

Big Lift is over. During the October-November exercise the Air Force flew an entire combat division from Texas to Germany and back in a brilliant tactical operation. MATS aircraft flawlessly carried 16,000 troops and more than a million pounds of equipment. Now, in the aftermath, it's time to sort out the meaning of . . .

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BIG LIFT

► **BOON** ► **BOONDOGGLE**
OR ► **BUST?**

By **Allan R. Scholin**

ASSOCIATE EDITOR, AIR FORCE SPACE DIGEST

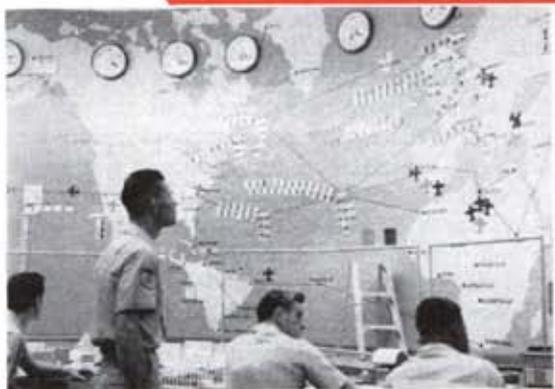
SECRETARY of Defense Robert Strange McNamara is a man of few misgivings. When he has invested \$20 million of DoD's money in a project, he expects a substantial return.

Operation Big Lift, in which Gen. Joe W. Kelly's Military Air Transport Service airlifted the entire 2d Armored Division from Texas to Europe in just over sixty-three hours October 22-24—joined by a four-squadron Composite Air Strike Force from TAC—bore a \$20 million price tag. For the investment, Secretary McNamara apparently wanted to demonstrate that US military forces in Europe could safely be reduced without impairing NATO's military strength. The money thus saved would not only reduce the US gold-flow deficit, but would go a long way toward achieving Mr. McNamara's \$4 billion cost-reduction goal in defense expenditures.

Operationally it was a sound plan and, under direction of Gen. Paul D. Adams, Commander in Chief of US Strike Command, it was executed with military precision. MATS demonstrated that its present transport fleet could indeed transfer a 14,000-man division plus support units 3,000 miles across the Atlantic and, despite below-average weather in Europe, completed the operation nine hours ahead of schedule.

In Europe, the men of the 2d Armored Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Edwin H. Burba, picked up their prepositioned divisional weapons and equipment stored in Europe since the Berlin crisis in 1961 and moved out on schedule for a week's maneuvers against the Army's Europe-based 3d Armored Division.

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Command control board at Hq. MATS, Scott AFB, Ill., shows more than 150 aircraft in the air along the 5,600-mile route from Texas to Europe at the peak of Exercise Big Lift in October.

BIG LIFT



Men of 2d Armored Division of Ft. Hood, Tex., line up to board MATS C-135 transport at Bergstrom AFB, near Austin, for ten-hour nonstop flight to Rhein-Main AB, Germany to open Big Lift.

The companion Composite Air Strike Force, which provided air support during the maneuvers, was led by Col. Richard V. Travis, Commander of the 401st Tactical Fighter Wing, England AFB, La. It was made up of two F-100 squadrons—the 613th of England AFB and 430th, Cannon AFB, N. M.—and an F-105 squadron, the 333d of Seymour Johnson AFB, N. C., each with eighteen planes, and the 363d Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron (Composite), of Shaw AFB, S. C., made up of eight RF-101s and six RB-66s.

They were supported by fifty C-130 transports of the 839th Air Division, Sewart AFB, Tenn., and 516th Troop Carrier Wing, Dyess AFB, Tex., carrying maintenance personnel and equipment, and a few reporters, including this one.

Unlike the 2d Armored, which depended on marrying up with its equipment after reaching Europe, the CASF was almost completely self-sufficient. If necessary, a CASF can operate entirely from its own resources, bringing in ground-handling equipment, armament, and even fuel. In Big Lift, because it was going into operational or standby bases where fuel and other facilities were already available, the support force was less than would otherwise be required.

Proceeding via Loring and Dow AFBs, Me., the fighters and reconnaissance planes were accompanied by SAC KC-135 tankers across the ocean—one for each two fighters and RF-101s, and one per RB-66—with a final refueling shortly before reaching the coast of Europe so that they would be able to fight their way in or make a speedy turnaround on the ground if necessary.

