

The Military Air Transport Service: A first step toward jointness in the United States military,
1948-1966

by

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B.S., United States Air Force Academy, 2019

A THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2020

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Abstract

Established in 1948, the Military Air Transport Service (MATS) was the first joint command in the United States Department of Defense (DOD) and became a critical first step toward promoting jointness in the United States military. Combining air transport personnel and assets of the United States Air Force and the United States Navy into a single command, the tone in the MATS establishment sharply contrasted with the intense interservice rivalry within the United States military during the late 1940s and early 1950s. At the same time that generals, admirals, and government officials battled over roles, missions, and other resources for their respective services in Washington D.C., MATS proved its effectiveness as a joint command by completing several demanding airlifts—from saving the city of Berlin from a Soviet blockade to establishing the United States' northernmost air base in the Arctic Circle. Nevertheless, as the importance of strategic airlift for the United States military grew, old problems of rivalry between the Air Force and the Navy and a battle in Congress with the Air Transport Association of America drove MATS toward reorganization into the Air Force's Military Airlift Command (MAC) in 1966.

Despite its status as an Air Force command, MAC continued MATS' joint legacy by providing air transport for the other services during the Vietnam War. Yet, it was not until 1986 when experiences garnered by the DOD from failures during the Vietnam War and other operations during the early 1980s resulted in a sweeping reorganization of the DOD under the Goldwater-Nichols Act. When the reorganization of the Defense Department established the United States Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) in 1987 as one of the eleven joint combatant commands, the long road to jointness in the United States military—that had started in 1948 with MATS—was complete.

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Acknowledgements

I owe a great many thanks to all the individuals who have supported me during the writing of this thesis and my graduate studies. I'd like to start by thanking my major professor, Dr. Donald Mrozek, who provided invaluable guidance and mentorship that has honed and focused my writing ability as a historian. I also greatly enjoyed our conversations about air power during our meetings and I hope to achieve even a fraction of your knowledgeability on the subject someday. I'm extremely grateful for your support. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Michael Krysko and Dr. Mary Elizabeth Walters, for providing their efforts to my thesis and graduate studies. I have learned a great deal from their instruction and feedback during my time at Kansas State University. I would also like to thank my professors and instructors back at the United States Air Force Academy's Department of History for their years of mentorship and support which allowed me to have the opportunity to attend graduate school. I look forward to returning home to teach the cadets!

Additionally, I want to thank my fellow graduate students for welcoming me to the university and providing a sounding board for my many ideas as I worked on my thesis. From providing peer feedback on assignments to catching a Wildcat football game, they made my experience at K-State a great one. To Alex and Thomas, I'm going to miss running around Manhattan with you guys.

Finally, I owe all my success to my family who have been with me every step of the way. From their encouragement of my love of aviation to instilling in me the values of hard work and determination, I truly could not have done this without them. Through their love and dedication, I know I can achieve whatever it is I set my mind to.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to Mom, Dad, and Caroline. Thanks for always supporting my goals and aspirations in everything I do.

The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the United States Air Force, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

Introduction: The Pursuit of Unification and Jointness

One of the lessons which have most clearly come from the costly and dangerous experience of this war is that there must be unified direction of land, sea and air forces at home as well as in all other parts of the world where our Armed Forces are serving.

—President Harry S. Truman, Special Message to the Congress Recommending the
Establishment of a Department of National Defense

In the early morning hours of 9 November 1948, a silvery four-engine transport aircraft descended through a low-hanging winter fog toward the runway of Rhein-Main airfield in Frankfurt, Germany. As the aircraft touched down and taxied to its assigned parking spot on the airfield's ramp, the lettering "U.S. Navy" adorning the plane's tail greeted the waiting United States Air Force (USAF) ground crews. The United States Navy (USN) R5D transport plane piloted by Lieutenant Richard Gerszeuski signaled the arrival of the Navy's Air Transport Squadrons Six (VR-6) and Eight (VR-8) as part of a growing fleet of aircraft dedicated to the intensive effort to lift the Soviet blockade around Berlin.¹ The Navy's arrival at Rhein-Main also signaled a new chapter in American military history, the operational debut of the United States' first joint command, the Military Air Transport Service.²

Allowing a Navy plane to operate out of an Air Force base was an unusual concept in the years just after World War II, yet joint operations became the norm for the United States military in the 21st century. The idea of jointness proved to be so prevalent in American military doctrine that seven Unified Geographic and four Functional Combatant Commands came to oversee the

¹ "Navy Wings Over Berlin," *Naval Aviation News*, March 1949, 3.

² Brian D. Laslie, *Architect of Air Power: General Laurence S. Kuter and the Birth of the US Air Force* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017), 128.

United States' service branches' combined assets during military operations. Throughout this thesis, the term "jointness" fits the definition provided by the Department of Defense's *Joint Publication 1: Doctrine of the Armed Forces of the United States* (2017):

The Armed Forces of the United States have embraced "jointness" as their fundamental organizing construct at all echelons. Jointness implies cross-Service combination wherein the capability of the joint force is understood to be synergistic, with the sum greater than its parts (the capability of individual components).³

Whether through combat support, logistical support, or any other form of cooperation, the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Space Force, and Coast Guard are required to seek opportunities to ensure their fellow services' success.⁴ This active push for cooperation and jointness was uncommon and unexpected before the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 when the joint force concept truly came into being.⁵ Nevertheless, the idea of a joint command did not suddenly appear after 1986. The precedent was set just after the end of World War II to the formation of the Military Air Transport Service.

Established in June 1948, the Military Air Transport Service (MATS) was a critical first step towards combining the assets and resources of two separate service branches for the first time. Because of redundancies in their respective air transport commands, the USAF and USN became the candidates to establish a joint command. Previously, the separate service branches

³Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, JP 1 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 201, I-2).

⁴ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, I-2.

⁵ S. Rebecca Zimmerman et al., *Movement and Maneuver: Culture and the Competition for Influence Among the U.S. Military Services* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2019), 11.

only coordinated their operations with one another when it was absolutely necessary and they were directed to do so, such as what occurred in the Pacific Theater between the Army and the Navy during World War II. However, an official joint command where cooperation was an expectation had never existed in the history of the United States military. MATS served as an experiment in the future of joint warfare and whether it was possible to have two services coordinate their efforts toward a common objective under the same command structure. It is also essential to consider that MATS' establishment came when relations between the Air Force and Navy were at an extreme low point. Interservice rivalry is what occurs, as explained by Don Snider in his article "The US Military in Transition to Jointness" (1996), "when the services, each following its own interests and ideology, compete within DOD [Department of Defense] for peacetime roles and wartime missions—and thus for resources—that they believe accrue to their unique strategic approach to war fighting."⁶ Intense disagreements during the hearings leading to the National Security Act of 1947 and heated arguments leading up to the infamous Revolt of the Admirals that came to a climax in 1949 marked what was arguably the worst period of interservice rivalry in American military history.

At the very time when senior leaders, politicians, and journalists fanned the flames of rivalry between the Air Force and the Navy, joint efforts to establish the Military Air Transport Service demonstrated that cooperation could be possible at the operational level. In fulfilling the shared mission of global airlift in support of all United States military branches, airmen and sailors dropped their differences and worked together as a united team. This decision to act united was later defined by *Joint Publication 1* as the concepts of unity of command and unity of

⁶ Don M. Snider, "The US Military in Transition to Jointness: Surmounting Old Notions of Interservice Rivalry," *Air and Space Power Journal* 10, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 18.

effort. Unity of command is the condition in which all applicable forces operate under a single commander who directs them towards the pursuit of a common objective.⁷ Unity of effort is the principle that all forces, “although not necessarily part of the same command structure,” understand and operate toward a common objective through coordination and cooperation.⁸ Through this venture in joint airlift operations, the Air Force and Navy edged toward a greater understanding of unity of command and effort in a period when interservice rivalries defined most relations between the military services. Thus, MATS’ early successes as a joint Air Force and Navy command challenge the traditional view that the two services rarely cooperated toward a common objective early in their relationship. From serving as an arm of American humanitarianism to aiding in the establishment of defensive barriers against the Soviet Union, MATS established a foundation for practical cooperation between two separate service branches—providing the possibility for other future joint commands.

The historiography surrounding the specific study of MATS is limited as most historians prefer to focus on one aspect of MATS rather than the overall history of the command. This includes operations in which MATS participated, MATS’ partnership with other commands such as the Strategic Air Command (SAC), and other related topics. In many works focusing on American air power, MATS receives little attention despite its critical role in transporting materials and personnel for the early Department of Defense (DOD). Melvin Deaile’s *Always at War: Organizational Culture in Strategic Air Command, 1946-1962* (2018) only briefly mentions SAC’s partnership with MATS, noting that during one of SAC’s deployments to the

⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, V-1.

⁸ Ibid.

Korean theater “SAC still required the support of the Military Air Transport Service’s cargo planes to move the units completely to their operating locations in the Pacific.”⁹ It is not mentioned that MATS was responsible for the movement of all of SAC’s nuclear missiles for its role in the nuclear triad.¹⁰ Brian Laslie’s *Architect of Air Power: General Laurence S. Kuter and the Birth of the US Air Force* (2017) places MATS in the framework of its first commander, General Kuter. Laslie credits MATS for proving itself as a capable force for global airlift, especially after its performance in Berlin, but MATS remained only a section of this work ultimately dedicated to following General Kuter’s career.

Neglecting the story of MATS can be attributed to some military historians wanting to focus their discussions solely on combat forces, rather than dedicate large portions of their work to logistics and air transport for combat operations. Even works that aimed to discuss the origins of jointness in the US military chose to leave out the Department of Defense’s first joint command. James Winnefeld and Dana Johnson’s *Joint Air Operations: Pursuit of Unity in Command and Control, 1942-1991* (1993), which seeks to explain the development of joint command of American air power assets, makes no mention of the Air Force and Navy choosing to integrate their air transport commands in 1948. Thomas A. Cardwell’s *Command Structure for Theater Warfare: The Quest for Unity of Command* (1984) makes extensive mention of the Department of Defense’s proposal for the creation of unified combatant commands—dedicating

⁹ Melvin G. Deaile, *Always at War: Organizational Culture in Strategic Air Command, 1946-1962*. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 126.

¹⁰ Stanley M. Ulanoff, *MATS: The Story of the Military Air Transport Service* (New York: Franklin Watts Inc., 1964), 89.

a decent portion of his work to discussing each service’s respective doctrines and views—but any mention of MATS as the first joint command structure is absent.

