

160th LIAISON SQUADRON

LINEAGE

160th Liaison Squadron constituted, 23 Feb 1944
Activated, 1 Apr 1944
Redesignated 160th Liaison Squadron (Commando), 1 May 1944
Redesignated 160th Liaison Squadron, 25 Nov 1945
Inactivated, 20 May 1946

STATIONS

Brownwood AAFld, TX, 1 Apr 1944
Statesboro AAFld, GA, 31 May 1944
Cross City AAFM, FL, 19 Aug 1944
Drew Field, FL, 6-26 Oct 1944
Leyte, 1 Dec 1944
Calasio, Luzon, 31 Jan 1944 (detachment operated from Mindoro, Feb-May 1945)
Mabalacat, Luzon, 30 Apr 1945
Ie Shima, 15 Aug 1945
Seoul, Korea, 22 Sep 1945-20 May 1946

ASSIGNMENTS

II Tactical Air Division, 1 Apr 1944
I Tactical Air Division, 18 Apr 1944
3rd Air Commando Group, 1 May 1944
308th Bombardment Wing, 25 Mar-20 May 1946

ATTACHMENTS

5th Air Liaison Group [Prov], May-Sep 1945
308th Bombardment Wing, c. 22 Sep 1945-25 Mar 1946

WEAPON SYSTEMS

L-5, 1944-1946
UC-64, 1944-1946

ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT SERIAL NUMBERS

ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT TAIL/BASE CODES

UNIT COLORS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

Leyte

Luzon

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Philippine Presidential Unit Citation

EMBLEM

None

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Evacuation, supply, and courier missions to support ground forces in forward areas of Southwest Pacific, Feb-Jul 1945

In the period from January, when the Philippines campaign was at its height, through June, the Light plane section - consisting of the 157th, 159th, and 160th Liaison Squadrons, Commando and the 341st Airdrome Squadron - evacuated more than 20,000 doughboys from the front lines on Luzon and other Philippine Islands. To do this they had to carry an average of 110 wounded men daily in their single-passenger "kites".

The three Liaison Squadrons were an integral part of the 3rd Air Commando Group designed to do numerous tasks that were not practical for the Fighter or Troop Carrier Squadrons. Working alone rather than in a flight or group the pilot and his light plane engaged in removing the sick and wounded from the Battle Zone, supplying ground troops who were cut off or encircled with much needed food and ammunition, carrying secret messages, transporting key personnel to areas where needed and spotting enemy troop locations and movements which were not detectable from larger and faster aircraft.

The Liaison aircraft were ideally suited for the type of operation carried on in the Pacific Theater, where island hopping advanced the War ever closer to the Japanese homeland. This left behind pockets of enemy troops cut off and left to starve. As a result there was an ever increasing need to maintain contact between the areas taken by friendly troops. This task was ideally suited to the light aircraft available on a moment's notice and able to take off and land any place where

a smooth area could be found. The light plane could often provide transportation where surface, water or other air transportation was out of the question.

The Liaison Pilots performed in a fearless manner, yet did not for the most part receive recognition commensurate with their many successful missions. The Newsmen generally preferred the exploits of the Fighters and Bombers and usually did not recognize the Liaison Pilots for the excellent work they were doing. This was partly due to the fact that the Liaison Pilots did not rain destruction on the enemy, record numerous kills nor work in large groups. Working alone is a hazardous situation, and the accomplishment of a successful mission was often not reported as significant or the only information available was swallowed up by the vast ocean or completely hidden by the unforgiving jungle. It is also very difficult to give a full account of the activity of a unit of Liaison aircraft since they operated alone and to report all of the events would have been an impossible task.

The Liaison Pilots were a unique group who numbered only about 1200 in the entire Army Air Force. They flew the L-5 Stinson Aircraft for the most part and except for the flight leaders and commanding officers they were enlisted men. After their completion of their training and graduation, they were rated as S/Sgt. They were required to be qualified as pilots prior to becoming an L-Pilot and they came from civilian pilots, washed out cadets, RAF and RCAF pilots who returned to the States to serve their country.

