

weapon. It became immediately obvious that the only practical means of doing this would be to fly supplies from the Assam Valley of far northeastern India easterly across far north Burma over a southeastern portion of the Himalaya Mountains, where mountains reached as high as 16,000MSL, then southeasterly into Yunnan Province of China, a distance on that route of around 575 miles. This route was referred to as the Able Route. This route was well north of the Japanese forces in Burma but unfortunately was within range of Japanese fighter aircraft.

This operation had to be developed from scratch. With 27 converted Douglas DC-3 aircraft taken from our domestic airlines the Army's 1st Ferry Squadron, with support personnel and attached to the US Army 10th AF in India for logistical support, begin operations in May 1942. It immediately began obvious that an aircraft with more capability than these was needed if the operation was to accomplish its mission.

Enter the 4 engine Consolidated C-87 aircraft in a limited way (a converted B-24) in December 1942 and the Curtiss C-46 in May 1943 which was to become the backbone of the Hump operation for the next 2 ½ years. The C-46 was initially developed as the Curtiss CW-20 and first flown in March 1940. It was developed by Curtiss for the purpose of being a domestic commercial airliner. When the U. S. Army first looked at it for Hump service it was far from being completely tested and ready for such an operation.

However, the war would not permit exhaustive testing and the Army asked for immediate production of the aircraft to be used primarily in the CBI. Unfortunately the first operations of the aircraft on the Hump proved to be disastrous and a number of the new aircraft and crews were lost. But after some months of operation the aircraft was modified and improved to the point that it became an outstanding aircraft for the purpose.

During its day the C-46 was the largest twin engine aircraft flying. It flew higher and carried approximately twice the load of a DC-3 and its successor the C-47. It was unpressurized and cruised at around 175MPH. It was a great instrument aircraft and the two staged supercharged 2000HP R-2800 engines that carried it were among the best used during the war.

I can speak of this aircraft from personal experience. I made 87 round trips over the Hump in it, flying in all kind of weather, both day and night. We flew the aircraft normally at 48,000 pounds gross but on occasion at 50,000 pounds, not much by today's standards. I have seen this aircraft bouncing like a cork on water, glowing along the wings and at the prop tips with Saint Elmo's fire, and raindrops sparkling on the windshield like fireflies. I was very proud to have had the opportunity to fly her. She was very kind to me.

So it is with pride that I observe her here today, placed next to mountains that were her initial home. May she remain a part of this World War II aircraft display for many years to come. And may the Cadets here at the Academy come to have the respect for her that those who flew her did. She did great things in her time.

Thank you for being here with us today.



Attending Group With C-46 Sculpture in Background