Perhaps the works most focused on MATS itself are a short book written by a lieutenant colonel with the U.S. Army Reserve who had a fascination with airplanes and the memoir of MATS Commander General William H. Tunner. Stanley Ulanoff’s *MATS: The Story of the Military Air Transport Service* (1964) aims to cover the entire history of the landmark command, from its trial by fire in Berlin to the first deliveries of C-141 Starlifters in 1964. “The pages that follow tell the dramatic story of the Military Air Transport Service . . . a global team living up to the motto ‘anything, anytime, anywhere,’” Ulanoff states at the start of his work, and for the most part he provides the most comprehensive overview of MATS in a published work.¹¹ Tunner’s memoir *Over the Hump* provides some of the best late-era MATS information outside of the Berlin Airlift and the Korean War. In describing his time as the commander of MATS, Tunner vehemently defends the effectiveness of MATS after Congressional inquiries started to question whether the budget could allow for a large military transport command as well as more funding for “massive retaliation” forces. In Tunner’s eyes, MATS deserved far more credit as a command that had to “practice and perform at the same time,” when compared with other major commands that could only “practice their D-Day mission.”¹² There is more to MATS than simply the Berlin Airlift and a few airlifts that the command carried out during the 1950s and ‘60s. As Tunner and Ulanoff showed, MATS set a precedent for the Department of Defense that deserves closer inspection.

¹¹ Ulanoff, *MATS: The Story of the Military Air Transport Service*, 15.

¹² William H. Tunner, *Over the Hump* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1964), 286-287.

The partnership in airlift between the Air Force and the Navy developed in stages. This thesis will first delve into the origins of the rivalry between the two services in the aftermath of World War II. The United States Army Air Forces' desire to establish an Air Force independent of the Army drew significant criticism from the Navy, which viewed the Air Force as a threat to naval aviation and as a challenge to the value of conventional naval forces. Senior officers from both sides argued over what the National Security Act should say and, after it went into effect, argued over what it meant. There was only a brief pause in the heated exchanges when the National Military Establishment (NME) including an independent Air Force came into being in September 1947. Still, tensions between the new Air Force and the Navy continued to intensify. The thesis will then examine the process that led to the establishment of MATS, including the Truman Air Policy Commission, the selection of General Laurence Kuter as the first commander, and the proposed structure of MATS.

The second chapter examines three operations of the Military Air Transport Service as the first unified command in the NME and later DOD. The chapter opens with MATS' trial by fire during Operation VITTLES—the allied airlift to save Berlin from the Soviet blockade. MATS was instrumental in aiding United States Air Forces Europe (USAFE) in breaking the Soviet blockade of Berlin, proving in the process that the Air Force and Navy were capable of joint operations.¹³ This operation will also be contrasted with the events leading up to and during what is known as the “Revolt of the Admirals.” The second operation examined is Operation BLUE JAY—the construction of Thule Air Base in Greenland. Operating in concert with another unified command—the Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS)—MATS once again

¹³ Brendan P. Mulready, "Berlin Airlift Proved Unification Can Work." *Proceedings* 76, no. 3 (March 1950): 283.

demonstrated its capabilities by aiding in constructing the United States' northernmost installation.¹⁴ The success of BLUE JAY enabled Thule AB to become a crucial installation for providing early missile warning and space surveillance against Soviet aggression. The last operation to be analyzed is Operation SAFE HAVEN—the MATS evacuation of over 14,000 Hungarian refugees from Austria following the Soviet Union's crushing of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.¹⁵ SAFE HAVEN became both a massive humanitarian evacuation and another powerful demonstration of airlift as a tool of diplomacy. These three operations were selected for their impact on the success of MATS as a joint command.

The third chapter will survey the later years of MATS after the completion of Operation SAFE HAVEN in 1957 and will attempt to explain the factors that led to the Navy's decision to pull its assets from the command, leading to MATS' reorganization into the Military Airlift Command (MAC), solely directed by the Air Force, in 1966. MATS came under fire in 1958 from civilian authorities and newspapers alike after allegations were raised by civilian airlines that the command was becoming too dependent on use of the Civil Reserve Air Fleet for MATS operations and that civilian airlines should be used more substantially for routine military air traffic.¹⁶ General Tunner went to battle with Congress over the effectiveness of the command and eventually secured its future after numerous rounds of debates.¹⁷ The Navy also grew increasingly insecure about its support of MATS after Operation BIG LIFT demonstrated transport aircraft's ability to rapidly deploy an entire army division overseas faster than transport

¹⁴ "Greenland Run Tests VR-6 Pilot Mettle," *Naval Aviation News*, December 1952, 19.

¹⁵ Milton Krims, "Operation SAFE HAVEN: Air Bridge to Freedom," *Air Force Magazine*, June 1957, 71.

¹⁶ "Shipping News and Notes: M. A. T. S. Criticized," *The New York Times*, January 9, 1958, 66.

¹⁷ Tunner, *Over the Hump*, 291-292.

ships ever hoped to achieve. In addition, MATS' support of SAC's role in the nuclear triad only further irritated the Navy as claims by SAC of its nuclear capabilities mirrored the fighting between the two services in the late 40s.¹⁸ Because of its support for the SAC mission, MATS found itself in the middle of the SAC-Navy feud. These issues combined with the increasingly limited role the Navy held in MATS by the early '60s resulted in the command deactivating as the Navy took back control of its transport assets and the Air Force reorganized the remnants of MATS into MAC, officially ending MATS' status as a joint command after eighteen years of service. MATS did not disband because it had failed to achieve what it had set out to do. The Navy did not pull out because the command was a failure. Old grudges and a desire to return to a previous status quo were what ended MATS.

This thesis will attempt to convey the story of a command that attempted to promote jointness between two military services of the United States during a time when many "old guard" officers were unwilling to buy into the vision of a joint force. All too often the first joint command in the modern DOD's history and what it achieved are passed over. From providing relief supplies to an earthquake-stricken Chile to paradropping combat gear as part of a massive exercise, MATS was there.

¹⁸ Hanson W. Baldwin, "The Fighting Ship Still Sails the Sea," *The New York Times*, January 26, 1964, 87.

Chapter 1: The Rivalry and the First Step

After World War II, many U.S. government officials and military personnel saw a need for improved cooperation within the United States military beyond the system practiced by the armed forces during the war. Closer scrutiny of the command structure of the United States military and a desire for unity of command eventually gave rise to the extraordinary experiment with MATS. But in order to understand the significance of MATS' establishment in 1948, we must first understand the intensity of interservice rivalry between the services which shaped the formation of MATS.

World War II ended in nuclear fire delivered in the form of two atomic bombs dropped by United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) aircraft. After USAAF strategic bombers of the Twentieth Air Force carried out the atomic bombings of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945, some senior USAAF officers saw the moment as an opportunity to push hard for an independent United States Air Force.¹⁹ Even before the dropping of the atomic bombs, USAAF already found itself engaged in a bitter debate within the United States military over the issue of independence for the fledgling air service. During the interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s proponents of air power such as Brigadier General William “Billy” Mitchell and his followers challenged not only the sufficiency but even the relevance of traditional land and sea forces. On 20 July 1921 Army Air Service aircraft demonstrated their capability, bombing and sinking the decommissioned German battleship *Ostfriesland*. This hardened Mitchell's resolve to secure an independent air force, because, he insisted, “the air

¹⁹ Phillip S. Meilinger, *Bomber: The Formation and Early Years of Strategic Air Command*, (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 2012), 82.

force will constitute the first line of defense of the country.”²⁰ A bitter rivalry developed between the Army’s airmen and the Navy over Mitchell’s views. The Navy resisted having its importance challenged, and the Army Air Service refused to be relegated to a mere support role for the greater United States military.

During World War II, the Army Air Forces saw its chance to finally win the decades-old fight for its independence. Proponents of air power had long argued that strategic bombardment was the key to winning a conflict without costly land battles or massive fleet engagements. However, results from the Combined Bomber Offensive against Germany did not fully prove this concept since ground forces still had to take Berlin to force a German surrender. On the other hand, the surrender of Japan after two of its cities were decimated by air-dropped atomic weapons presented a stronger case for a strengthened air force. The Commander of the Army Air Forces, General of the Army Henry “Hap” Arnold, with the advice of USAAF’s public relations department, pushed his staff to promote a publicity campaign that emphasized what the Twentieth Air Force had accomplished against Japan.²¹ General Arnold also encouraged his fellow USAAF commanders—most notably Generals Carl Spaatz, Ira Eaker, and George C. Kenney—to promote the view that air power was the United States’ predominant method of warfare, that USAAF was the nation’s premier force for employing air power, and that USAAF’s strategic bombardment of Europe and Japan had significantly sped the Allies’ victory in World War II.²² Chief of Staff for the Twentieth Air Force Major General Lauris Norstad, another

²⁰ Brigadier General William Mitchell, quoted in “SINKING THE OSTFRIESLAND,” *The New York Times*, July 21, 1921, 5.

²¹ Jeffrey G. Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight for Naval Aviation, 1945-1950* (Washington D.C.: Brassey’s, 1998), 45.

²² Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight for Naval Aviation, 1945-1950*, 46.

senior officer who sensed that momentum for an independent Air Force had shifted in USAAF's favor following the atomic bombings, wrote:

With the imminent closing of the Japanese war so closely upon the heels of V-E Day, the emphasis in the activities of the Hq AAF [Headquarters Army Air Forces] needs to be on planning for the future of the Air Forces. To accomplish that effectively we need young, energetic, capable officers of varied backgrounds. The sooner we get those officers on the job the better for the Air Forces, as the jockeying for position is running along at a fast pace.²³

The Army Air Forces could argue that nuclear weapons made strategic bombing even more effective than it had been during the war—just one bomber carrying an atomic bomb was needed to inflict massive damage. The Army Air Forces could also argue that it was the more cost-effective service than the traditional Army and Navy since air power was the nation's sole method of delivering atomic weapons to the battlefield. Thus, Norstad's forecast was correct—the end of World War II kicked off a scramble among the service branches for resources and influence when the United States reassessed its military. A fight among the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps for relevance and the Army Air Forces for independence was looming.

Jockeying for Position

The issue of “unification” of the armed forces took shape in 1946 after conflicting interpretations between the Department of War and the Department of the Navy about combat experience during World War II demonstrated that cooperation between the two departments was lacking.²⁴ The services and their respective departments practiced unity of command in some

²³ Major General Lauris Norstad to Lieutenant General John K. Cannon, August 14, 1945, Personal-1945 (1), Box 23, Pentagon Series, Norstad Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

²⁴ Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight for Naval Aviation*, 32-33.

forms throughout the war, but their command structures remained separated. According to the Army, this prevented the most effective planning and communication between the different services. Prior to the end of the war, the War Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff gave their support for a single national defense department to address coordination issues and oversee the nation's ground, sea, and air forces. The Department of the Navy agreed that changes to the structure of national defense were necessary to improve coordination and communication, but it leaned toward a structure without a single defense department to assert control over the service branches.²⁵ Any proposed additional oversight threatened the Navy's ability to operate independently.