F-100s went into Phalsbourg and Etain, F-105s into Chaumont, RB-66s into Toul-Rosieres, all in France, and RF-101s into Ramstein, Germany. Ramstein is headquarters for both USAFE's Seventeenth Air Force and NATO's Fourth Allied Tactical Air Force. Toul-Rosieres is the home of a Third Air Force RB-66 wing. The other three bases in France are maintained on



Once begun, airlift went on night and day, hauling 16,000 troops and 3.4 million pounds of equipment from Texas to Europe. Here C-130 takes on a truck.

a standby basis, prepared to accept augmentation forces, as in Big Lift.

The C-130 in which I rode was piloted by Maj. James Akin of the 774th Troop Carrier Squadron, Langley AFB, Va. It carried starter units and other gear, plus a few maintenance men of Seymour Johnson's 333d Squadron, commanded by Lt. Col. Claire L. Chennault, Jr., son of the famed Flying Tigers commander in World War II. Our route was via Harmon AFB, Newfoundland, and direct into Chaumont.

We fell behind schedule right at the start at Seymour Johnson when a failure in the ramp door-lock mechanism prevented pressurization of the plane's interior. Major Akin elected to fly the loaded plane back into Langley at low altitude, where we shifted to a spare C-130 and got away for Harmon about three hours late.

At Harmon, which we reached at noon, TAC rules dictated a twelve-hour crew rest. At midnight, we were delayed another six hours to allow expected ground fog to burn off at Chaumont. The transatlantic leg was routine, and we reached Chaumont at 3 p.m. October 22, just after arrival of all but two of the F-105s. We learned that Colonel Chennault and his wingman, after departing from Loring, had turned back to Harmon when the tanker serving them encountered a temporary malfunction in its refueling system. According to standing TAC procedures, the F-105s didn't wait around for the tanker crew to clear up the discrepancy but returned to Harmon, followed by the tanker, and came on to Chaumont the next day.

A similar problem had delayed four of the F-100s. One F-100 had made too violent a contact with the boom of its tanker, bending it and impeding the flow of fuel. Both F-100s in that flight accordingly turned back, joined by two others serving as escorts, again in accordance with TAC instructions. They, too, arrived in France the following day.

Colonel Chennault later explained that he and the



Alert crew hurries to put chocks under wheels of TAC Composite Air Strike Force Hercules transport arriving at Etain AB, France, USAF standby base used by F-100 fighters in exercise.



Gen. Joe Kelly of MATS; Gen. G. P. Disosway, USAF; Secretaries Zuckert of USAF, Vance of Army; and Army Gen. Paul Freeman meet press.

other delayed crews were operating under peacetime flying safety rules. Had it been urgent for them to continue, they could readily have made it by hooking up to other tankers in the deployment.

To the CASF crews and most of the support personnel, Big Lift was routine, differing only in particulars from numerous other deployments. However, when the two F-100 squadrons departed from their home stations they were not to return for several months, for after participating in the Big Lift maneuvers in Germany they went on to Cigli AB, Turkey, and Aviano AB, Italy, on normal TAC rotation, relieving sister squadrons in their wings which returned to the US.

I joined in Big Lift at the invitation of Mr. McNamara who, to help make his point, had invited every US newsmen with military accreditation to travel with the 2d Armored or the CASF transports. Some 240 reporters and photographers accepted his offer, and we were joined in Europe by several hundred members of the German, French, and British press. To make certain that we would miss nothing of consequence in the exercise, DoD had assembled a staff of more than a hundred military information officers, plus a fleet of cars, buses, helicopters, and transport planes to take newsmen anywhere they wanted to go in the exercise area. These preparations paid off handsomely in the most comprehensive coverage ever accorded a military exercise.

But Mr. McNamara did not get quite the favorable press he might have expected from these elaborate and careful preparations. Even before Big Lift was officially announced, the German press was apprehensive that something was in the wind as US Army troops began assembling the 2d Armored's stockpiled equipment and putting it in first-class working order. When the exercise was announced, accompanied by the broadside invitation to the press, the German press viewed it as another attempt to justify withdrawing

some US forces, and pointed out that President Kennedy had assured the Germans during his visit there in July that US forces would remain in Europe as long as they were needed. (See also "Airpower in the News," in November '63, AIR FORCE/SPACE DIGEST.)

