

On June 6, the squadron was re-requested to transfer four L-pilots and eight L-5Bs to Headquarters, 10th Air Force. Transferred were Joseph Ruggiero, John Conner, Howard Forsell and William Knight (Maj. Ret.) who were, in turn, assigned to the 71st Liaison Squadron in Parodova, India.

One letter home, dated June 7, 1945, told of strong winds creating a heavy dust storm. "Then the rains came. The dust was so thick that the initial downpour was a mud storm. It rained mud!"

The outstanding event for the month, for the 155th, was the flight of ten of the squadron's L-5Bs over the Hump to China. While the war in Burma was not over, the liaison planes, with their litters for evacuating the wounded and their reputation for doing a multitude of vital jobs, were needed in China.

Crossing the Hump during the monsoons in June was a difficult flight for the large air transports. An L-5, with a 185 hp engine, was a mouse daring to run through the alley. The flight, which left Kalaikunda at dawn on June 14, was led by 1st Lt. Benedict Lukacs. L-pilots transferring to the 14th Air Force in China were Joseph Payne, Harry Donaldson, Lee East, Cornelius Feyen and Robert McGovern. The additional pilots who would ferry, but remain with the 155th, were John Kenfield,

William Klein, John Raynak and William Oldaker.

After 20 minutes in the air, the flight had to drop to the deck. "Deck flying" at tree-top level was an old standby for these liaison pilots who could not depend on the few instruments they had for flying "blind." With a stop at Ondal for fuel, the flight reached Lalmanir Hat for their first stop-over.

The morning of the 15th found conditions as bad as the previous day. They were unable to take off until 3:30 that afternoon but managed to reach Tezpur, India where they spent the second night.

The third day permitted just one hour and 45 minutes flying. Until this point, except for bad weather conditions, the flight had encountered no serious trouble. However, during the next lap of the journey, which began immediately after dinner, McGovern's ship began sputtering. This was cause for great concern for the last remaining barrier between them and Myitkyina, their next planned stop, were mountains with elevations of 7,500-8,000 feet. Thin air at such altitudes is not hospitable to an L-5 with a laboring, failing engine, but somehow McGovern was able to clear the range. At Myitkyina, the 155th pilots met the flights of the other Liaison Squadrons of the 2nd Air Commando Group which were making the same trip.

From Myitkyina, the entire group of 30 L-5s departed together but continued in separate flights as it was easier keeping fewer planes together. When the 155th flight covered about 150 miles on the way to Paoshan, they were suddenly engulfed in a big storm and were separated. Seven of the ten L-5s returned to Myitkyina. Oldaker, Raynak and East did not. The Jungle Air Rescue Squadron at Myitkyina began an immediate search for the three missing planes.

There was still no word on the missing L-5s the following morning so the flight continued on its way, this time attempting to reach Bhamo. Once again, bad weather forced the group back to Myitkyina. The next day, the flight was able to reach Bhamo, a one-hour trip, and was once again grounded by extreme weather conditions.

On the morning of the 21st, the flight reached Mangshih, fighting a storm all the way, then continued on to Paoshan. On the 22nd, the hazardous trip to Kunming, China was completed with one stop at Yunnanyi. Upon their arrival in Kunming, the group discovered that Raynak and Oldaker had already arrived. When they became separated, they managed to locate an emergency landing strip. With no damage done, they were able to reach Kunming without further incident. East was still unheard from.

In his last radio calls, East was heard to say that he was out of control and would attempt to bail out. Regaining some control, he did crash sustaining minor injuries. Extricating himself from the wrecked L-5, he walked about 50 miles before he was found by some Chinese engineers. On the 24th of June, six additional L-5Bs of the 155th were assigned to other squadrons.

L-pilot Walter "Pappy" Guire, the first of the "eligibles," was sent home, Second Lt. Will R. Danehower was transferred to the 1st Air Commando Group, and Operations Officer Capt. David W. MacMillan was assigned to a twin-engine fighter squadron. The total strength of the squadron on June 30 was 12 officers and 71 enlisted men.

