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PUTTING TACTICAL BACK INTO THEATER AIRLIFT

by

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Major, United States Air Force

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not the necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Theater airlift has taken a back seat to strategic airlift since being consolidated in 1976 into the Military Airlift Command. This, together with the added emphasis on unity of command created by the Goldwaters-Nichols Act of 1986 is creating a growing desire by the Theater CINCs to reeacquire command of theater airlift. After explaining the history behind consolidation an explanation of the Theater Airlift Manager (TAM) system is explained. The paper argues the differences between strategic and tactical airlift have been blurred by having a single command for airlift causing the mission of theater airlift to become less than well defined. Without a well defined mission, the Theater CINC has percieved a reduced responsiveness to meet theater airlift needs creating desire by the Theater CINC to take command of theater assets. However, the paper concludes this cannot be allowed to happen, because of loss of unity of effort in airlift and a return to the duplication of support systems that existed prior to consolidation.

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Abstract of

PUTTING TACTICAL BACK INTO THEATER AIRLIFT

The once clear distinctions between strategic and tactical airlift is becoming increasingly more clouded. The Theater CINCs are concerned over the readiness of theater airlift to meet their theater needs. This together with the added emphasis on unity of command created by the Goldwaters-Nichols Act of 1986 is creating a growing desire by the Theater CINCs to reacquire command of theater airlift from the Military Airlift Command (MAC). I explain why tactical and strategic airlift were consolidated into MAC and outline the Theater Airlift Manager (TAM) system. With that as background I show how tactical airlift has been assimilated by the strategic mission diluting the emphasis on tactical airlift and how this is causing concern for MAC's responsiveness to the theater airlift needs. The paper concludes the benefits of the single manager concept outweigh the duplication of efforts which will result from returning command to the Theater CINC. A number of recommendations are made including a change in policy by the Air Force to reemphasize the distinct differences between strategic and tactical airlift

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

As a result of the Goldwaters-Nichols Act of 1986 and the emphasis on unity of command and joint operations, the debate over ownership of theater airlift has again been opened. 1 The discussion is resurfacing old arguments over the organization and responsiveness of theater airlift. As a quick reminder, theater airlift is designed for resupply, troop movement, and airborne operations within a theater, while strategic airlift is for operations between theaters. Over the course of the past 40 years the US has been on a evolutionary process of consolidating its airlift assets into a single command that today is called the Military Airlift Command (MAC). In 1974 theater airlift assets were consolidated into MAC and in 1976 the Secretary of Defense made MAC a specified command. By doing so unity of command in the theater was broken as airlift assets were no longer under the command of the Theater CINC. Issues over organization of forces, responsiveness to priorities and airlift funding have re-energized a call for the theater airlift to again be under the command of the Unified CINC.

The evolutionary process resulting in the consolidation of airlift has taken place along side the changing capabilities of aircraft, emphasis on the similarities between the strategic and theater mission, and the recognition of airlift as a vital, but limited resource important to national policy implementation. Further, airlift is a 'system' of interlocking parts which is more efficient when organized to provide rapid, and responsive common user transportation. In other terms, the driving argument behind consolidation has been the answer to the following

question: why should each service, operational commander, or agency husband its own airlift transportation assets when one organization, trained, equippea and specialized in the business of airlift can provide efficient and cost effective airlift services to the Department of Defense (DOD) as a whole?

With the unity of command becoming a greater issue, this question is being reexamined. It may just turn out that unity of command is more important than unity of effort.

The questions I want to explore with this paper are: is the current theater airlift system being responsive to the theater CINC, and if not, will decentralizing command of the theater airlift assets be the right answer? To begin to answer these two vital issues first, I will provide the background to the development of airlift doctrine, secondly how the current theater airlift system is integrated into the theater organization, and lastly at what steps are being taken to solve the issue.

CHAPTER II
AIRLIFT DOCTRINE

The development of airlift doctrine has been an evolutionary process, much like Air Force doctrine as a whole. As early as 1925 the value of air transport in a military role was forming as early advocates of air power such as Major Henry H. 'Hap' Arnold participated in early tests of the airplanes' role in air transport. His early involvement in these examinations probably led to Major General Arnold in 1941 to say:

> 'Any nation in building an air force cannot think of its fighting planes alone. This air transport service for troops, supplies, ambulances and medical service and for the transport of artillery and heavy equipment is a necessary adjunct to the maintenance of any efficient fighting force in the field. The speed of modern mechanized forces makes it distinctly advisable that at least a portion of their supply columns and agencies travel through the air.' 2

Such was the recognition of the airplane's utility in a transport role providing range, speed, and flexibility -- an undisputed truth which today has resulted in an ever growing demand for airlift.