A plan to reorganize the armed forces was eventually enacted as the National Security Act of 1947.²⁶ The bill called for the unification of the armed forces within a single National Military Establishment headed by a single Secretary of National Defense (later changed to Secretary of Defense). The measure drew both praise and criticism across the services. The most controversial aspect of the proposal concerned the official establishment of an independent United States Air Force as a separate service responsible for overseeing the United States' land-based aircraft. The Navy was disturbed that the Air Force, because land-based bombers were the only viable method of delivering atomic weapons at the time, possessed the potential to have sole access to the nation's growing atomic arsenal.²⁷ Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz expressed both this and another concern in his testimony to the Senate Naval Affairs Committee:

²⁵ Robert E. McClendon, *Unification of the Armed Forces: Administrative and Legislative Developments, 1945-1949*, (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1952), 3.

²⁶ Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight for Naval Aviation, 1945-1950*, 52.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 35.

There are other indications that some senior officers of the Army Air Forces desire a separate Air Force ultimately exercising complete authority over all matters concerning aviation including training, research, and production not only of aircraft but of all weapons which pass through the air. From other statements which have been made it is evident that there exists a lack of appreciation of the importance of the Navy, its past accomplishments and its future capabilities.²⁸

Nimitz's testimony represented many others' fears about the Air Force and the possibility that it could get control of all military aviation assets. Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King joined Nimitz in opposing the independence of the Army Air Forces because it meant separation rather than unity. In his testimony before the Senate Naval Affairs Committee, King remarked: "I wish to record my strong opposition to the clear tendency of the present Army Air Forces to establish a monopoly of the use of air power in the common defense."²⁹ According to King, the Army Air Forces' desire to control all military aviation assets, including those assigned to naval aviation, defeated the purposes of promoting unity. The Navy was not keen on surrendering control of one of its most powerful combat assets to another service. King further explained: "The net result of the consolidation proposed would seem to be, paradoxically, enough, further separation."³⁰ Despite resistance, USAAF leaders refused to bend to the Navy's opposition.

²⁸ Statement by Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Chief of Naval Operations before the Senate Naval Affairs Committee at Hearing on S. 2044, May 3, 1946, File No.1 Unification Statements, Testimonies 1945-1946, Box 28, Pentagon Series, Norstad Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

²⁹ Statement by Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King before Senate Naval Affairs Committee at Hearings S. 2044, May 7, 1946, File No.1 Unification Statements, Testimonies 1945-1946, Box 28, Pentagon Series, Norstad Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

³⁰ Statement by Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King before Senate Naval Affairs Committee at Hearings S. 2044, May 7, 1946, File No.1 Unification Statements, Testimonies 1945-1946, Box 28, Pentagon Series, Norstad Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

The Army and Navy delivered a joint report concerning the progress of the National Security bill to President Truman on 31 May 1946 and a follow-on oral presentation to the President occurred on 4 June 1946. During these two briefings President Truman was told that the service branches had agreed on eight elements of the bill concerning roles for the Council of Common Defense, National Security Resources Board, and Joint Chiefs of Staff; the omission of a single chief of staff and the formation of the Central Intelligence Agency; and reorganization of the procurement and supply, research agencies, and military education and training systems.³¹ Truman noted that he believed “that we have come a long way in narrowing the zone of disagreement which had previously existed between the services. The full understanding reached on eight vital aspects of unification is a significant accomplishment.”³² The services still disagreed on four points—the extent of Air Force control over aviation assets, the continued existence of the Marine Corps, the parity of three military departments, and the creation of a single Department of National Defense to oversee the armed forces.³³ For these remaining points, President Truman expressed his stern belief that there should be three equal military departments organized under a single Department of National Defense; that the Marine Corps would continue to operate under the Navy; and that the Air Force would respect the boundaries of naval aviation by not exercising authority over Navy and Marine Corps aircraft.³⁴

³¹ Letter to the Secretaries of War and Navy on Unification of the Armed Forces by President Harry S. Truman, June 15, 1946, Public Papers, Library Collections, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO, USA.

³² Letter to the Secretaries of War and Navy on Unification of the Armed Forces by President Harry S. Truman, June 15, 1946, Public Papers, Library Collections, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO, USA.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

During the hearings leading to the National Security Act, the Army Air Forces targeted the Navy, claiming that the service placed self-interest before national security.³⁵ Norstad stated during his testimony before the Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments that the United States Strategic Bombing Survey had found that practicing unity of command resulted in fewer casualties with greater operational results; thus the military should undergo a reorganization that brought the service branches under a single authority.³⁶ General Dwight D. Eisenhower also supported unification, explaining his experiences in Europe. There, Eisenhower explained: “All agreed that single command in the field was essential; for my part this incontestable truth applied equally to the Washington management from which the orders for the field commander must come.”³⁷ Eisenhower also lent his reputation to the Air Force cause, arguing that it was necessary to recognize that the time for an independent Air Force had arrived. “This bill,” he said, “sets up the Air Force in its legitimate place and does something to recognize the paramount influence of air power upon modern warfare.”³⁸ The Army Air Forces pressed for its version of unification by claiming that it held the moral high ground against the Navy, which was said to prioritize their self-interest over the collective good in national defense.

³⁵ Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight for Naval Aviation, 1945-1950*, 46, 48.

³⁶ Statement of Major General Lauris Norstad, Director of Plans & Operations Division, War Department General Staff, before the Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Department, House of Representatives, File No. 2 Unification Statements, Testimonies 1947, Box 28, Pentagon Series, Norstad Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

³⁷ Testimony of General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower, Chief of Staff, United States Army before the Armed Services Committee, United States Senate on National Security Act of 1947, March 25, 1947, File No. 2 Unification Statements, Testimonies 1947, Box 28, Pentagon Series, Norstad Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

³⁸ Testimony of General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower, Chief of Staff, United States Army before the Armed Services Committee, United States Senate on National Security Act of 1947, March 25, 1947, File No. 2 Unification Statements, Testimonies 1947, Box 28, Pentagon Series, Norstad Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

It appeared from all the back-and-forth between the Army Air Forces and the Navy in the Senate hearings that neither side was willing to compromise its position. Eventually, however, it was the Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, who argued that the legislation in 1947 could be accepted without compromising his defense of the Navy's position:

I should like to repeat that this bill, in my opinion, provides an equitable and workable framework for the integration of all of the agencies of government concerned with national defense. Therefore, it prepares our country for modern warfare which is not only military, but is also economic and world-wide. Neither this bill nor any other can legislate a spirit of unity among the branches of our armed forces, but this bill is the result of a spirit of accommodation which is a better augury of unity than any legislative fiat. Therefore, our defense potential will be increased without endangering the corps spirit of any branch of the service and without weakening the democratic concept of civilian control over the military establishment. I hope this bill becomes law.³⁹

Forrestal's middle-ground approach to the debates provided an indication that compromise would be possible despite the Navy's strong opposition to what the Army Air Forces proposed. He believed some form of integration to be achievable and thought that the bill established a foundation for the services to gradually work toward a better understanding of unity of command. The bill would not be the end-all solution for interservice rivalry, but it would be a start.

After being passed through Congress, the bill arrived at Truman's desk. President Truman signed the National Security Act of 1947 into law with Congressional approval on 26 July 1947 creating the NME with three equal service departments—the Army, the Navy, and the

³⁹ Testimony of Secretary James Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy, Department of the Navy before the Armed Services Committee, United States Senate on National Security Act of 1947, March 18, 1947, File No. 2 Unification Statements, Testimonies 1947, Box 28, Pentagon Series, Norstad Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

Air Force.⁴⁰ The newly independent Air Force did not see the National Security Act of 1947 as the end of its fight against the other service branches, however. W. Barton Leach, an Army Air Force Major turned Harvard law professor, worked closely with General Norstad to develop a strategy for future use against the Navy should another interservice fight occur. Leach gave Norstad an explanation in a memorandum on 19 September 1947: “The principal lesson of the unification controversy is that the USAF will get results out of Congress proportionate to the education which it is able to impart to Congress.”⁴¹ Leach also recommended that the Air Force keep an updated file on members of Congress concerning their voting habits during the unification battle and work with each official who opposed the Air Force “to eliminate the cause of his disfavor and make him a supporter of the USAF in the performance of its national function.”⁴² Like the Cold War building between the United States and the Soviet Union in the background, if and when the next fight with the Navy occurred, the Air Force ensured its readiness to wage battle.

The Finletter Commission on Air Policy

Although the bill for the National Security Act was being finalized for the President’s signature, another opportune moment to push the unification effort forward appeared. In a letter dated 16 June 1947, Garrison Norton, Assistant Secretary of State and Chairman of the Air Coordinating Committee, alerted President Truman to the waning of the American aviation

⁴⁰ Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight for Naval Aviation, 1945-1950*, 52.

⁴¹ W. Barton Leach to Major General Lauris Norstad, September 19, 1947, Leach File (4), Box 21, Pentagon Series, Norstad Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

⁴² W. Barton Leach to Major General Lauris Norstad, September 19, 1947, Leach File (4), Box 21, Pentagon Series, Norstad Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

industry caused by the slowdown of industrial production after World War II.⁴³ The growing threat of the Soviet Union weighed on Truman and the strategic capabilities demonstrated by air power convinced Truman that a lagging aviation industry posed a significant threat to national security. On 18 July 1947 Truman replied to Horton:

I have read with great interest your letter of June 16, 1947, discussing the present condition of the aircraft manufacturing industry and recommending that I appoint a board of disinterested citizens to study the relationship of this industry to the national security and welfare. Your recommendation seems to me well taken. I have, therefore, appointed an Air Policy Commission with the request that it make an objective inquiry into our aviation policy in its broadest aspects.⁴⁴

Truman appointed a five-man committee headed by Thomas K. Finletter the same day, charging them to “make an objective inquiry into national aviation policies and problems, and to assist me in formulating an integrated national aviation policy.”⁴⁵ The President made sure to emphasize the importance of the commission’s mission:

The rapid development of aviation in recent years has made many of our former concepts out of date. At the same time, there exists a danger that our national security may be jeopardized and our economic welfare diminished through a lowered aircraft production and a failure of the aircraft industry to keep abreast of modern methods, with consequent retarding of the development of air transportation. There is an urgent need at this time for

⁴³ Letter to the Chairman of the Air Coordinating Committee by President Harry S. Truman, July 18, 1947, Public Papers, Library Collections, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO, USA.

⁴⁴ Letter to the Chairman of the Air Coordinating Committee by President Harry S. Truman, July 18, 1947, Public Papers, Library Collections, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO, USA.

⁴⁵ Letter Appointing Members to the Air Policy Commission by President Harry S. Truman, July 18, 1947, Public Papers, Library Collections, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO, USA.

an evaluation of the course which the United States should follow in order to obtain, for itself and the world, the greatest possible benefits from aviation.⁴⁶

Commonly called the Finletter Commission, this presidential board conducted a sweeping study of civilian and military aviation in the United States throughout the late summer and fall of 1947, searching for solutions to improve the innovation and efficiency of the American aviation industry.