Warning and Movement Orders were received in July. On August 4th, a truck convoy carried the squadron to a waiting train at Salua Army Air Field. Waiting at the Port of Calcutta the following morning was a Hooghly River barge for the final transfer to a troop transport, the USS General E. T. Collins. Departure, for redeployment to the Pacific Zone of Operations, was on August 6th. After several sweltering days, marked with extreme delay because of a low river tide, the Bay of Bengal was reached.

News of the Japanese peace offers, the atom bombs and ultimate surrender was reached aboard the troopship. The impending invasion of the Japanese homeland was not to be. It was a moment of great personal thanksgiving.

The first scheduled port was at Colombo, Ceylon, for fuel, after which the ship continued on to Fremantle, Australia where all were given one-day's shore leave. A shuttle train made it possible to visit the city of Perth just a few miles away.

With the assignment of various personnel into the squadron, strength had grown to 16 officers and 80 enlisted men as of August 31, 1945.

The troopship continued around Australia, through the Tasman, Coral and Bismarck Seas, with further stops at Hollandia, New Guinea and Ormoc Bay, Leyte and San Fernando, Luzon, in the Philippines, then onto Okinawa.

With no harbor facilities, disembarkation was made by landing craft. This was during the afternoon of September 19th at Hagushi Beach, scene of the initial landings during the invasion of Okinawa.

A furious storm struck the island during the night. By noon of the following day it had become a full-blown typhoon. The squadron, still huddled on the beach, was then transported by truck to an AAF transient camp near Yontan Airfield. This was to be the last official location of the 155th Liaison Squadron Commando.

The squadron was assigned to the Fifth Air Force per General Orders #1930, Far Eastern Air Forces; the immediate higher echelon was the V Bomber Command.

The point system and other criteria for discharge or return to the United States was rapidly depleting the squadron, necessitating a number of organizational changes. First Lt. Wallace E. Gage replaced Major Zeigler as Commanding Officer, 1st Lt. Louis Badat became Adjutant and 1st Lt. Morris R. Pilcher was now Operations Officer. Squadron strength on September 30th consisted of 13 officers and 66 enlisted men.

The 155th Liaison Squadron Commando was inactivated on Okinawa. Remaining personnel were assigned to other organizations, the majority flown to Japan for assignment with the 157th Liaison Squadron in Tokyo.

The 155th did its homework well, and they had proudly passed the tests. The parachute packer, the pilot, the clerk, the welder, the mechanic - all straight As. But, the statistics belong to the pilots. During the March 11 to May 19, 1945 period of combat operations, missions were flown for a total

of over 7,023 hours, 2,869 casualties were evacuated from front-line positions and over 200 tons of cargo were carried to a hundred vital locations.

440720	L-5	42-98486	KCRGC	Minnick, Franklin L, Jr	In water off Horseshoe Point, FL
440722	L-5	42-98210	TOAEF	Basile, John A	Cross City AAF, Cross City, FL
450316	L-5B	44-16841	TOA	Hoover, Kirk H	Myitche
440224	L-5	42-14873	MAC	Krauss, Leon	5 Mi W Godman Field, Louisville, KY
440226	L-5	42-98486	FLEF	Bielich, Michael	2 Mi N Ellijay, GA
440303	L-5	42-14982	LAC	Welley, George A	Aux Field, Camp Campbell, KY
440309	L-5	42-15042	TACGC	Littleton, Felman A	William Northern Field, Tullahoma, TN
440310	L-5	42-98176	LACGL	Foehrenbach, Herbert R	Aiken AAF, Aiken, SC
440421	L-5	42-98477	FLoG	Ferry, Richard R	Cleveland-Toledo Airway, OH
440503	L-5	42-98492	LACMF	Evans, Campbell K	Aikens AAF, SC
440514	L-5	42-15043	LACW	Ruggiero, Joseph F	Aikens Muni Airport, SC
440527	L-5	42-98485	MACO	Smith, Gordon A	Vicinity of Graniteville, SC

Air Force Order of Battle

Created: 7 Mar 2012

Updated:

Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.

Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.