Although the military recognized the usefulness of the transport airplane it entered World War II woefully lacking in transport aircraft. In fact, it was the civil carriers who provided the early transport capability both in airplanes and training air crews. 3 It was believed, if necessary, available civilian airplanes would provide the military with off the shelf aircraft to fulfill transportation needs. However it was soon recognized that although helpful, civilian airplanes were not designed to undertake the specialized military tasks. The same holds true today, especially for the tactical airlift mission where aircraft require special equipment and handling

capabilities to operate in to and out of remote airfields and perform a variety of specialized tasks.

As WWII progressed, a large number of transport services developed in the individual theaters. Each had its own particular mission designed to meet that theaters particular needs and did not necessarily contribute to the whole. 4 As a result the Air Transport Command (ATC) was formed to provide centralized organization, and command and control of intertheater airlift operations. The theater airlift was organized under the Troop Carrier Command (TCC), but in the theater it was under the command of the Theater CINC. One impetus behind formation of ATC was to prevent the theater commanders from rerouting intertheater airlift assets for intertheater missions. For this reason ATC's mission was clearly delineated as:

> 'The Air Transport Command, Army Air Forces, is the War Department agency for the transportation by air of personnel, material, and mail. Aircraft and crews engaged in the operation of air transportation and ferrying services will not be diverted from such operation by commanders concerned except in cases requiring that such operations be delayed until security will permit resumption of operations.' 5

World War II proved to be a watershed for airlift by making its mark on military operations. It became recognized as a vital element of airpower and gained the trust of senior leadership. Most important it was recognized that 'strategic airlift is separate from troop carrier aviation. However, in unique circumstances, strategic airlift may perform combat supply by air, both air landing and air dropping, but again only upon agreement of all concerned.' 6 On the flip side, theater airlift also could perform strategic like missions of supply on regular routes. These similarities clouded the distinction between these

two missions, providing compulsion in the ensuing years to examine these two missions for duplication of effort and economies of resources.

With the creation of the Air Force in 1947, and the post-war demobilization, airlift saw much turbulence and constant review with pressure to achieve efficiency in operations. Repeatedly documented was duplication in effort by the separate service's airlift transportation systems. For this reason in 1948 ATC and the Navy's Air Transport service were combined into the Military Air Transport Service (MATS), later to become the MAC. Theater airlift remained under the command of the Theater CINC with the forces provided by Tactical Air Command (TAC).

The Army also retained and expanded its own fixed wing organic transport up until Vietnam. In the years before Vietnam and during Vietnam the Air Force and the Army each had been developing its own airlift capability. However, "Through a series of Army-Air Force agreements reached during the 1950s, the Air Force had become responsible for conducting strategic and tactical airlift operations. Tactical Airlift was the mainstay of the Army's maneuver capability in Vietnam, but the Army still possessed a number of small, fixed-wing aircraft capable of carrying troops and supplies to combat zones." 7 These aircraft were the C-7 Carabou and the C-123 Provider. The wide dispersion of operating areas together with their remoteness created by Vietnam's jungle terrain put heavy burdens on tactical airlift to maintain air lines of communication (ALOCs).

In Vietnam the duplication of these systems was seen as inefficient. Additionally, confusion began to arise over

deconfliction and airlift mission assignment. The Army similarly was concerned over the growing Air Force helicopter force which had become their primary organic transportation asset next to the truck. What transcribed was an agreement between the Air Force and the Army in 1966 wherein the Army relinquished its claim to all fixed-wing aircraft designed for transport and in return the Air Force gave up its helicopters except those for search and rescue and special air warfare. What is more important the Air Force agreed to confer with the Army on the characteristics of future airlift aircraft to ensure interoperability with Army supply, resupply, and troop movement functions. 8 With this agreement the Air Force was inextricably linked to supporting the Army's tactical airlift needs.

The airlift requirements in Vietnam grew to the point where the Air Force set up a separate dedicated airlift command and control structure. The 834th Air Division reported to 7th Air Force, and had sole responsibility for airlift control within Vietnam. This was counter to policy of having a single command and control for all strike and theater air. However, the system proved successful and set the precedent for the Theater Airlift Manager Concept which we use today. 9 The C-130 aircraft was introduced at this time and proved successful in the operating the Air Lines of Communication (ALOC) for logistics in the theater. However, because the aircraft were being flown more in this role many similarities were being drawn between the strategic and tactical mission especially in the support areas. Duplication was found in the aerial ports where separate support elements were operating on the same field, one for theater

airlift and the other operated by MATS in support of the strategic mission. This overlap in mission was brought out in the Project CORONA HARVEST in the early 1970s.

