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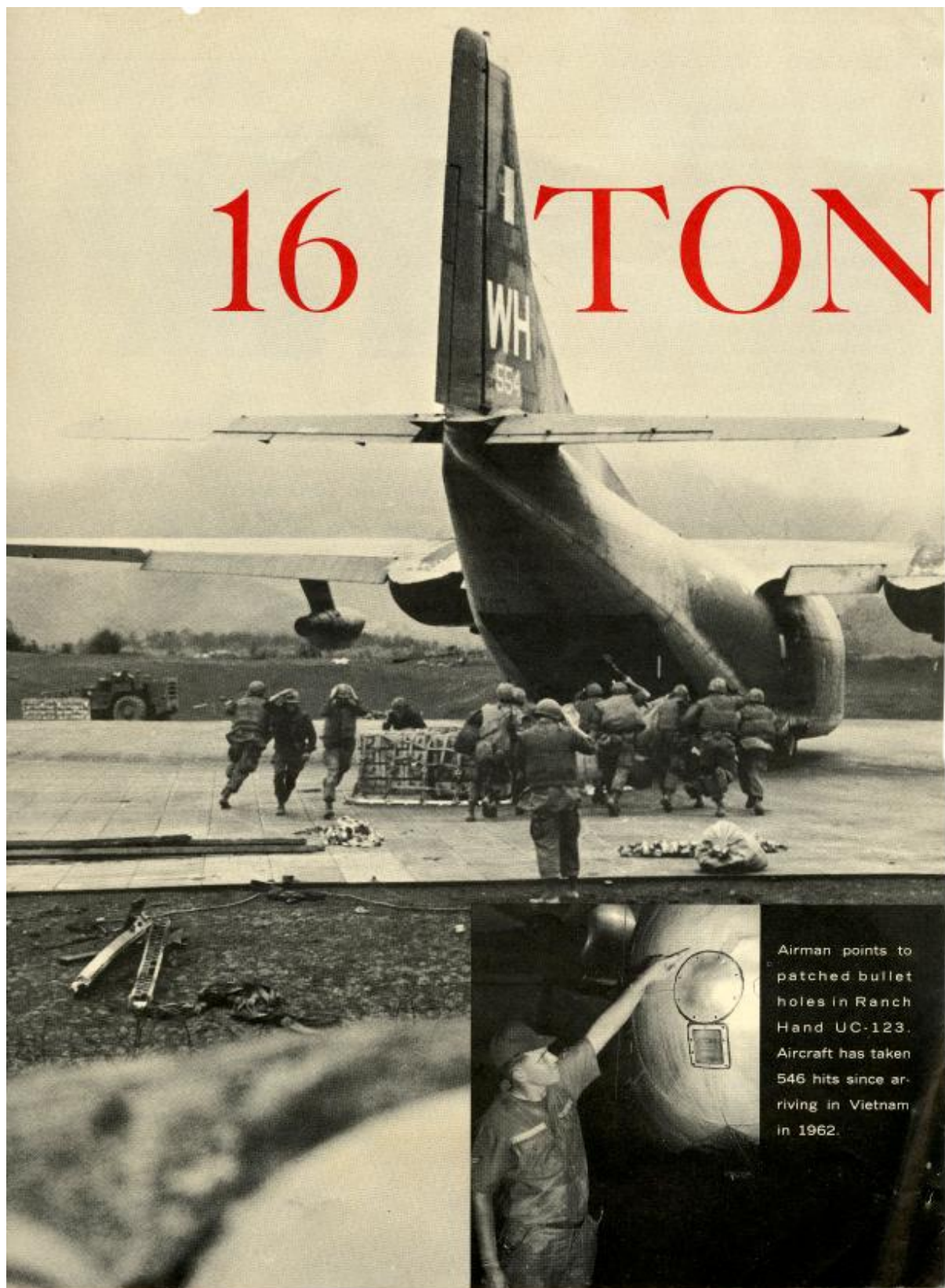
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16 TON



Airman points to patched bullet holes in Ranch Hand UC-123. Aircraft has taken 546 hits since arriving in Vietnam in 1962.

S... •and what do I get?