An opportunity for furthering unification emerged during the Finletter Commission's investigation – one that would prove especially important in establishing a precedent for joint undertakings by the services. While analyzing the Air Force's and the Navy's aviation assets, the commission members came across what they believed to be a redundancy. Airlift operations conducted during World War II by the Army's Air Transport Command (ATC) and the Navy's Naval Air Transport Service (NATS) provided critical supplies for American forces across the globe.⁴⁷ The two transport commands continued to operate independently of each other in 1947 despite having essentially the same mission. Truman's desire to unify the armed forces guided the Finletter Commission's approach to the issue of two separate transport commands, and, as a result, the commission recommended "the consolidation of ATC and NATS into one Military Air Transport Service to handle all scheduled military transport services for the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force."⁴⁸ The commission also recommended that the consolidated transport service be supported by a larger commercial fleet of transport aircraft for emergency use as was done

⁴⁶ Letter Appointing Members to the Air Policy Commission by President Harry S. Truman, July 18, 1947, Public Papers, Library Collections, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, MO, USA.

⁴⁷ *Anything, Anywhere, Anytime: An Illustrated History of the Military Airlift Command, 1941-1991*, (Scott AFB, IL: AMC History Office, 1991), 64.

⁴⁸ Thomas K. Finletter, *Survival in The Air Age* (Washington D.C.: Government Publishing Office, 1948), 37.

during the war, continuing the civilian airlines' partnership with military air transportation. The Finletter Commission's final report, *Survival in the Air Age*, was delivered to Truman on 1 January 1948, setting in motion an effort to eliminate this redundancy between the Air Force and Navy.

The Finletter Commission's call to combine the Air Force's ATC and the Navy's NATS into a single transport service did not fall on deaf ears. Truman wanted to promote jointness among the services and to lessen the fighting between the Navy and the Air Force during the hearings for the National Security Act of 1947. According to a statement in the Air Force publication *The Story of MATS*, Truman's wishes encouraged Forrestal and the NME to create at least one example of unification between the two services.⁴⁹ Secretary of Defense Forrestal heeded the Finletter Commission's recommendation, and in early January 1948 he directed Air Force and Navy working groups to develop plans to combine the two transport services.⁵⁰ While representatives from both services investigated solutions for combining the two commands, Forrestal commenced his search for the leaders who would help set in motion the first joint command.

The Right Men for the Job

On 22 January 1948, Navy Secretary John L. Sullivan, Air Force Secretary Stuart Symington, and Secretary of Defense Forrestal met to discuss the selection of the new command's leadership.⁵¹ The choice would be important in establishing a strong precedent for

⁴⁹ *The Story of MATS, U. S. Air Force*, (Washington D.C.: Government Publishing Office, 1951), 4.

⁵⁰ *Anything, Anywhere, Anytime: An Illustrated History of the Military Airlift Command, 1941-1991*, 67.

⁵¹ Roger D. Launius, "Military Unification's Precursor: The Air Force and Navy Strategic Airlift Merger of 1948," *Air Power History* 39, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 27.

joint leadership of both airmen and sailors. The three men agreed that an Air Force officer would serve as the first commander, largely because the Air Force would make a more considerable contribution to the command. Symington recommended Major General Laurence S. Kuter to Forrestal as the officer who would oversee and take charge of the joint command, and Forrestal concurred with the recommendation. Kuter was still waiting on the result of his nomination by President Truman to head the Civil Aeronautics Board when he received notification that Forrestal was appointing him to command the proposed Military Air Transport Service.⁵² Kuter chose not to wait for the Senate's decision and instead accepted the position that kept him in a military uniform.⁵³

Symington's recommendation was an excellent one. Kuter brought a wealth of experience and tactfulness that would make him ideal for handling a joint command. Kuter had an impressive record; he was a 1927 graduate of West Point who had crossed from a field artillery commission into the Army Air Corps in 1930. He graduated at the top of his 1935 Air Corps Tactical School class and served as an instructor when, according to his close friend and classmate Major General Haywood S. Hansell, Kuter had his only run-in with the Navy:

Only once did Larry's sense of humor get him in serious trouble. He gave a lecture on the history of the Navy. The lecture was salted and spiced with humor, but taken quite literally it could be construed as a contention that the Navy was now superfluous and lacked the wit to know it. A Navy member of the class did not take kindly to the lesson, nor did he think it funny, and he reported the incident to the Chief of Naval Operations who, in turn, took it up with the Secretary of the Navy, who took it up with the Secretary of War, who took it up with the Chief of Staff of the Army, who took it up with the

⁵² Laslie, *Architect of Air Power: General Laurence S. Kuter and the Birth of the US Air Force*, 127.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 128.

Chief of the Air Corps, who took it up in drastic terms with the Commandant of the Air Corps Tactical School. The Chief of Air Corps demanded to know what disciplinary action was being taken. The whole maneuver became what is known in aeronautical terms as "dynamically unstable." It grew in violence and intensity with every sequence. There is no telling what would have become of the future four-star general if the Commandant, a great-hearted Irish gentleman by the name of Col. John F. Curry, had not replied by saying that he was the Commandant, that he was responsible for what went on in his command, and that if disciplinary action was contemplated it should fall on him. They don't make them like that very often.⁵⁴

Unlike his other classmates' dealings with the Navy after the war, "Larry's" incident paled in comparison. Kuter continued to impress regardless, earning himself a spot in the Air War Plans Division where he co-authored AWPD-1—the plan that formed the basis for the Combined Bomber Offensive.⁵⁵ From there, Kuter's wartime positions included several important assignments that set him up well for his future leadership of MATS. The most notable of these assignments were his service as one of General "Hap" Arnold's personal assistants and his time as Commanding General of USAAF Air Transport Command's Atlantic Division, where he oversaw the peacetime transition and consolidation of operations of several ATC bases.⁵⁶

Kuter was serving as the U.S. representative to the International Civil Aviation Organization when he was notified that Forrestal had appointed him. Kuter's background made him an ideal choice to lead an air transport command. Laslie notes in his assessment of Kuter that one of his traits was "the ability to keep the spotlight off himself" and work in the

⁵⁴ Haywood S. Hansell, "General Laurence S. Kuter, 1905-1979," *Aerospace Historian* 27, no. 2 (June 1980): 92.

⁵⁵ Laslie, *Architect of Air Power: General Laurence S. Kuter and the Birth of the US Air Force*, 48.

⁵⁶ *The Story of MATS, U. S. Air Force*, 18.

background without raising controversy.⁵⁷ Given that tensions were already high between the Air Force and Navy, Kuter’s personality would be crucial in getting the two services to support a joint culture in the proposed command. Forrestal made sure to express his personal confidence in Kuter as one of the “non-political working airmen” to successfully foster cooperation between the two services.⁵⁸

With Kuter heading MATS, Forrestal nominated Rear Admiral John P. Whitney as the new Vice Commander—securing interservice relations between the Air Force and Navy at the command’s most senior positions. Whitney brought with him an enthusiasm for jointness, having served on the Joint Army-Navy Air Transport Committee during its first year of meetings in 1942. The Committee analyzed issues common to the ATC and NATS during World War II and sought cooperative solutions for both commands.⁵⁹ He had also served as Deputy Commander of NATS in 1945, which lent him insight into the Navy’s air transport infrastructure and willingness to combine with ATC. Roger Launius notes that Whitney “was also well known for his ability to enunciate and defend potentially controversial positions, thereby ensuring that the Navy’s prerogatives in the proposed merger were not stampeded.”⁶⁰ This did not mean that Whitney and Kuter were at odds—Whitney’s air transport background and desire to truly make MATS work led to the development of a mutually beneficial and friendly partnership between the two men.

⁵⁷ Laslie, *Architect of Air Power: General Laurence S. Kuter and the Birth of the US Air Force*, 48.

⁵⁸ “Chronology, Development of MATS 1 Jan-1 Jun 1948,” Historical Files, Office of MAC History, quoted in Launius, “Military Unification’s Precursor: The Air Force and Navy Strategic Airlift Merger of 1948”, 28.

⁵⁹ Launius, “Military Unification’s Precursor: The Air Force and Navy Strategic Airlift Merger of 1948”, 28.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

Satisfied with his selections for the senior leaders of MATS, Forrestal made his formal announcement to the public on 4 February 1948 that the Air Force and Navy were forming a unified transport command within the National Military Establishment.⁶¹ *The New York Times* described the action Forrestal announced as “the first concrete step in the direction of unification of the armed forces since he took office under the new law last September.”⁶² Forrestal’s announcement also set the Air Force and Navy in motion to consolidate their efforts to form MATS and make it effective with Kuter and Whitney leading the effort.

Forming the Military Air Transport Service

Selecting the leaders of the new MATS command was one task. The effort needed to start the actual consolidation of ATC and NATS was an entirely different matter. Kuter and Whitney assumed their duties by visiting ATC and NATS bases across the country to gain perspective on each service’s operational capabilities and to identify resources that would be valuable for smoothing the merger. However, Kuter noticed that some personnel in NATS were less than enthusiastic about being in a command structure headed by an Air Force officer. During a trip to the NATS Headquarters at Moffett Field to meet with NATS Commander Admiral J. W. Reeves, Kuter explained what happened when he met with Reeves:

He interrupted and said that he knew why we were there. The former Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Forrestal, had told him that we were coming— why and what we wanted—and that he would give us full access to everything in NATS headquarters. He said, "I hereby give you full access to everything in NATS headquarters, and I doubt that it will help you

⁶¹ Harold B. Hinton, “FORRESTAL SETS UP NEW AIR SERVICE; Names Kuter as Commander of Consolidated Air Force, Navy Transport Units,” *The New York Times*, February 5, 1948, 13.

⁶² Hinton, “FORRESTAL SETS UP NEW AIR SERVICE; Names Kuter as Commander of Consolidated Air Force, Navy Transport Units”, 13.

any. I will be hospitable. I will buy you a drink when you get ready to go. You have the headquarters at your disposal," and he walked out.⁶³

Kuter came to call the process of merging NATS and ATC a “shotgun marriage” arranged by Forrestal and the NME.⁶⁴ Yet Kuter did not waver in his effort to “make this Navy and Air Force organization into some form of cohesive, single command.”⁶⁵

The proposed mission statement for MATS centered on four objectives—global air transportation of essential material for all service branches; communications, weather, and air rescue support during operations; administration of air transport bases in the United States and overseas; and lastly execution of cooperative missions with other civilian, federal, or military agencies.⁶⁶ MATS’ proposed structure consisted of three transport divisions covering different parts of the globe—Atlantic Division covered Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and South America; Continental Division serviced the contiguous 48 states, Alaska, and Greenland; and Pacific Division covered the rest of the globe with transport to Hawaii, Oceania, and Asia.⁶⁷ The three transport divisions were commanded by either an Air Force or Navy general officer, with the Pacific Division typically led by Navy admirals and the other two divisions commanded by Air Force generals. In addition to the transport divisions, MATS oversaw the operations of six technical services—the Air Weather Service for weather monitoring and forecasting; the Air

⁶³ “Chronology, Development of MATS 1 Jan-1 Jun 1948,” Historical Files, Office of MAC History, quoted in Launius, “Military Unification’s Precursor: The Air Force and Navy Strategic Airlift Merger of 1948”, 28-29.