Project CORONA HARVEST, was "a systematic effort to gather and evaluate evidence from Southeast Asia." 10 Two controversial issues were reviewed: separate management functions for airlift and the "long-standing division of the nation's tactical and strategic airlift forces among separate commands." The study found, "the separate tactical and strategic airlift management organizations had duplicated command, aerial port and support elements." and recommended "that steps be taken to achieve a single airlift command as soon as possible." 11 Further, the study validated the need for a dedicated airlift management system independent of the strike forces. Needless to say TAC opposed combining the two systems under one command. TAC was concerned that combining TAC airlift resources with the "strategic airlift units would diminish the tactical orientation of the force." 12 Historically tactical airlift had been dedicated to the ground forces. By consolidating these forces into a common user system it was believed this bond would be diluted.

The arguments were strong on both sides. However, the "proponents promised it would save manpower and money, increase efficiency, provide theater commanders with greater flexibility in meeting airlift requirements and accelerate and simplify the augmentation of tactical and strategic airlift in support of each other." 13 The proponents believed a synergistic effect could be achieved by combining the two forces. That is, the sum airlift

would be greater than the separate parts.

Problems of mobilizing the European theater C-130 assets to support the resupply of Israel during the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, called Nickel Grass, demonstrated the deficiencies of having the tactical and strategic airlift operated by two separate command structures. It took seven days to coordinate twelve C-130s from EUCOM for dedication to MAC for use in operation. 14 It was becoming more evident 'a consolidated airlift force could implement a standard systems for all airlift.' 15 As such the discrepancies in airlift command and control highlighted by Nickel Grass were powerful arguments to combine the Tactical and Strategic airlift assets into one command.

Further pressure came from the realities of a post-war military needing to trim cost and streamline operations. Secretary of Defense James R. Schelesinger calling upon the findings of CORONA HARVEST and his desire to make the services more interdependent, instructed the services to 'consolidate in FY 76 all strategic and tactical airlift under MAC as a single manager which will be designated as a specified command for Airlift.' 16 (For a listing of MAC gained units from TAC see appendix 1) This included Navy and Marine assets as well except for special tasks such as the Marine's refueling KC-130s and the Navy's Carrier Onboard Deliver Operations (CODO). As the directives were being put into action TAC and the other services voiced concern about MAC's responsiveness to their future airlift needs. The Secretary 'promised that the DOD was taking a

careful, deliberate approach to implementing the airlift consolidation to ensure that there will be no loss in airlift service for the Navy and Marine Corps." 17 The Commander of TAC, General Robert J. Dixon, was assured by then Commander of MAC, General P. K. Carlton, that he would place heavy emphasis on preserving the image of tactical airlift. As we will see this is true, however, through the years the assimilation of the tactical airlift force has been consumed by the strategic mind set.

With this history behind us we can conclude three things. First, there has been a distinct difference between, what we call today, intertheater and intratheater mission. Intertheater airlift was born from the troop carrier units of WWII and have been inextricably linked to the operation of ground forces. Intertheater airlift is strategic in nature and has been mainly concerned with the deployment of forces. Secondly the similarities between these missions, especially in the support areas has brought pressure to bear to recognize an economy of effort through consolidation under a single command structure Third, and last, the recognition that airlift is a system comprised of many elements, not just airplanes.

One vital element of making airlift function is command and control. In the following chapter I will discuss the Theater Airlift Manager (TAM) Concept and how through the TAM the Theater CINC's airlift needs are met.

CHAPTER III
THEATER AIRLIFT MANAGER
THE FORCE MULTIPLIER

The single most significant aspect of airlift is that it is a system of airplanes, air crews, maintenance, logistics, aerial port specialists, and command and control. It was the recognition of an airlift system which gave credence to airlift consolidation to achieve unity of effort in airlift or what is more often referred to as 'the 'single manager concept.' The single manager was born from a recognition by the DOD on the reliance of the services on airlift. It was created in an effort to bolster airlift readiness and improve the effectiveness and over-all economy of airlift support provided to the Armed Forces.' 10 The annexation of theater airlift assets into MAC in 1976 made great gains toward that end. However, as with any large conglomerate such as MAC, there has been, in my view, a trade off in responsiveness for efficiency.

Many operational commanders do not understand the complexities of operating an airlift system and consequently view MAC as not responsive. An explanation of the Theater Airlift Manager Concept may explain why this is so.