Their training involved techniques in short field take-offs and landings from every conceivable place such as golf courses, roads and trails, beaches, rice paddies or any place with enough clearing to get airborne. They learned to fly low, to follow ground contours and to become as inconspicuous as possible. These planes had no protection other than their ability to maneuver at low speeds and to be nearly invisible against the terrain.

As with the Air Commandos each unit went through a rigid period of selection so that the men finally assigned were the best available. From May to October each Unit followed a rigorous training schedule preparing them for the demands of combat.

In October the Liaison units reported to Drew Field, Tampa, Florida for final processing for overseas duty and on 7 Nov 44 the Unit boarded the General Hersey at San Francisco destined for the South Pacific. After many days at sea and several stops along the way the Liaison Squadrons arrived on the island of Leyte, Philippines 30 Nov 44 and into the combat zone.

The plane cleared a cliff by a few dozen feet, with a cloud directly above, then dropped into a narrow canyon, flying well below the tops of the bordering cliffs and only a couple of hundred feet from either wall. The canyon widened for a lake but beyond it the jungle closed in solidly again in a series of knife-edge ravines. No sign of any movement anywhere. Yet this was the center of an area where patrols that morning had reported some 2000 Japanese, remnants of the defending armies of Leyte now trying to make their way to the northwestern coast. These troops were retreating slowly in good order and with enough weapons, but in such terrible physical condition that they had resorted to cannibalism.

An L-5 is itself an embarrassing airplane. Nobody knows exactly what to call it. It looks enough like a Cub plane to be mistaken for one regularly, but it has 165 horsepower, needs more landing room than a Cub and serves an entirely different function. Built as an Army model by various manufacturers, it just doesn't fit anywhere. Neither do the aerial sergeants-not quite officers, not quite ordinary enlisted men- who fly it from fields never intended for it, over terrain never intended to be crossed on missions the designers never dreamed about.

Their chances are slim. They draw flight pay and are exempt from normal enlisted men's chores. But they don't have those lovely gold bars - and the hardwood ones at which they could be resting between flights if they were officers. If they have special privileges such as not saluting much of anybody, it is because nearly every officer around any airport you can pick sooner or later wants a ride in an L-5 - to see a girl on the other side of the mountain, to meet his brother fifty miles down the line or to take a thirty-five minute flight which will save him an all day, 150 mile jeep ride over backbreaking roads. Those taxi trips keep the L-5s busy between operations, but the sergeants have something to say about who gets them, and so everybody is pretty nice to the sergeants.

The sergeants practically never get any mail, which is misdirected as a matter of course by postal clerks who are convinced that liaison squadrons must be (a) attached to the troop-carrying groups, or (b) part of some artillery unit. They take what quarters are left around an airfield after the Bomber and Fighter pilots are housed, and they eat where they can, seldom having a mess of their own. Operationally, they remain sturdy independents. Two days after flying with Whiley Pease, I tried to find their headquarters. A young man behind the operations desk at Tacloban field looked up owlishly and said, "Oh them? Well, I'll tell you. They're all crazy. They don't have any headquarters. They just fly out of holes once in a while - crossing the strip, about half the time - and you can't never find the holes. They got no parking space and they don't pay any attention to anybody. Last night, so help me, one of them tried to bluff a C-54 out of the landing circle, and got away with it. Made that big guy pull up and come around again. They ought to be shot, the whole bunch. I don't think they're even our Allies."

On 4 Nov 44 the 160th Liaison Squadron was transported to the San Francisco harbor and loaded on the General Hersey, a troop ship, headed for the south Pacific. The destination was still unknown except that it was going to be a warm climate indicated by the clothing that was issued.

At sea the orders were opened and it was learned that the 160th was headed for the island of Leyte in the Philippines. Since the General Hersey was not in a convoy she zigzagged all the way to New Guinea where the casual troops were unloaded. Since there was a constant threat from submarines a small convoy accompanied the Hersey the rest of the way to Leyte. 26 days after leaving San Francisco, the 160th Squadron unloaded on the beach of Leyte 1 Dec 44.

Because there was only one man in the area that knew that the 160th was coming, it resulted in spending several days on the beach without proper equipment. Men slept under the stars, on the ground and ate any place that food could be found. Much of the time it was "C" and "K" rations. Without transportation it was difficult to find anyone who could help the Unit out of its dilemma.