⁶⁴ Major General Laurence Kuter, Laurence Kuter Oral History, vol. 1, 462, quoted in Laslie, *Architect of Air Power: General Laurence S. Kuter and the Birth of the US Air Force*, 128.

⁶⁵ Major General Laurence Kuter, Laurence Kuter Oral History, vol. 1, 468, quoted in Laslie, *Architect of Air Power: General Laurence S. Kuter and the Birth of the US Air Force*, 128.

⁶⁶ Larry O’Toole, "MATS-Unification in Air Transport," *Army Information Digest* 4, no. 12 (December 1949): 53.

⁶⁷ *The Story of MATS, U. S. Air Force*, 8-10.

Rescue Service for personnel rescue and recovery; the Air Photographic and Charting Service for documentation and terrain mapping; Special Air Missions for Presidential and VIP transportation; the Aeromedical Transport Wing for casualty airlift; and finally the Air Resupply and Communications Service for unconventional warfare.⁶⁸

The most challenging part of the process was getting the Navy to agree to the proposed allocation of resources to MATS. Kuter and Whitney's working group delivered their draft mission statement for MATS and their request for personnel and assets to the Air Force Chief of Staff General Hoyt S. Vandenberg and Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Louis E. Denfeld on 29 March 1948.⁶⁹ Vandenberg agreed to the draft and approved it as written, pledging the Air Force's commitment to consolidation. Denfeld and several other senior Navy officers held back, instead choosing to make several changes to the draft document—the most controversial being the requested number of naval aircraft to be assigned to MATS. The Navy opted to provide a total of only 37 R5D aircraft instead of the 56 R5D, eleven R4D, and seven Beechcraft trainers requested by MATS—potentially degrading the effectiveness of the mission and defeating the purposes of jointness.⁷⁰ Kuter asked Vandenberg for guidance on how best to proceed. The dispute wound up at Forrestal's desk for mediation. Forrestal made it clear to both parties that they would either compromise or else he would issue directives himself to end the impasse.

On 30 April 1948, the Air Force and Navy leaders reached a compromise that saw the creation of Fleet Logistic Support Wings with fourteen R5Ds for the Navy's sole use while

⁶⁸ Ulanoff, *MATS: The Story of the Military Air Transport Service*, 63, 67, 73, 77, 83.

⁶⁹ Launius, "Military Unification's Precursor: The Air Force and Navy Strategic Airlift Merger of 1948", 29.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

relieving MATS of the responsibility for supporting fleet operations.⁷¹ The Navy also retained its training facilities at Moffett Field but agreed to send MATS personnel to jointly train with the Air Force once a training school was established. MATS was satisfied with receiving 39 R5Ds and four R4Ds from the Navy for its use, but the initial disagreement showed the Navy still apprehensive at surrendering control of their aircraft. Despite this, Kuter and Whitney accomplished their most difficult task by winning the final approval of both services to support the command.

Confident that Kuter and Whitney were ready, Forrestal proceeded to announce the official starting date for MATS, which was reported on the front page of the 8 May edition of *The New York Times*. “The first concrete unification yet effected by the Armed Services will go into effect on June 1,” writer Harold Hinton stated. “The unique feature of the agreed plan is that interchangeability of command is authorized for the first time in United States history. Naval officers can command Air Force troops, and Air Force officers can command naval personnel.”⁷² Formally established as a unified command of the National Military Establishment by order of Secretary Forrestal on 1 June 1948, the Military Air Transport Service combined the Navy’s Naval Air Transport Service and Air Force’s Air Transport Command into a single chain of command.⁷³ The first trial of a joint command was ready; there would be no turning back.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Harold B. Hinton, “SERVICES’ AIRLINE WILL START JUNE 1; Merged Army-Navy Transport, First Real Unification, Has a World-Wide Network,” *The New York Times*, May 8, 1948, 1.

⁷³ *The Story of MATS, U. S. Air Force*, 5.

Chapter 2: Jointness Takes Flight

MATS sortied around the world in support of American military operations from the moment of its establishment. The concept of joining two services into one command had much to prove as Air Force and Navy personnel operated as teammates for the first time. Despite initial culture clashes between personnel from both services, the United States' efforts to counter communist threats in Europe thrust the men and women of MATS into action as one team. As they worked around the clock to ferry manpower and supplies from point to point, Air Force and Navy MATS crews countered the intense rivalry at the military's senior levels and showed the rest of the military what a truly joint force could achieve.

First Flights: Operation VITTLES

When readers of *The New York Times* picked up their copies of the 24 June 1948 paper, they were greeted with the front-page headline “RUSSIANS BAR FOOD TO WESTERN BERLIN IN CURRENCY FIGHT.” Thousands of miles away, the Soviet Union blockaded Berlin to starve out the city's population as retaliation against the Western Allies' introduction of the Deutschmark currency to stabilize the post-war German economy.⁷⁴ The Soviet Union felt snubbed by the Western Allies' decision to ignore input from the Soviet Union about the currency issue. Additionally, the Deutschmark threatened the Soviet's position in Germany since it enabled the Germans to exert some control over their post-war economy—a situation the Soviet Union wanted to prevent. Thus, the trains that had long been carrying food and materials

⁷⁴ Drew Middleton, “RUSSIANS BAR FOOD TO WESTERN BERLIN IN CURRENCY FIGHT,” *The New York Times*, June 24, 1948, 1.

to the city were halted, electricity and water were shut off to the western sectors, and the Soviets closed the border between East and West Berlin. The city suddenly found itself in dire straits.

The Americans and British chose to forgo an armed confrontation with the Soviets along land routes into Berlin and chose instead to launch an airlift. Even before 24 June, USAFE had started flying some supplies to Berlin with C-47 “Skytrains” of the 60th and 61st Troop Carrier Groups. Originally intended for tactical support of military forces in Europe, these two units were quickly overwhelmed by the requirements needed to support the city. The U.S. occupation government under the command of General Lucius D. Clay concluded that, every day, Berlin’s population needed “646 tons of flour and wheat; 125 tons of cereal; 64 tons of fat; 109 tons of meat and fish; 180 tons of sugar; 11 tons of coffee; 19 tons of powdered milk; 5 tons of whole milk for children; 3 tons of fresh yeast for baking; 144 tons of dehydrated vegetables; 38 tons of salt; and 10 tons of cheese.”⁷⁵ This total did not include the raw materials for power such as coal and gasoline or miscellaneous supplies like medicine also needed by the people of Berlin.

The full-scale airlift commenced on 26 June under the codename Operation VITTLES with General Curtis LeMay and USAFE at the helm. The first wave of supplies arrived at Tempelhof Airport aboard the 60th’s C-47s on the evening of 27 June; and, by the end of the first day, 80 tons of supplies had made it into Berlin aboard USAFE’s aging fleet of twin-engine C-47 transports. LeMay knew his C-47s lacked the cargo capacity and horsepower to match the required tonnage for the airlift, so he asked Washington for the immediate transfer of more modern C-54 “Skymaster” aircraft to USAFE.⁷⁶ While LeMay’s request was being processed in

⁷⁵ Roger G. Miller, *To Save a City: The Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1998), 28.

⁷⁶ Miller, *To Save a City: The Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949*, 30.

Washington, it became apparent that the Soviet blockade had assumed menacing proportions that the airlift as originally envisioned would be unable to overcome, forcing the Department of State and the NME to consider other options. Secretary Forrestal, Undersecretary of Defense Robert Lovett, and Secretary of the Army Kenneth Royall met with President Truman on 28 June to decide on alternative courses of action. Truman made his position clear; the United States would not abandon Berlin and the airlift would continue.⁷⁷

Formed barely four weeks earlier, MATS—alongside the Tactical Air Command, and three other commands—responded to LeMay’s request for C-54 aircraft.⁷⁸ MATS ferried 54 of the larger four-engine C-54 transports to USAFE, helping to improve tonnage capacity, albeit slowly.⁷⁹ The first of these 54 C-54s arrived at Rhein-Main Airfield on July 1 and immediately went to work under USAFE’s command. MATS C-54s arriving at Rhein-Main also brought aircraft maintenance equipment that quickly made Rhein-Main the central hub for all C-54 flights to Berlin.⁸⁰ By mid-July, both USAFE and the Royal Air Force reached their maximum daily tonnage capacity of 2,250 tons—still insufficient to sustain the population of West Berlin.⁸¹ It became clear that more aircraft were needed to improve the airlift’s delivery capacity and that USAFE needed an expert leader to make the whole effort more effective.

⁷⁷ “The Berlin Crisis,” Research Project No. 17, Rough Draft, Department of State, The Berlin Airlift, President’s Secretary’s Files, Truman Papers, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri, USA.

⁷⁸ A. Timothy Warnock, ed., *Short of War: Major USAF Contingency Operations* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 2000), 4.

⁷⁹ *The Story of MATS, U. S. Air Force*, 35.

⁸⁰ Miller, *To Save a City: The Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949*, 33.

⁸¹ *The Story of MATS, U. S. Air Force*, 35.

General Clay met with the National Security Council and President Truman on 22 July asserting that the airlift needed greater support and insisting that, if he received enough additional aircraft, the airlift would force the Soviets to back down from their blockade.⁸² Clay asked for the full assistance of MATS to make it happen. General Vandenberg responded that such a commitment from MATS might threaten the young command's infrastructure and that diverting aircraft to Germany could disrupt the rest of MATS' global operations. Despite his doubts, Vandenberg stated: "If we decide that this operation is going on for some time, the Air Force would prefer we go in wholeheartedly. If we do, Berlin can be supplied."⁸³ Vandenberg agreed to Clay's requests and turned his attention to MATS as the command to truly get the Berlin Airlift off the ground.

A few days before the 22 July meeting, Brigadier General William H. Tunner, MATS Deputy Commander for Operations, received a sealed envelope marked "eyes only" from General Vandenberg containing a copy of a letter from Lieutenant General Albert C. Wedemeyer, Director of Plans and Operations of the Army General Staff.⁸⁴ Wedemeyer disclosed to Vandenberg that the airlift could break the Soviet blockade with proper support and recommended that the airlift be placed under an officer who had commanded an airlift before. That officer, Wedemeyer stated, was Tunner. His reputation from successfully leading the airlift over "The Hump" to China during World War II had made him the ideal candidate to expand and

⁸² Miller, *To Save a City: The Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949*, 41.

⁸³ General Hoyt Vandenberg, Memo for the President July 23, 1948, Memo for President: Meeting Discussions (1948) folder, Box 220, President's Secretary Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library, quoted in Miller, *To Save a City: The Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949*, 42.