Airlift does not exist for itself. It provides a service to a host of users inside and outside the DOD. In the theater airlift role, it serves the Theater CINC based upon his expressed priorities and within the larger scope of national strategy. For the most part, airlift is a request and response system. The user or customer requests airlift through his service channels to a validator which approves the use of airlift to meet the specific transportation need. In the case of Europe, CINCEUR has

designated USAFE as its executive agent to validate airlift requests. A similar situation exists in the Pacific theater. In the case of a joint operation such as Desert Storm, or Just Cause a Joint Movements Control Center (JMC) with representatives from each service is formed to act as the CINC's senior validating agent. 19 Requests are rank ordered based on an established JCS priority system then passed to the Commander of Airlift Forces (COMALF) for tasking. The COMALF is the senior airlift manager designated by MAC and approved by CINC USTRANSCOM. 20 The COMALF is a member of the Air Component Commander's staff as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Airlift. The COMALF then is dual hatted; responsible to MAC, but also to the AFCC. Through the COMALF's dedicated Airlift Control Center (ALCC) the COMALF plans coordinates the airlift taskings which are executed by the airlift units assigned to the theater. The COMALF also manages for MAC the strategic missions transiting his area of responsibility.

This arrangement gives the Theater CINC through the AFCC operational Control (OPCON) over assigned theater airlift aircraft. Equally important, through the TAM, the AFCC has access to all of MAC's airlift resources on a pre-coordinated basis. This added benefit of the TAM gives a CINC "one stop shopping" to meet his airlift needs. This is the real benefit of the single airlift manager concept.

The process cycle for a routine request to be fulfilled is about 24-48 hours. In the event an immediate airlift mission is needed, such as an emergency resupply or air evacuation, the system is designed to be short circuited by the Tactical Liaison

Officer (TALO). This individual is assigned with the various customers and aids the user in determining his airlift requirements. The TALO, through what ever communication means available, will contact the Airlift Control Center (ALCC) to pass the request. However, the request must still pass through the myriad of layers of service channels to the JMC for validation. Needless to say, without a validated request the ALCC cannot act on it to task the mission. The process then remains labored by many layers of validation and delays the COMALF's ability to respond.

Why then have a request process at all? First of all airlift is not the only means available to the user. The Army must weigh the use of organic means over the cost of providing airlift. Additionally, it may be just more efficient to use a truck then an airplane. Lastly, the requirements far airlift normally outstrip the total airlift capability. Therefore some system of racking requirements against capability must exist.

The process is further complicated by the fact that some mission types may take an extraordinary amount of preparation and coordination. For example an airdrop of supplies to a forward area requires special loading, airplane preparation, and air crew route and drop planning to ensure mission success. However, an air evacuation, or airland mission may only require diverting an airplane already airborne into the nearest airfield to the patient. The value of a dedicated TAM system provides the capability to use the appropriate asset to meet the requirement versus the need for a specific airplane or units organic asset.

The Army would prefer to have a system which reduces response to six hours. 21 However, this means maintaining a host of airplanes on a strip alert. This traditionally has been avoided by MAC because of its inefficient use of limited airplanes. MAC prefers to operate on a set of routes on an established schedule based upon the known requirements. This works great for strategic lift where you're operating out of basically the same main bases day in and day out. However, if theater airlift is to be supportive of the ground forces, it must move with the battle. This requires extreme flexibility in the commmand and control (C2) structure and highly trained air crews who are accustomed to operating independently in a wide variety of mission roles without a host of support.

On this last issue of flexible C2, MAC's image of being overly "motherly" has created a perception of being unresponsive to the user. Decisions the air crews use to be taking in the field had to be continually upchanneled for approval often causing delay and frustration. Flexibily to respond to changing situations in the field rapidly is lost as the C2 structure is growing larger and more complicated. Further MAC has been overzealous in protecting a C2 architecture designed to support the strategic deployment. The result has been to divorce theater airlift from integration within the theater's air coordination structure. For example, up until most recently MAC has contended that its ALCC could operate independently of the TACC. The TACC is the senior coordination element of the the Tactical Air Control System (TACS). The TACC is the primary interface with the Army's Air Ground System (AASS). The result has been the creation of two separate C2 structures one for theater

airlift and one for tactical strike aircraft. Consequently the result has been loss of airspace coordination, deconfliction and unity of effort within the theater. The autonomy in MAC C2 has provided a perception to the theater CINC that his theater assets were not his to control.