Finally the 160th was assigned an area where tents were put up and everyone began looking forward to the mission in the Philippines.

Shortly after arriving on Leyte the island was secured and little flying was required of the pilots the campaign of the island of Luzon had gotten underway and the 160th soon moved to the big island by L.S.T.

Terer was a large concentration of Japanese on Luzon and much fighting was taking place. The Squadron finally located near Clark Field and began their first real combat duty. The pilots were constantly called on to evacuate the wounded from the front lines, courier service, taxi service for military personnel, observing and directing artillery fire by the Army and Navy and pinpointing some of the bombing attacks by the Air Corps. Several of the pilots and a few airplane mechanics were put on detached service or temporary duty with ground forces so they could assist them in various ways. Those with whom these men worked were quite complimentary of the skill and talent demonstrated by the pilots.

When the enemy was defeated on the island of Luzon, the 160th along with the Fighter Squadrons and Troop Carrier Squadron moved to the island of Ie Shima. This was the staging area for the invasion of Japan. The ground echelon moved by LST and while still in the harbor of Okinawa the Bomb was dropped on Japan. This appeared to be the end of the war with Japan. The next day the 160th landed on Ie Shima where they remained until peace was assured.

When the 160th ground echelon left the Philippines the air echelon with all of the pilots remained on Luzon. An effort was made to have the enlisted pilots fly the L-5s to Ie Shima, a great distance and all over water. Since they had enough points to go home and after considering risks involved, they decided to go home. This caused some problems for the Commanding Officer but after an explanation to higher authorities, everything was worked out and the officers later joined the rest of the squadron on Ie Shima.

While on Ie Shima the Squadron had the privilege of seeing the Japanese peace envoy make their first landing on American held real estate on their way to Gen. McArthur's headquarters in Manila. The envoy came in a two white Betty bombers with green crosses painted on each side. A flight of P-38s met them in the air and provided an escort for their first landing on American held soil. When the short Japanese Officers unloaded they looked very apprehensive and unsure of what to expect. They were quickly transferred to a waiting C-54 for the remainder of their flight.

With the war over the remainder of the 160th moved to Korea where they were attached to the 308th Bomb Wing. (September 1945)

There was little activity in Korea during the next few months except to survive the winter weather. By the end of 1945 most of the Squadron personnel had enough points to go home and processing began for return to the USA. Some remained until early 1946 but for the most that was the end of the 160th Liaison Squadron.

In late 1945 and early 1946 new Army of Occupation troops began to replace the rotating original personnel. The army's 24th Corps was the occupation unit of Korea and as it began to organize for occupation duty, the 160th became an important part of Korea's occupation. Much of the communications, between the remote occupation units and their Headquarters was conducted by the 160th Liaison Squadron. Medical personnel, mail, military government personnel and emergency supplies were constantly being shuttled to the scattered troops and communities throughout all of Korea. Yes, and even the favored candidate for president of South Korea, Sigmund Rea, was flown to many political rallies throughout South Korea by 160th personnel.

By mid-summer of 1946, South Korea's military government was shaping up and began to assume the occupation responsibilities of the 24th Corps. By midsummer the mission of the 160th was once again greatly diminished, and the unit was deactivated in 1946.

460412	L-5C	44-17277	CRDF	Page, Charles C	Mt SeFuri
460213	L-5B	44-16738	GL	LaCom, Karl A	Ashiya AB
440914	BT-13B	42-90299	TOAEF	Wawrzonek, Mitchell	Cross City AAF, Cross City, FL
440515	L-5	42-98351	TAC	Della Chiaie, Raymond R	Brownwood AAF, TX
440515	L-5	42-14876	TAC	(parked aircraft)	Brownwood AAF, TX
440607	L-5	42-14952	TOA	Penton, Jack	Portal, GA
440615	UC-64A	43-35431	LACGL	Humphrey, Edwin J	Sylvania AAF, Sylvania, GA
460223	L-5E	44-17876	GL	Maxwell, Robert B	Fusan Racetrack Strip

Air Force Order of Battle

Created: 7 Mar 2012

Updated:

Sources

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