Lt Col Robert F. Erbe,
Directorate of Aerospace Safety



Yeah! Tons of ammunition, indigenous type personnel, Viet Cong, cows, chickens, pigs, dried fish, R&R troops—tons. The only, only machine we could be talking about is the C-123K Provider—the basic Fairchild C-123 that has been operating in RVN since the beginning of the Vietnam war.

A normal day's work for the Provider is 16-20 tons of very diversified cargo, from pretty, sweet-smelling movie stars to boxes of dried squid. The average sortie is 40 to 50 minutes and you fly an average of 6 to 10 a day. Ninety-nine per cent are flown under a tactical VFR flight plan. The average flying time per day is five hours with a high

of 10 being logged. The days are long, starting at 0430 and ending as the sun goes down. Very little C-123 flying is done at night; that is when important maintenance is accomplished. The key to moving people and supplies on time safely starts with a well-maintained, airworthy aircraft. C-123 maintenance in RVN is accomplished every night by dedicated personnel subjected to the routine harassment of VC rocket attacks.

The worldly experience of the C-123 personnel is fantastic. Majors with doctor's degrees, fresh out of graduate school, back to the cockpit types; lieutenant colonels just out of war college, crewed with brand new

C-123 taking off from strip at Khe Sanh. Aircraft has been backbone of airlift in Vietnam. Noise from jet engines causes combat photographer to protect his ears.



Some cargo is dropped by parachute, some by aircraft landing and discharging cargo. Conditions determine method.



second lieutenant pilots right out of flying school. On the flight line maintenance experience also varies. There are chief master sergeants with years of practical experience as well as new three-levels direct from tech schools. Molding this vast varied experience into an efficient safe operation is one big continuous task aggravated by the tremendous personnel turnover in RVN.

Taking all of these people out of their normal stateside environment for one year and placing them in a strange country to perform as a team was and is an experience no C-123 crewman will forget, no matter how hard he tries. To insure accident-free operation, personnel must remain as close to their stateside environment as possible. Here are

some of the actions taken within the C-123 units in RVN:

- Flips were improved in 1967 to a real stateside operation. The new Tactical Airdrome Directory was a godsend to the new pilots. Radials and distance from the nearest TAC-AN are on each picture of the RVN base. The picture shows landmarks, runway orientation, gradient, crown, hazards, frequencies, ground fire information, etc. New publications of the Tactical Airdrome Directory were received by the C-123 pilots like the new Playboy Magazine. Old copies were never thrown away and were used over and over for training.

- Flip also put out a VFR map of RVN that was as good or better than stateside. Four maps, front and



back covered all of RVN in detail.

- Victor numbers are used instead of base names. Many of them are very difficult to pronounce and some bases have two or three names. PAX and cargo have been delivered to the wrong base because of the multi- and similar base names.

- In-country (RVN) IP and pilot checkout time was reduced considerably, based on the pilot's past experience, thus attaining a greater productivity for the year in Vietnam. Stan/eval (including instrument) checks, route checks, field checks—all must meet stateside standards.

Stateside operation was not attained in living conditions, transportation to and from work, and off-duty recreation.

Commanders are doing a great deal to improve these conditions but still they are the greatest irritants. Crewmembers develop ways to overcome these irritants but only through job satisfaction can they continue to produce outstanding results and airmanship.

Frequently during a critical resupply mission combat conditions will require immediate operational procedural changes. For example, how can you land 1000 feet down on a 2900 foot, 40 foot wide, wet dirt strip, avoiding ground fire, reverse the recip engines (which shuts down the jets), offload 44 Marines with all their combat gear, onload 58 Marines with all their equipment,

and four KIAS, restart the jets, get airborne in *one* minute, and comply with all checklist items? Obviously, the checklist was not developed for such conditions and mission requirements demanded checklist modifications on the spot. Each critical resupply mission was given a special briefing, a combat checklist and flimsy, yet one crew, 44 PAX, and three C-123s were lost. Thank goodness such critical resupply missions were definitely the unusual.

The hauling of 16 tons in a C-123K in RVN makes you another day older and your RVN tour a very long year older. What do you get? Two rows of ribbons and a year of flying experience like you'll never forget. ★



Crews at Work—Aircraft commander checks map during shuttle to isolated forward area; loadmaster secures cargo destined for Special Forces camp; low altitude delivery of concertina wire. Heavy gloves protect hands. Left, ammo delivery to Army troops at Bu Dop airfield.