Fortunately this has been recognized by MAC and TAC. Steps are being taken reconnecting theater airlift back into the TACS and AAOS. For example in Desert Storm the theater airlift missions are published on the single Air Tasking Order (ATO) along side the strike missions. However, MAC still publishes a separate airlift mission schedule with unique airift mission information not included on the ATO. MAC also added an airspace integration cell to the ALCC to ensure proper and rapid airspace coordination and deconfiction with the strike forces. An area MAC has sidestepped for many years. These steps are a monumental leap forward in reintegrating theater airlift back into the total effort. Further, MAC is now conducting training for potential COMALFs providing an understanding for the total theater framework within which they must work.

The TAM system provides the Theater CINC with airlift expertise and a management structure to operate both strategic and tactical airlift missions. Integration of these two segments of airlift are vital to unity of effort within the total framework of the airlift task. However emphasis on the strategic side has caused a breakdown of maintaining the tactical link with the theater which allow theater airlift to operate successfully. With these deficiencies now being recognized and corrected the Theater CINC should recognize the value of maintaining a

consolidated airlift system.

Besides theater C2 there are other issues making the theater commanders squawk for command of their theater airlift. Specifically, they see an erosion in theater airlift capability and they want a greater say in the organization and capabilities of their theater airlift forces. In the next chapter I will address these issues.

CHAPTER III
INTRATHEATER, THEATER, OR TACTICAL AIRLIFT
WHICH IS IT?

Part of the CORONA HARVEST recommendations emphasized that a 'single organization for airlift should recognize the distinct mission requirements of tactical and strategic airlift.' [22] Under pressure from General Carlton, MAC initially took great strides to preserve the image of the tactical forces while incorporating them into the MAC airlift system. However, a perceived inequality in support between the tactical and strategic forces created a division between these two roles which personified itself as the 'big MAC -- little MAC' syndrome. [23] What resulted was a push to equalize the forces to create a single system of rules, and regulations for support which applied equally to C-5s, C-141s and C-130s resulting in the transformation of tactical airlift to more equal footing with its strategic brother. This action further clouded the differences between the tactical and strategic role. As a consequence theater airlift has had an identity crisis.

To support what I am saying consider the following: since MAC acquired the tactical airlift assets all of the following terms have been used to describe the theater mission, intratheater airlift, tactical airlift, and lastly, theater airlift. AFM 2-50, 'Doctrine for Joint Airborne and Tactical Airlift Operations' describes tactical airlift missions as:

> '...airlift operations used to initiate and sustain many missions, such as parachute and airlanded assaults, resupply and evacuation.' [24]

Intratheater airlift gives the reader a symbology of relating to 'intertheater' thereby placing emphasis on airlift that occurrs

after intertheater airlift, sealift or prepositioned war material is made available for forward delivery. It connotates theater airlift's role as an extension of the strategic deployment mission. The draft JCS Pub 4-01.1 'Airlift support to Joint Operations' will describe theater airlift as:

> '...transportation within a theater of operations. These movements usually occur between main operating bases (MOB) and seaports to the forward operating locations. Theater airlift also provides lateral movement within the forward area, theater resupply, and may execute the evacuation of casualties. The missions to accomplish these tasks may be either preplanned or immediate. Preplanned missions support anticipated needs. Immediate missions result from unanticipated, urgent or priority requirements.'

Very indepth, however notice no mention of airborne/airdrop operations.

Which is right? Is airdrop no longer required? What will the Army want us to do? What about the other services? What I am highlighting is the fact that theater airlift doctrine is in transition mainly because the user is still not sure what role theater airlift will play.

General Duane Cassidy, CINCMAC in 1986 stated: 'when an airlift force supports a commander, airlift cannot be thought of as an airplane; it is a system that includes a variety of airplanes. With this understanding, the classic distinctions between tactical and strategic airlift become blurred.' 25 What Cassidy was saying is the Theater CINC should not care about the type of airplane that will be provided to support his mission. That is MAC's job. However, the Theater CINC has his own set of priorities which may not match those of MAC's. Unless the Theater CINC clearly defines his airlift needs MAC will solve them how it sees fit, instead of the other way around.

Unfortunately, history has shown us theater airlift users have not mutually agreed on actual wartime theater airlift requirements. Just as strategy depends on airlift, airlift depends on strategy. The Army, the primary user of theater airlift has been undergoing their own change in strategy. AIRLAND BATTLE, AIRLAND BATTLE FUTURE, Army 21 all recognize the deficiencies associated with the Army's traditional doctrinal emphasis on firepower. AIRLAND BATTLE elevates maneuver to the 'dynamic element of combat, the means of concentrating forces in critical areas to gain and to use the advantages of surprise, position, and momentum which enable smaller forces to defeat larger ones.' 26 With the use of non-linear lines, dispersed basing and use of light divisions greater emphasis on maneuver is going to require theater airlift to be more responsive.