⁸⁴ Tunner, *Over the Hump*, 161.

streamline the entire Berlin airlift.⁸⁵ Tunner awaited Vandenberg's next move since no orders had been included in the envelope. On 23 July, Vandenberg called Tunner to his office. Tunner recalls the exchange:

“O.K., Bill,” he said, “it’s yours. When can you leave for Berlin?” “Right away, sir,” I said. While the iron was hot, I asked his permission (General Kuter was still in the Pacific), to take with me a few highly trained men, in whom I had confidence, in order to get under way immediately. I promised to use discretion so that the work of MATS or any other organization I got them from would not be disrupted.

“Get going,” Vandenberg said, “but be reasonable. Tell Personnel the names of the people you want, and their orders will be cut right along with yours.”⁸⁶

Despite Vandenberg's decision, Kuter worried about sending Tunner to work with LeMay in Berlin because of the potential for a culture clash. LeMay was a hardline combat commander, while Tunner had a non-combat background, but Kuter knew that Tunner was the best man for the job. “I concluded this had to be a MATS operation,” Kuter said. “Nobody else had the lift; we did. My deputy for operations ought to go over there and run it, Brig. Gen. William ‘Bill’ Tunner.”⁸⁷

Tunner arrived in Germany with 72 MATS C-54 aircraft to bolster the airlift's effort and quickly got to work establishing an airlift task force under USAFE to improve the whole operation's efficiency.⁸⁸ Tunner started by directing his staff to establish a system that had

⁸⁵ *Anything, Anywhere, Anytime: An Illustrated History of the Military Airlift Command, 1941-1991*, 69.

⁸⁶ Tunner, *Over the Hump*, 162-163.

⁸⁷ Major General Laurence Kuter, Laurence Kuter Oral History, vol. 1, 478-479, quoted in Laslie, *Architect of Air Power: General Laurence S. Kuter and the Birth of the US Air Force*, 130.

⁸⁸ *The Story of MATS, U. S. Air Force*, 37.

transports landing or taking off every 90 seconds. The requirements to meet this schedule were demanding. MATS trained replacement aircrews to combat crew fatigue, ferried freshly inspected aircraft from the United States to USAFE, coordinated maintenance to keep the transports flying, and conducted transatlantic deliveries of supplies from the United States to Europe for staging at Rhein-Main.⁸⁹ The whole effort required more than 2,500 MATS personnel to achieve, but the new transport service was more than prepared for this first challenge.⁹⁰ By 15 October, Tunner and MATS successfully setup the Combined Airlift Task Force with a formidable armada of transport aircraft, but that did not mean Tunner was finished calling up as many MATS aircraft as he could get.⁹¹

The time came to test the MATS joint system with Tunner running the airlift in Berlin. On 27 October, Commander James O. Vosseller, USN, Commander or “skipper” of MATS Air Transport Squadron Eight (VR-8) stationed in Hawaii, received orders from MATS Headquarters to gather his squadron immediately and transfer to Rhein-Main in Germany.⁹² The suddenness of the orders sent many of the VR-8 crews scrambling to arrange their sudden departure from the Pacific to the European mainland. Lieutenant Chester L. Robertson recalled, while in the middle of his leave: “I thought some of my buddies were pulling my leg, so I called Cmdr. Vosseller to verify the message. He assured me that it was no joke, and although I had to leave my car, my family and I caught the next HAL plane.”⁹³ Within 48 hours of receiving their orders, the first

⁸⁹ *Anything, Anywhere, Anytime: An Illustrated History of the Military Airlift Command, 1941-1991*, 71.

⁹⁰ *The Story of MATS, U. S. Air Force*, 35.

⁹¹ Larry O’Toole, “MATS-Unification in Air Transport”, 56.

⁹² “Navy Wings Over Berlin”, 2.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

group of VR-8 planes took to the air from Honolulu. Following behind VR-8, MATS Air Transport Squadron Six (VR-6) received their orders on 30 October to depart Guam immediately for Rhein-Main.⁹⁴ The crews of VR-6 were even more scattered than their VR-8 counterparts – some men were as far away as Shanghai – requiring the dispatch of a few aircraft to bring them back to Guam. Commanding officer of VR-6, Commander Charles C. Howerton got his squadron in the air within 48 hours on 2 November.

The Navy squadrons made their journey to Germany in legs. The crews winterized their kit and aircraft at Naval Air Station Moffett Field—trading their tropical uniforms and gear for parkas, wool mitts, and winter survival gear—before flying across the United States to Westover Air Force Base for final aircraft checks. Fitted with new Ground-Controlled Approach (GCA) equipment at Westover to allow for landings in poor visibility, the two squadrons took flight across the Atlantic for Rhein-Main.⁹⁵ When the first Navy R5D touched down at Rhein-Main and taxied to the hard stands covered in water and mud, Tunner recalled making a point of heading out to meet the crew personally:

The first R5D, naval nomenclature for the C-54, landed in that sea of water, sending spray and spume high into the air. It splashed its way over to where I was waiting, and came to a stop. The door opened, and its crew looked out. I'll never know which of us must have looked the most ludicrous to the other. What I saw was a small group of men in navy blue uniforms with highly polished shoes preparing to step out into the winter mud and rain of Hessian Germany. What they saw was a two-star general standing in

⁹⁴ “History of Military Air Transport Squadron Six, 513th Troop Carrier Group, 7497th Airlift Task Force Wing, Combined Airlift Task Force,” 30 October 1948 – 31 January 1949, 1.

⁹⁵ “Navy Wings Over Berlin”, 2.

water up to his knees, trying to look dignified. Finally, we all started laughing. There wasn't much else to do.

“General, sir,” one of the natty young men in blue sang out, “just tell me one thing—are we at land or at sea?”

“Why, we ordered this just for you,” I said. “We wanted the Navy to feel at home.”⁹⁶

VR-6 and VR-8 R5Ds (USN model of C-54) trickled into Rhein-Main through the fog and rain throughout mid-November—the final aircraft of the two squadrons touched down on 22 November after engine trouble delayed their arrival.⁹⁷ With the two squadrons and their twenty-four R5Ds ready for the run to Berlin, VR-6 and VR-8 were placed under the Air Force's 61st and 513th Troop Carrier Groups of the Combined Airlift Task Force.⁹⁸ Operation VITTLES was now a joint operation through MATS.

The Navy's arrival marked the start of a new joint culture at Rhein-Main. Differences in service jargon showed as lighthearted humor instead of a major problem to the Air Force and Navy crews working together for the first time. Returning from a delivery run to Tempelhof, Navy Lieutenant Ormand Fowler radioed the Rhein-Main airfield tower for a “set of wheels” as soon as he parked his R5D. Upon taxiing to parking, Lieutenant Fowler was both surprised and amused to see an Air Force maintenance truck pull up with spare tires for his aircraft. In Navy terms, Fowler was simply looking for a ride back to the terminal instead of walking.⁹⁹ Just as the

⁹⁶ Tunner, *Over the Hump*, 214.

⁹⁷ “History of Military Air Transport Squadron Six, 513th Troop Carrier Group, 7497th Airlift Task Force Wing, Combined Airlift Task Force,” 30 October 1948 – 31 January 1949, 1.

⁹⁸ Daniel W. Christensen, “Navy Air in the Berlin Airlift: Remembrances of an Enlisted Pilot,” *Naval Aviation News*, February 1996, 34–37.

⁹⁹ Thomas J. Cutler, “Operation Vittles,” *Proceedings* 139, no. 1320 (February 2013): 92.

Navy learned to not ask for “wheels” unless they needed repairs, Air Force pilots soon learned from their Navy colleagues, as reported by *Naval Aviation News*, that the “runway is the deck, left is port and right starboard, a C-54 is an R5D, and that a latrine is a head.”¹⁰⁰ Some individuals back in the United States even learned to adopt the other service’s culture. Colonel Robert E. Cron Jr., MATS Vice Deputy Commander for Services, noted that Admiral Tomlinson, commander of the MATS Pacific Division, “tucks his tie into his shirt like a general, but his Air Force chauffeur has learned to say ‘Aye, aye, sir.’”¹⁰¹

Although the two Navy squadrons made themselves at home among the Air Force in Rhein-Main, Secretary Sullivan and Admiral Louis Denfeld, Chief of Naval Operations, placed themselves at odds with the Air Force and Army over budget wrangling for the 1949 fiscal year and over assigned mission roles for the services reached during the Key West Agreement in March 1948.¹⁰² Sullivan and Denfeld decided that the time had come to defend the forces the Navy thought it needed to maintain a major strategic role. No longer would the Navy’s fundamental beliefs be compromised by aggressive demands made by the other services. Denfeld appointed Captain Arleigh A. Burke in late December 1948 to head OP-23, a research group designed for the sole purpose of fighting a future political battle with the Air Force.¹⁰³ At the same time when Navy MATS personnel worked to integrate themselves with their Air Force

¹⁰⁰ “Navy Wings Over Berlin,” 3.

¹⁰¹ Robert E. Cron, Jr., “MATS Headquarters Organization: A Staff Tailored to a Particular Mission,” *Military Review* 28, no. 12 (March 1949): 26.

¹⁰² Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight for Naval Aviation, 1945-1950*, 164.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 168-169.

hosts, the upper echelons of Navy leadership prepared to go on the offensive against its sister services.

Despite the Navy's dealings in Washington D.C., jointness continued in the training of MATS personnel. The Air Force and Navy announced an agreement on 18 January 1949 to exchange air transport personnel—pilots, mechanics, radar operators, and other crews—at their respective training facilities to increase cohesion between the two services. Replacement Navy pilots assigned to VITTLES received training on the C-54 and Air Force procedures at Great Falls (now Malmstrom) Air Force Base in Montana.¹⁰⁴ The Navy pilots flew a mock “little corridor” to simulate flight conditions between Western Germany and Berlin and better understand the Air Force's system of landing an aircraft in Berlin every 90 seconds. Once they completed the course, the Navy pilots were then sent on to Rhein-Main to rotate out pilots from VR-6 and VR-8. Simultaneously, Air Force officers were sent to Naval Air Station Olathe in Kansas for technical training on the Ground-Controlled Approach system because NATS required its transport pilots to always use GCA procedures, regardless of visibility, for their landings. The GCA system was vital to maintaining the airlift's momentum since it allowed ground controllers to guide aircraft to landings even in conditions with poor weather and limited visibility.¹⁰⁵ As a result, weather delays due to dangerous fog no longer prevented aircraft from safely landing.

¹⁰⁴ “AIRLIFT TRAINING UNIFIED; Navy, Air Force to Interchange Men for Special Course,” *The New York Times*, January 17, 1949, 8.

¹⁰⁵ “AIRLIFT TRAINING UNIFIED; Navy, Air Force to Interchange Men for Special Course”, 8.