Then on October 19, just three days before the troop airlift was to begin, Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric seemed to confirm Germany's fears in a Chicago speech.

"This Big Lift exercise," he said, "will demonstrate our ability to project our military power far more quickly over far larger distances than has ever been the case in the past.

"By employing such a multibase capability, the US should be able to make useful reductions in its heavy overseas military expenditures without diminishing its effective military strength or its capacity to apply that strength swiftly in support of its worldwide policy commitments."

Germany's outcry over this apparent shift in US promises was, if anything, intensified by Mr. Gilpatric's intended assurances that "any such adjustments will, of course, be based on consultation with our major allies and so far as possible upon agreed NATO policies. In particular," he declared, "we look forward to continued close understanding with our allies in the Federal Republic of Germany who share with us a primary responsibility for the Central Front of the Western Alliance. The central object of our policy will be unchanged: to sustain a major American presence in the defense of Western Europe at all levels of force."

It has been reported that Mr. Gilpatric's speech was approved by the White House over strong objections from the State Department. It was by now fully apparent to the State Department that implementation of the underlying purpose of Big Lift would have to be deferred, or the US would be confronted with serious

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BIG LIFT



Tanks prepositioned in Europe and readied by US Army caretaker force along unused autobahn strip are picked up by troops of 2d Armored Division for use in Big Lift exercise.

problems in maintaining NATO unity. Thus a week later, after Big Lift had delivered its forces to Europe without a flaw, Secretary of State Dean Rusk visited Frankfurt—just a few miles from Rhein-Main Air Base where most of the Big Lift forces landed—and declared: "We have six divisions in Germany. We intend to maintain these divisions here as long as there is need for them—and under present circumstances there is no doubt that they will continue to be needed. . . . Does the airlift of an armored division mean the withdrawal of US troops from Germany? The answer is 'No.' . . ."

A few days later, on October 31, President Kennedy, at a press conference in Washington, reaffirmed that the US has no intention of reducing Army strength in Europe under present conditions.

(Neither the President nor Mr. Rusk referred to air strength in their statements. Early in November it was reported that USAF will cut back its B-47 force and supporting KB-50 tankers based in England, along with B-47s and interceptor units in Spain, and will replace part of USAF's troop-transport squadrons on the continent with rotational units.)

The huge press contingent brought to Europe by DoD to sell Mr. McNamara's troop-reduction plan was by now at a loss to explain the \$20 million Big Lift operation. What had it really proved? True, 16,000 men had been delivered to Europe in less than three days—but commercial airliners operating regularly from the US to Europe can easily match that total.

As an effective demonstration of military capability the exercise had several shortcomings. It could not have been carried out in time of war, for an enemy would easily have destroyed the prepositioned equipment and even denied airfields to the incoming transports. It was not a particularly useful test of the prepositioned equipment concept, for in its selling job DoD had taken no chances—the Army had assigned more than a thousand men, beginning months ago, to check out each tank, personnel carrier, jeep, truck,



Lt. Col. Claire L. Chennault, Jr., Commander of the 333d Tactical Fighter Squadron from Seymour Johnson AFB, N. C., confers with newsmen at Chaumont AB, France.

and field kitchen to put them in tiptop shape for the 2d Armored. When General Burba's men arrived, vehicles were lined up on an unused stretch of autobahn, gassed up and ready to roll.

"One purpose of an exercise," General Burba told the press, "is to uncover weak spots in your planning. Here there weren't any."

Thus it was primarily a demonstration of reinforcement capability in a period of only potential tension. As such, however, it would seem to run counter to the oft-repeated US demand that our NATO allies fulfill their own commitments to the NATO forces. If the US is prepared to supply additional forces in an emergency, they might say, why should we put more men and money into NATO in peacetime?

The British, who have failed to meet their full NATO commitment because of a balance of payments deficit and other problems of their own, applauded Big Lift because it bolstered their contention that they can readily airlift additional troops into Germany whenever they may be needed.