When we speak of theater airlift today for the Air Force's part, we are referring to the venerable C-130 Hercules. The days of the C-7 and C-123 are now gone. These two earlier airplanes were used extensively in Vietnam in support of the Army especially into very forward areas of the battlefield. The C-7 and C-123 were capable of landing on very short (<1800 feet) runways -- a capability which has been lost with the retirement of these aircraft. The C-130 is no slouch and continues to prove its versatility in many roles and can operate out of relatively short (3000 feet) runways made of dirt and carry upwards of 15 tons.

However, the C-130 is getting old and the lack of emphasis by the Air Force to pursue a replacement is not going unnoticed by the Theater CINCs. 'The need for cost-effective and reliable

theater airlift, previously satisfied by current C-130s, is a long recognized and well documented requirement. However, the US Air Force has not developed and produced a new medium tactical transport since 1955.' 27 Part of that can be attributed to airlift's low priority on the funding profile. As Jeffery Record points out;

> 'Though the Army is the principal user of airlift (especially tactical airlift) it is the responsibility of the Air Force to satisfy the Army's airlift needs and most Air Force senior officers usually prefer to spend money on warplanes rather than on slow, unglamorus transports.' 28

This adds to the credibility problem with our users especially in light of the promises made by the Air Force leadership during the 1970's consolidation. The Army in particular has come 'privately to believe that the Air Force cannot be counted upon to meet the full spectrum of the Army's future fixed-wing tactical requirements.' 29 As such they continue to develop and depend upon their own organic means of transportation of trucks and helicopters to support the theater transportation needs. Other users, the Marines, and the Navy all will depend on theater airlift in some form or another and each have their own unique requirements and priorities creating a quagmire of joint theater airlift issues.

Some of the issues are being created by the fielding of the C-17. The C-5 and C-141 are primarily looked at as strategic aircraft, where the C-130 is the theater aircraft. As the division between strategic and theater are blurred by the fielding of the C-17, the support for what has typically been called tactical airlift may be even further diluted.

The Air Force Airlift Master Plan called for the retirement of 180 C-130 aircraft as induction of the C-17 takes place. 30 The plan allows the reduction based upon the direct delivery capability of the C-17 to the Forward Operating Base (FOB) thus reducing the requirement for onward movement of cargo from the Main Operating Bases (MOB). However, the Theater CINC will have intratheater requirements outside those of onward movement of cargo. For one Malpositioned stocks must be moved from depot areas to where they will be used. If the theater fleet is reduced in size this will reduce the capabilility and flexibility to meet these theater demands.

The problem lies in that national airlift needs may impinge on the theater needs, meaning, although the Theater CINC has access to the entire MAC inventory through the COMALF, higher national requirements may preclude his obtaining those assets. For example, the diversion of aircraft dedicated to the strategic flow to support a theater requirement must be weighed against the degradation of movement of forces to a theater. With the creation of USTRANSCOM and the emphasis on deployment of forces, strategic assets may be denied to the theater. If the requesting theater is not where the deployment flowing, it may be too low on the priority pole to ever receive C-17 support for theater airlift requirements. The C-17 is a needed addition to the transportation fleet, but I think the Theaters smell a rat.

Adding to the problem is coming up with a viable way to measure the theater airlift requirement. For years we have measured strategic and tactical airlift on the same footing. This has led to our attempting to define tactical requirements in

strategic terms. Without a doubt the most quoted measure for airlift effectiveness is millions of ton/miles per day, a homogeneous measure which is easily quantifiable, but discounts the multifacited and unique requirements placed upon theater airlift. 'Indeed, more than a few tactical airlift experts regard gross ton/mile productivity as a virtually useless measure of tactical airlift effectiveness.' 31 Why? Because strategic airlift requirements are based upon a determined preplanned flow. 'In no major past conflict have US tactical airlift requirements been remotely predictable in advance, and certainly not in comparison to those of strategic airlift.' 32 Within a theater of operations, the flow of the battle and the needs of the theater CINC will determine the mission of the day -- something not so easily quantified.

Further, the economies sought in a strategic operation may not be appropriate in a theater campaign. Delivery of one case of ammunition, or the airdrop of one bundle containing vital supplies at the right place has more value than all the ton miles in the world. Will we be willing to operate a C-17, for example, with less than a full load? What is required is an airplane which can operate cost effectively with loads designed to meet theater needs with a fleet capabile of generating many sorties. Flexibility will be found in the actual numbers of aircraft in the fleet not the individual hauling capability of the airplane.