The growth of teamwork between the Navy and Air Force both at home in the United States and in Germany encouraged Kuter to remark on 25 January at a dinner of the Institute of the Aeronautical Sciences in New York City: "It is our hope and belief that those who undertake later projects of unification may find in MATS encouraging evidence and reassurance that their efforts can be successful."¹⁰⁶ Secretary Sullivan later echoed Kuter's remarks during his 26 February congratulations to the two Navy squadrons for their successes during the airlift: "We watch with unceasing pride your exemplary cooperation as members of the unified team, the Combined Airlift Task Force, whose brilliant record of accomplishment in Berlin is an inspiration to this country and the world."¹⁰⁷ Besides the growing sense of jointness emerging in Germany, the Air Force and Navy crews in Berlin also made sure to use their old rivalries to enhance their efficiency in the airlift even more.

Tunner encouraged friendly competition among the transport pilots to see which squadron could attain the highest efficiency rating flying between Rhein-Main Air Base and Tempelhof Airport in West Berlin. VR-8 scored an impressive 151.1 percent efficiency with 950 sorties and 10,083 tons of supplies in March 1949, signaling not just that the Navy squadrons were good but also that competitiveness between the crews was succeeding in maintaining a high operational tempo.¹⁰⁸ Bragging rights were a powerful motivator, and Tunner was able to use rivalry between Air Force and Navy pilots to produce a beneficial result. The pilots of VR-8 credited their GCA training with NATS for enabling them to routinely take the top spot from

¹⁰⁶ Major General Laurence Kuter, quoted in "AIRLIFT IS CALLED ARM OF DIPLOMACY; General Kuter Describes Berlin Flights at Meeting, Here Navy Crews Are Praised," *The New York Times*, January 25, 1949, 19.

¹⁰⁷ Secretary John Sullivan, quoted in "Navy Squadrons Lead Pack; Berlin Airlift Freight Mark Is Set," *Naval Aviation News*, May 1949, 17.

¹⁰⁸ Mulready, "Berlin Airlift Proved Unification Can Work.", 286.

their Air Force peers, who had less experience with GCA approaches in poor weather.¹⁰⁹ The two Navy squadrons also heavily credited their maintenance personnel for allowing them to keep the R5Ds in the air and on schedule—a force which the Air Force agreed made a significant difference. While the Navy set individual squadron records for the airlift, the overall tonnage of supplies peaked during Tunner’s maximum effort “Easter Parade” on 16 April 1949. Designed as a message to the Soviets that their blockade would fail, the Combined Airlift Task Force pilots delivered a record total of 12,941 tons of supplies over 24 hours.

The May 1949 squadron history of VR-6 revealed that, on occasion, some of the missions were carried out by combined Navy-Air Force crews. It was during a planned mission on 18 May that Navy Lieutenant (Junior Grade) Wayne Brooks and Air Force Second Lieutenant W.V. Shumski completed VR-6’s 5,000th mission of Operation VITTLES as a joint team.¹¹⁰ Another act of “good sportsmanship” between the services was recounted by Navy Journalist Brendan Mulready:

Probably the best example of how this unification on an operational level functioned in the Airlift is furnished by the experience of Commander Harry P. Badger, U.S.N., Commanding Officer of VR-6 and Senior Naval Aviator in Germany. Commander Badger flew the Airlift on April 12 [1949]. His squadron was currently engaged in trying to mark up a new record for 24 hours of operations When the last plane critically needed in the air to win the record was loaded and ready for take-off, the pilot found several Air Force planes were already ahead of him on the runway waiting for take-off. If the VR-6 plane awaited her turn it would cost the squadron the record. The VR-6 Operations Officer tossed the problem into the laps of the Air Force personnel in the

¹⁰⁹ “Navy Wings Over Berlin”, 3.

¹¹⁰ History of Military Air Transport Squadron Six, 513th Troop Carrier Group, 7497th Airlift Task Force Wing, Combined Airlift Task Force. 1 May 1949 – 31 May 1949.

Control Tower. Without hesitation, the word crackled back for the Air Force planes to sit and wait. The Navy VR-6 ship got immediate clearance, took to the skies and landed with the new record.¹¹¹

Rather than hold their position in line and block VR-6's attempt at the record, the Air Force crews demonstrated an understanding of unity of effort and made it possible for the Navy plane to get off the ground on time. VR-6's bowling team also made sure to take home the Atteberry-Betts bowling championship trophy against the Air Force's 61st Maintenance Squadron that May.¹¹² For the officers and enlisted MATS personnel, service rivalry became nothing more than light jokes and bragging rights. The opposite was true in Washington.

Although personnel assigned to the Berlin Airlift were making outstanding progress that spring, several controversial events took place in both the Truman Administration and the NME. In March, Truman asked for Forrestal's resignation after numerous conflicts between the two convinced Truman that he could no longer count on his Secretary of Defense for support. Forrestal's resignation left the former secretary in a broken state, and, tragically, he took his life later in May just as the blockade was lifted.¹¹³ Louis A. Johnson, Truman's chief fundraiser during the 1948 election and a significant proponent of unification, replaced Forrestal as Secretary of Defense on 28 March and quickly rocked the boat. Without consulting the Joint Chiefs of Staff prior to his decision, Johnson canceled the Navy's new "supercarrier," the *U.S.S. United States*, on 26 April as a cost-cutting measure, but Johnson's pro-Air Force inclination

¹¹¹ Mulready, "Berlin Airlift Proved Unification Can Work.", 287.

¹¹² History of Military Air Transport Squadron Six, 513th Troop Carrier Group, 7497th Airlift Task Force Wing, Combined Airlift Task Force. 1 May 1949 – 31 May 1949.

¹¹³ Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals*, 173-174.

suggested to senior Naval officers he preferred to keep the Navy out of strategic air warfare.¹¹⁴ To the Navy, aircraft carriers were the future of the service. Cancellation of the *United States* threatened that future. Thus, Johnson's decision sparked a ferocious resurgence in fighting back in Washington D.C. between senior leaders of the Air Force and Navy.¹¹⁵ In General Norstad's and Professor Leach's eyes, Johnson's unexpected killing off of the Navy's carrier was a major threat to the cause of unification that the two had championed in 1947. "The way this Carrier business has been decided is a very serious threat for you and me and everything we have been trying to accomplish," Leach wrote to Norstad. "I'll bet anything you want that he has also killed the current amendments of the National Security Act and has set back the cause of unification by at least two years."¹¹⁶

Even though Secretary Sullivan's resignation as Secretary of the Navy on 24 May represented the wider frustration of the Navy against the other services, MATS remained insulated against the events transpiring in Washington. The Berlin Airlift brought out a spirit of jointness in both Air Force and Navy personnel. They worked together to sustain the people of Berlin, setting aside service differences to accomplish an enormous feat that delivered 382 million tons of supplies during the blockade's duration.¹¹⁷ General Kuter summarized MATS' contribution to the airlift:

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 188.

¹¹⁵ W. Barton Leach to Lieutenant General Lauris Norstad, April 26, 1949, Leach File (1), Box 21, Pentagon Series, Norstad Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

¹¹⁶ W. Barton Leach to Lieutenant General Lauris Norstad, April 26, 1949, Leach File (1), Box 21, Pentagon Series, Norstad Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas, USA.

¹¹⁷ United States, Congress, Senate, Committee on Interstate Foreign Commerce, *Study of Military Air Transport Service Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce*, June 13, 1958, 85th Congress, 2d session, 1958, 122.

Being faced with Operation Vittles only six weeks after MATS was formed, there is no doubt that the command's planned development was retarded by more than a year. At the same time, however, we gained in a brief span the equivalent of many years of peacetime experience, invaluable training, and many lessons in the business of strategic airlift.¹¹⁸

At the height of the airlift, the young command alone had 4,000 personnel and 300 C-54s operating the Berlin route in support of USAFE. The Soviet Union abandoned its blockade of Berlin in May after realizing that the airlift was neither failing nor stagnating; it was only growing. For MATS, the massive airlift of supplies to the city of Berlin during Operation VITTLES became validation for the importance of global airlift capabilities and an achievement for both the Air Force and Navy.¹¹⁹

Fall 1949 witnessed the height of the Air Force and Navy's confrontation—later dubbed “The Revolt of the Admirals.” Information gathered by OP-23 on the shortcomings of the Air Force's Convair B-36 bomber and the “Worth Paper” highlighting Secretary Johnson's membership on Convair's board of directors spurred the Navy to battle with the Air Force in Congress.¹²⁰ After numerous hearings and extensive investigation, the House Armed Services Committee cleared the Air Force of any alleged wrongdoings. At the same time, the Navy was held in contempt for opposing its sister services in a public show of defiance. Truman fired Denfeld as Chief of Naval Operations, reaffirming that unification of the armed forces would continue despite the Navy's revolt.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ *The Story of MATS, U. S. Air Force*, 37.

¹¹⁹ Mulready, "Berlin Airlift Proved Unification Can Work," 283.

¹²⁰ Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals*, 1.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 274-275.

MATS fostered a truly joint culture between Air Force and Navy personnel that directly contrasted with the events in Washington at the height of interservice rivalry between the Air Force and Navy. Even as the Air Force and Navy exchanged blows in Congressional hearings, the first annual report from MATS emphasized to the public, as reported in the *The New York Times* on 18 September, that “MATS was the first large-scale unification project in the armed services” and that the command would continue to promote a joint culture as an example to the rest of the armed forces.¹²²

Into the Arctic: Operation BLUE JAY

War on the Korean Peninsula and the presence of communism in Southeast Asia encouraged the United States to build and expand its overseas bases as a defensive perimeter for the continental United States. To secure the northern boundaries of North America against Soviet strategic bombers and missile forces, the United States turned its attention to the Arctic Circle. With the Danish government’s permission, the Department of Defense ordered the Army Corps of Engineers to develop a plan to construct an air base at North Star Bay in northern Greenland.¹²³ An air base near the Arctic Circle allowed the United States to intercept potential Soviet attacks and enabled SAC’s strategic bombers to provide more effective deterrence against the Soviet Union by reducing their flight time. Said by some to be the Army’s “greatest feat of military construction since World War II,” the building of Thule Air Base under the codename

¹²² “AIR TRANSPORT REPORTS; Berlin Lift Operations Cited to Show What Services Does,” *The New York Times*, September 17, 1949, 44.

¹²³ *Operation Blue Jay, The Big Picture* (U.S. Army Signal Corps Pictorial Center, 1953), <https://archive.org/details/gov.archives.arc.2569497>.

