

187TH RCT AIR-LIFTED TO KOJE-DO



Dirty and dusty paratroopers unload from a truck prior to boarding C-54 Skymasters and C-46 Commandos for troubled Kofe-do. Thirteen hours was saved by using air instead of land and sea travel.

ON THE SCENE STORY OF KOJE-DO AIRLIFT

By Herman Edwards (Portland Oregonian)

The greatest airlift of combat troops in the Korean war flew the night skies over the Japan Sea Friday and Saturday, May 16 and 17, in a spectacular reinforcement of the garrison on explosive Kofe-do, island prison of war camp of the United Nations.

This is a story of the dramatic operation by the only civilian correspondent who witnessed it from beginning to completion. I was the only newsmen to ride the giant night airlift from Japan fields with the paratroopers to Korea and to accompany them by sea transport from the Korean field to little Kofe-do.

The Kofe-do operation broke with only two hours' alert for pilots of Brig. Gen. Chester E. McCarty's 315th Air Division and paratroopers of Brig. Gen. Thomas J. H. Trappnell's 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team, tough veterans of two combat jumps in Korea.

Normally, the McCarty-Trappnell teams said to be the finest

liaison of military units in the Far East, bases planes on 72 hours notice to get planes ready and to get the airborne infantry geared for a landing or paratroop in Korea in an or two hours flying time. This time the surprise order from GHQ, at Tokyo, came at 9 a.m. and by noon the paratroopers were in truck convoys enroute to the airfields.

Some paratroopers, on a training mission for a night drop, received the word to return to their base much later, got the secret orders at 2:30 p.m. and by 5 p.m. were enroute to the planes. On two airfields in Japan the McCarty Combat Cargo units—the 403rd Troop

Carrier Wing and the 437th Troop Carrier Wing—"pushed panic buttons" to get ready; but actually it was a hurried, orderly process.

Trappnell and McCarty set up a command post on the principal Japan airfield to direct the maze of details involving 169 round-trip airplane sorties across the Japan Sea to Korea. After it got under way General Trappnell flew the airlift to the Korean field, then hopped by liaison plane to Kofe-do to make plans for receiving his troops. General McCarty, after the big haul was in full swing, then flew the airlift to Korea to observe the handling of his planes at that end.

From the two Japan fields the big four-engine C-54s and the fat C-46 Commandos, loaded with troops and ammunition, and the cavernous C-119 Flying Boxcars, carrying paratroopers, jeeps and trucks, took off at three-minute intervals in a long procession that ran endlessly through the night and into the next morning.

There were no accidents, no delays, but the air field was a bedlam of sound of roaring airplane engines, truck convoys, marching troops. At 1:45 a.m. I boarded a Flying Boxcar of the 403rd's "Blue Tail Flies" Squadron.

Two jeeps with loaded trailers and a lot of other gear had been lashed in the big plane when we climbed aboard—50 paratroopers and eight passengers—to crowd between the cargo and the walls of the plane, the space made narrower by the "Max West" life jackets and the parachutes we wore.

The paratroopers were "helpless as a pregnant woman"—as they described it, weighted down with weapons, ammunition and an assortment of gear all weighing 150 pounds. We passengers were less encumbered.

The great engines of the Flying Boxcar wailed like banshees for what seemed like a full 15 minutes as we climbed to 6500 feet elevation for the



Troopers arrive at Ashiya for the first wave of the Kofe-do airlift. The 403rd Wing's Blackjack Squadron, was supplemented by 374th Wing and 61st Group C-54 Skymasters. Planes took off in five minute intervals.

125 mile run across the Japan Sea. Three minutes ahead of us another C-119 roared along at 6000 feet, and behind was another, also 500 feet below. Forty-five minutes later we came down, without a bounce on the rough, plowed steel planking of the Korean airfield where planes already were as thick as ants at a picnic.

Trucks shuttled alongside the unloading planes and we hurried to a nearby beach where vehicles and men were being loaded aboard heavy landing ships for the run to Kofe-do, some 40 miles off the coast of the South Korean mainland.

Our LST captain said we had the biggest load aboard he had ever carried. Trucks, jeeps and equipment seemed to crowd every available inch of space on the ship, yet we got more than 1000 men aboard for the four-hour run to Kofe-do.

The ship plowed slowly through a gentle groundswell off the Korean coast, then entered a series of passages studded with mountainous islands. Native Korean fishing

craft cluttered the channel, seeming to be intent on crossing our bows as we bore down upon them. This LST had made many runs to Kofe-do, carrying prisoners to the U.N. prisoner of war camp. Now it was carrying troops to help quiet disturbances on the island agitated by Communist leaders in the compounds.

On Kofe-do, where he awaited the arrival of his troops, General Trappnell was highly pleased with the operation of the airlift. This was an "off-the-cuff" operation, he told me, accomplished with much shorter notice and in less time than training operations.

"There is no better liaison between two military organizations anywhere, and there has never been a time when General McCarty and I have not been able to settle every question that came up."

General McCarty has repeatedly told his pilots that the primary purpose of Combat Cargo is to serve the Army, to put men and equipment where the Army wants it, when it wants it.



187th men, morale high, regroup at a Korean airstrip in preparation to move to the waiting LSTs.



Combat ready paratroopers board Navy LST's. Four hours later the men walked ashore at Kofe-do ready for any hostile act.



Navy LST 1068, loaded down with men and equipment from the 187th, pulls away from its berth to make the 40 mile trip to Kofe-do.