When we speak of the right place this raises the question of how far forward and in what threat conditions will theater airlift be expected to go. Again that may depend on the situation of the moment. The argument questioning the

willingness of the air force to commit airlift assets to forward areas based on aircraft cost are irrelevant. Combat losses would be unavoidable and the cost of any piece of military equipment is only an issue when compared to the national military objective to be gained or lost. If the national priority is sufficiently dear, it is clearly appropriate to commit any or all military assets to achieve the desired goal. However, if we are to commit airlift forces in a medium to high threat tactical environment we should give them the means to achieve a high probability of success in that environment. The threat varies by theater which again gives reason for the Theater CINC to want command of their own theater airlift. They can design it to meet their specific problems vice a vanilla fleet which may be a compromise to satisfy everyone's needs, but meeting none.

A perfect example is HQ United States Air Forces Europe, (HQUSAFE) European Distribution System (EDS). USAFE desired an additional air transportation to provide logistic support for the European assigned fighters and reduce the workload on theater C-130s. The system was validated to improve fighter reliability. Also, USAFE desired a transportation system that was not under the purview of the Airlift Service Industrial Fund (ASIF), as the C-130s are. 'ASIF is a management tool used by MAC for allocating DOD airlift, as well as providing flexibility to meet changing airlift needs. Congress directed this management in 1958, to make air movement of passengers and cargo visible as a cost.' [33] In theory having common user airlift ASIF funded provides equity of service to all users and is a vehicle by which airlift can be prioritized against alternative forms of

transportation. Obviously, unit owned transportation is more desirable as the unit does not externally 'pay' for the transportation.

EDS consisted of a dedicated communication system between fighter wings, and one squadron of C-23 Sherpa aircraft. The Air Staff approved the system, however it was funded on the requirement that MAC operate it as the single airlift manager and that other services such as the Navy could use it on a opportune basis. Not what USAFE wanted, however to assure funding support they agreed to the provisions set forth, but were successful in keeping it out of ASIF. The C-23 was severely limited in capability. Its slow speeds made it useless outside of the Central European front and it had a limited lift capability which at times prevented the C-23 from fulfilling its primary mission. USAFE even refused to allow MAC to purchase extra passenger seats for the aircraft for fear MAC would try to use the airplane outside of dedicated use for USAFE fighters.

Did EDS improve reliablity or reduce the workload of the C-130s? I am not sure. But the C-23 is already being retired, just five years after it was fielded. This kind of theater parochialism is why we consolidated in the first place. However, MAC and the Air Force need to work closely with the Theater CINCs to ensure the proper tactics and capabilities are being provided to meet their mission needs.

For example, in 1985 I was involved with planning to consolidate all of the Adverse Weather Aerial Delivery (AWADS) C-130s to Pope Air Force Base. One squadron of AWADS aircraft are based at Rhein Main Ab, Germany. Due to the aging AWADS system

it was becoming increasing more difficult and costly to support the system at two locations. By consolidating MAC could reduce the cost of maintaining two sets of limited spare parts and personnel management would be simplified as specially trained aircrews and maintenance personnel would all be located at Pope. When required, the aircraft could be deployed to Europe on a as needed basis. EUCOM disagreed citing that poor weather in Europe would degrade army airborne and special forces training without a capability to air drop in adverse weather. Further, they complained that flexibility would be lost in responding to peacetime contingency operations. One other undocumented reason, but known from personal experience, was EUCOM's desire not to have to validate their need for the aircraft to MAC each time they desired AWADN capability. In other with the AWADN in theater EUCOM would not have barter for them -- possession is nine tenths of the law. Also, EUCOM felt MAC would not deploy the aircraft to Europe strictly to support theater training. EUCOM won out but not before much four star to four star debate.

It is issues like this which give credence for returning command of the theater mission back to the Theater CINC so he can organize it how he sees fit. However, as we have already seen, This will lead to duplication of airlift systems and loss of unity of effort and increased interoperability problems as each theater would seek an airlift aircraft to meet their own unique needs.