Still, as we said at the outset, Mr. McNamara is a determined man who has no intention of losing his \$20 million investment. Notwithstanding the statements by President Kennedy and Secretary Rusk about keeping up our strength in Europe, the US is still confronted by an unfavorable gold-flow balance which, to the extent that it affects our economy and the strength of the dollar around the world, poses a threat to NATO and our other military alliances. Discounting the emotional response precipitated in Germany by Big Lift, its military significance was not lost upon Europe's military and political leaders. It is a means of reducing US costs in Europe, while affording swift reinforcement in a period of tension. Thus, when Secretary McNamara meets with the NATO Council in Paris later this month, he can be expected to press for some kind of timetable for reducing our forces in NATO. Germany has committed twelve divisions to

NATO, the last of which will be in place by next summer. France has agreed to assign two more divisions to NATO—making four in all—as soon as they can be reequipped with modern weapons and made combat-ready sometime late in 1964. Then, at least, “on consultation with our major allies”—and barring any new flareup in East-West tensions—Mr. McNamara may reap a return on his investment.

Meanwhile, Big Lift points the way toward another strong possibility for reducing our gold-flow problem without going back on our recent promises. This is a plan, attributed to General Adams of STRICOM, to rotate entire divisions between the US and overseas. It would be a logical expansion of the Long Thrust exercises, in which forces of battle-group size have been airlifted from the US to swap places with counterparts overseas.

Under the Adams concept, MATS would fly a division overseas for a tour of from six months to a year, without dependents, replacing another which would be returned to the US, with dependents. Since there are on the average three dependents for each US serviceman overseas, bringing the dependents home would make possible substantial reductions in support personnel and facilities, as well as reducing the percentage of the servicemen's pay that goes into foreign pockets.

Even if he is temporarily stymied in Europe, Mr. McNamara may have plans for troop reductions in other parts of the world. Another division-strength Big Lift is planned for February, when MATS will airlift an infantry division to Korea to be married up with equipment stockpiled aboard a fleet of Liberty ships already in the Far East. There is talk, too, about still another division airlift to the Middle East, possibly at the same time as the Pacific exercise.

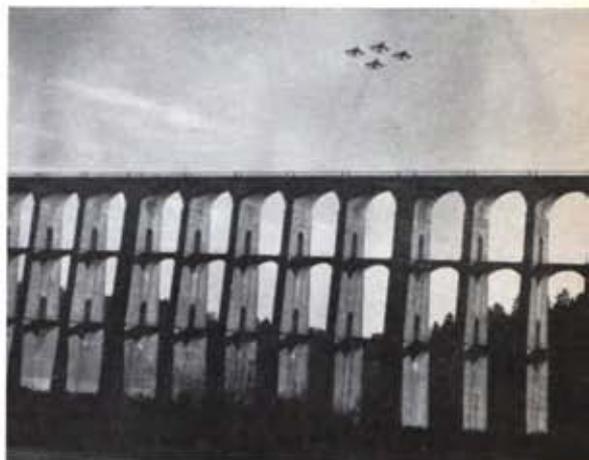
Based on its Big Lift performance, MATS could readily handle both airlifts simultaneously. About forty percent of its active-duty transport resources were used in Big Lift. General Kelly told reporters that with present equipment MATS could airlift ten divisions to Europe in a thirty-day period under Big Lift ground rules.

As of now, the US must rely on prepositioned equipment in carrying out its large-scale deployments. In Big Lift, men of the 2d Armored carried with them some 3.4 million pounds of baggage and light weapons. To transport the full equipment of an armored division would require an airlift capacity of thirty-two million pounds. This astronomical figure will be within reach when MATS acquires its Lockheed C-141A StarLifters, now in production, and no problem at all if and when the huge CX-4, follow-on to the C-133 Cargomaster, comes along in a few years.

Thus Big Lift, for all its shortcomings, was an impressive demonstration of how far the US has come in developing global mobility for ground forces, and how far we have yet to go in achieving truly mobile strike forces. For that alone, it should be worth the cost in money. But it is foolhardy to conclude that the narrow assumptions on which Big Lift was predicated provide valid reasons now to pull back ready forces facing Communists along the border. That would put added strain on the already strained NATO alliance, and, in the long run, cost much more.—END



With air-ground maneuvers taking place as close as ten miles to the Communist border, USAF fighter and reconnaissance crews work out mission flight plans with special care.



Supersonic F-105 Thunderchiefs of 333d Fighter Squadron en route to maneuver zone fly over historic Roman-built bridge at Chaumont, France.



STRICOM's Lt. Gen. B. K. Holloway, right, views test with General Burba and RCAF's Air Vice Marshal R. A. Cameron of NATO.