How then can we better serve the Theaters and regain lost ground for our tactical airlift forces? In my last chapter I will provide these recommendations.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Were the opponents to consolidation right after all? Is the only way the theater CINC going to achieve the airlift system he wants is to command it? In my final analysis, no. The synergystic effect promised has been achieved by having all airlift in a single organization. Consolidation has been good for airlift on the whole. However, consolidation has blurred the significance of theater airlift by creating a homogeneous airlift system, one system for all and all for one system. The assimilation of tactical airlift by strategic airlift has created a credibility gap between the Air Force and the Theater CINCs who want their own system to meet their specific needs. As the Air Force continues to waffle on support of transport aircraft, especially for replacements to the C-130, the users will continue to push for increased organic capability. Further, lack of support for a strong theater airlift will give the CINCs leverage to retake command of theater airlift. If they win in this argument we will return to the duplication of support structures, loss of unity of effort and parochialism which dulled our efforts as in Nickel Grass. True, theater airlift has taken a back seat while improvements have aimed at the strategic mission, but we must remember that is where the crisis has been. Further, our political inertia makes funding support for transport aircraft tenuous at best validating the need for a strong airlift advocate able to develop the support to field future airlift aircraft. However, the theater users with MAC must clearly delineate what those theater needs will be.

As this debate moves forward, airlift doctrine is being tested in the middle east. How CENTCOM employs its assigned theater airlift assets in this campaign will set the tone for theater airlift for the future. No doubt the C-17 supporters are already calculating how many airlift sorties could have been saved had the aircraft been operational, but will they calculate the value of the tactical aircraft as well? Or, just measure tons hauled, and people moved.

What can be done then? Some of what needs to be done is already taking place. Specifically, the recognition that theater airlift must be integrated into the total airspace management structure through reconnecting the TAM into the TACS. There is communication taking place between HQ MAC and TAC not seen since 1976. 34 Further, emphasizing theater airlift as just that, THEATER airlift which is tactical; not intratheater airlift. It may be just a play on words, but it highlights why the airlift is there -- for the Theater CINC as he sees fit. The initiatives by HQ MAC to train COMALFs for their demanding positions is helping these individuals recognize that airlift is not an autonomous system existing in and for itself. That the COMALF needs to know his customer and be able to function with and within the larger theater system.

The Air Force needs to reassess it desire to pursue a homogeneous system which does not recognize the distinct differences between strategic and tactical airlift. HQ MAC needs to reexamine the lessons of project CORONA HARVEST and the commitments made since the mid 1960s. The Air Force should reaffirm airlift's support to the theater by actively pursuing a

theater airlift fleet which meets the demands of the complex theater environment and survive; a system emphasizing responsiveness and flexibility and the tactical nature of the theater. In other w[illegible] time and place takes precedence over simply ton/miles of cargo hauled. This means accepting a less than efficient operation.

This is possibly taking place already. One planner on the staff at 21st Air Force, MAC's airlift operator for the Eastern Hemisphere, speaking about Desert Storm told me: 'theater airlift is learning how to be tactical again.' 38 If that be the case then theater airlift is back on the right tract and the Theater CINCs should leave well enough alone.

UNITS TRANSFERRED TO MAC

TAC

839th Air Division, Pope AFB (inactivated 31 Dec 74)
316th Tactical Airlift Wing, Langley AFB
317th Tactical Airlift Wing, Pope AFB

834th Air Division, Little Rock AFB (inactivated 31 Dec 74)
314th Tactical Airlift Wing, Little Rock AFB
463rd Tactical Airlift Wing, Dyess AFB

1st Aerial Port Group
1st Aerial Port Squadron, Dyess AFB
2nd Aerial Port Squadron, Little Rock AFB
3rd Aerial Port Squadron, Pope AFB
4th Aerial Port Squadron, Langley AFB

1st Aeromedial Evacuation Group, Pope AFB (assigned to 375 Aeromedical Airlift Wing)
Little Rock USAF Hospital (assigned to 314 Tactical Airlift Wing)
Pope USAF Clinic assigned to 317 Tactical Airlift Wing

USAFE

2nd Aeromedial Evacuation Group, Rhein-Main AB
66th Aeromedial Airlift Squadron Rhein-Main AB
6th Aerial Port Squadron, RAF Mildenhall
322nd Tactical Airlift Wing (consolidated with 435th Military Airlift Support Wing into the 435 TAW
Host responsibility for Rhein-Main Transferred to MAC

PACAF

374th Tactical Airlift Wing, Clark AB
21st Tactical Airlift Squadron, Clark AB
776th Tactical Airlift Squadron, Clark AB
345th Tactical Airlift Squadron, Kadena AB
6th Aeromedial Evacuation Group, Clark AB
20th Operations Squadron, Clark AB
6th Aerial Port Squadron, U-Tapao AB

USAFSO

1300 Military Airlift Squadron, Howard AFB (act 31 Mar 75)

Alaskan Air Command (AAC)
17th Tactical Airlift Squadron, Elmendorf AFB

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