Operation BLUE JAY was another example of MATS' commitment to jointness alongside the Navy's Military Sea Transportation Service and the Army's Corps of Engineers.¹²⁴

MATS rode on the success of the Berlin Airlift into the 1950s before being called upon to provide airlift support for BLUE JAY in the fall of 1951. The second joint transport command, the Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS), carried the initial construction crews and their materials from Norfolk, Virginia on 6 June 1951 before arriving two weeks behind schedule at North Star Bay on 9 July.¹²⁵ Unexpected difficulties with pack ice blocking the fleet's planned route to Thule caused significant delays, demonstrating the harshness of the environment. Upon landing at the shores of North Star Bay, the armada of men and equipment departed from the Navy ships to begin the first phase of construction. The construction crews worked around the clock to make up for lost time and completed a preliminary airstrip in early August, allowing MATS and its transport planes to begin landing at the base. Coordination between the Navy's MSTS and the Air Force's MATS provided a steady flow of replacement construction crews, food, and equipment from the mainland over the first phase of construction, which ended in late September with the arrival of harsh winter conditions and ice fields that sealed off North Star Bay.¹²⁶

The support of MATS became critical for sustainment of the base during the winter months as ice sealed the entrance to North Star Bay. MATS planes ferried fresh food and spare parts into Thule, and then they shuttled Army engineers and civilian construction workers back

¹²⁴ *Operation Blue Jay*.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*.

¹²⁶ "Greenland's Global Gateway," *Military Review* 32, no. 12 (March 1953): 27.

to the States to await the spring construction season. VR-6—veterans of the Berlin Airlift and Korean Airlift—provided supplies to Thule in their trusty R5Ds alongside their fellow MATS squadrons from Westover Air Force Base in Massachusetts. VR-6 pilots used the same airmanship skills they developed flying through German fog to cut their way through arctic winds and to battle frigid temperatures. An excerpt by journalist Petty Officer 3rd Class C. H. Nelson provides context of one VR-6 run to Thule in December 1952:

Our flight from BW-8 to Thule, 900 miles from the North Pole, is a constant battle of wits between the weather and our pilot. Our flight plan calls for us to fly at 9500 feet, but clouds and the chance for icing forced us to fly at 10,500. We still were not completely above the clouds. The coastline of Greenland is invisible to us, but we can follow it on our radar screen.

A little more than four hours of flying time finds us over Thule. Our first view of the area is the great ice cap which ends close to the base. As we circle over the mountains we can see *Old Flat Top*, Dundas mountain. There are quite a few icebergs in the harbor and a lot of snow on the surrounding mountains. It does not snow much at Thule, most all of the snow blows in from the ice cap.

There is only one ship in the harbor, the icebreaker *Atka*. She will be the last ship to leave Thule. With the ice closing in fast, there will be no more ships to enter Thule for 10 months.¹²⁷

VR-6's participation in the aptly named "Arctic Airlift" saw the squadron carry over 6,000,000 tons of cargo and over 5,000 passengers between April 1951 and November 1952.¹²⁸ *Naval*

¹²⁷ "Greenland Run Tests VR-6 Pilot Mettle," *Naval Aviation News*, December 1952, 19.

¹²⁸ "VR-6 Men Will Be 'Blue Jays': Order Commemorates Thule Project," *Naval Aviation News*, July 1953, 23.

Aviation News said the accomplishment “stands alongside the famous *Berlin Airlift* when it [VR-6] vied with VR-8 to lead all military transport squadrons in accomplishments each month.”¹²⁹

The Danish and United States governments lifted the secret of Thule Air Base’s construction in September 1952 after the base became fully operational. The announcement drew praise from the American public for how the base promised to enhance security from the Soviets and for the innovations used to establish an advanced air base above the Arctic Circle. *The New York Times* noted that the “rapid construction of Thule represents an unusual effort by the Army Corps of Engineers, the Military Sea Transportation Service, the Military Air Transport Service, and private construction companies on contract.” Thule’s construction involved three of the military departments in the DOD and an additional civil-military partnership that all led to the base’s completion in eighteen months.¹³⁰ MATS’ teamwork with the Navy MSTS and the Army Corps of Engineers provided an arctic air base that served as an integral part of the United States’ early warning network.

Exodus: Operation SAFE HAVEN

By 1956, MATS had grown accustomed to providing humanitarian airlift support and to performing its standard DOD transport role around the world. By that point, the command had eight humanitarian operations on its record, ranging from evacuating stranded Muslim pilgrims in Beirut to providing iron lungs to polio patients in Buenos Aires.¹³¹ Most of these additional

¹²⁹ “Greenland Run Tests VR-6 Pilot Mettle”, 19.

¹³⁰ Austin Stevens, “U. S. Creates Huge Air Base In Far North of Greenland; Strategic Center at Thule for Jet Fighters and Bombers Held Jointly With Danes — Across the Polar Ice From Soviet,” *The New York Times*, September 19, 1952, 5.

¹³¹ Ulanoff, *MATS: The Story of the Military Air Transport Service*, 113-114.

duties were relatively routine for the MATS crews. But when an unexpected revolution took place in Hungary later that year, MATS faced its largest and most complex humanitarian airlift.

Tired of the Soviet Union's iron-fisted hold on their country, Hungarian freedom fighters and rebels revolted against the Soviet Union on 23 October 1956. Fighting raged in the Hungarian capital of Budapest and the rebels seemed to be gaining the upper hand, but dreams of Hungarian independence were quickly ended when Soviet tanks and infantry crushed the uprising on 4 November.¹³² Facing a Soviet grip on the nation that was even harsher than before, 15,000 Hungarian refugees fled to neutral Austria for a chance at freedom. By late November, the United States agreed to a request by the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration to evacuate the refugees. Faced with the largest humanitarian airlift since the Berlin Blockade, the Eisenhower Administration and DOD called on MATS to get the job done.¹³³

Unlike the Berlin Airlift of 1948, the airlift of Operations SAFE HAVEN I & II was conducted solely by MATS aircraft outside of USAFE oversight. MATS directed its 1608th and 1611th Air Transport Wings from the Atlantic Division to prepare an evacuation starting on 11 December. Meanwhile, Army ground transports moved the refugees from neutral Austria to Munich, Germany, where facilities near Munich-Riem airport provided the best holding point for the 10,000 refugees bound for the United States.¹³⁴ The MATS system went to work like a well-oiled machine preparing Munich-Riem for the rapid influx of aircraft in the coming days. MATS Airways and Air Communications Services (AACS) personnel installed GCA equipment to

¹³² Milton Krims, "Operation SAFE HAVEN: Air Bridge to Freedom," *Air Force Magazine*, June 1957, 70.

¹³³ Krims, "Operation SAFE HAVEN: Air Bridge to Freedom", 71.

¹³⁴ Daniel L. Haulman, *The United States Air Force and Humanitarian Airlift Operations, 1947-1994* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1998), 244.

guide aircraft in through the German fog they had battled back in 1948, Air Weather Service (AWS) observed weather reports and developed forecasts for aircrews to use in their flight plans in and out of Munich, and the Aero Medical Evacuation Section established a processing station to screen refugees heading to the United States. With assistance from the Army, USAFE, and the Red Cross, Munich-Riem was prepared for the first wave of departures on 11 December.¹³⁵

SAFE HAVEN I got underway on 11 December with the arrival of Air Force C-118s and Navy R6Ds from the 1611th out of McGuire Air Force Base and C-121 aircraft from the 1608th flying out of Charleston Air Force Base to take the first refugees back to the United States. The process went smoothly at first with five fully loaded flights out of Munich occurring each day, but worsening fog and stormy weather from a high-pressure system over the next few days slowed the operation to a near halt.¹³⁶ So thick was the fog at one point that an observer was sent with a walkie-talkie to the edge of the runway to transmit visibility readings back to the control tower for relay back to the incoming MATS aircraft.¹³⁷ The MATS flyers pushed on despite the foul weather, relying on their GCA equipment for guidance, and by the end of SAFE HAVEN I on 3 January, a total 6,400 refugees had been safely relocated to the United States. After a brief pause in the operation to shift to another airport, the 1611th resumed flights out of Neubiberg Air Base in Munich on 6 January and concluded SAFE HAVEN II on 30 June with an additional 3,800 refugees safely evacuated to the United States. There were no serious accidents out of 173

¹³⁵ Krims, "Operation SAFE HAVEN: Air Bridge to Freedom", 80.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

total flights during both SAFE HAVEN phases, an impressive achievement despite numerous issues with foul weather.¹³⁸

MATS' successes with two of the largest humanitarian airlifts in DOD history and in the establishment of the northernmost air base in the U.S. defense system demonstrated that MATS had mastered the art of strategic airlift and truly deserved its reputation as an effective joint force. Despite the falling out between the Air Force and the Navy that was evident at the highest levels during the turbulent years 1948-1949, MATS maintained its commitment to jointness. It did so within the organization through effective employment of its Navy transport squadrons alongside their Air Force counterparts, while doing so outside the command in team efforts with the MSTs and Army Corps of Engineers. The success of MATS could have served as a model for an even greater championing of joint commands by the DOD. By the end of the 1950s and start of the 1960s, however, MATS fell victim to various factors that ultimately led to the command's decline.

¹³⁸ Haulman, *The United States Air Force and Humanitarian Airlift Operations, 1947-1994*, 245.

Chapter 3: The Rise of Strategic Airlift and Resurgence of Rivalry

The many successful joint operations carried out by MATS throughout the 1950s could have proved to the DOD the effectiveness of joint commands to foster greater cohesion between the services. Instead, as the late 1950s and early 1960s approached, a return to the status quo of separation took precedence in the DOD, and a variety of events slowly wore away at MATS' dedication to jointness. Civilian air carriers, looking to break into military transport contracts, took on the command in a Congressional battle that put MATS under intense budgetary scrutiny and led to the command's emergence into a greater role with the Air Force. The dominant role of SAC within the Air Force had sapped MATS' of resources and support, but the rise of strategic airlift as an element of Flexible Response put MATS in parity with SAC and drew support from the Army. Another extended disagreement between the Air Force and Navy emerged over the growing threat of strategic airlift toward seaborne transport, finally taking its toll on the command and leading to the Navy's withdrawal of its assets from MATS and the Air Force's reorganization of the command into the Air Force Military Airlift Command (MAC) in January 1966.

The Navy Takes the Back Seat: The MATS Reorganizations of 1956 and 1958

At about the same time that MATS was preparing to launch Operation SAFE HAVEN, a major reorganization occurred in the command that drastically shifted the balance of power between the Air Force and Navy. DOD Directive 5160.2 was reissued on 7 December 1956, designating MATS and the Air Force as the single manager operating agency for strategic airlift

in the DOD.¹³⁹ This meant that each military department was ordered to abolish any independent airlift unit that duplicated MATS' mission and transfer those airlift units to MATS. Both Tactical Air Command (TAC) and the Navy were forced to transfer their four-engine transports to MATS control under the new directive.¹⁴⁰ The Navy, keeping with its tradition of independence, protested the directive and asked to keep some of its transport aircraft for Fleet Logistic Air Wings. These aircraft focused solely on fleet replenishment and thus were not considered by MATS as part of the strategic airlift mission. The DOD granted the Navy permission to keep twenty of its aircraft, but strictly for use as fleet replenishment transports. Otherwise, they too would have fallen under MATS and Air Force control.¹⁴¹ The "Single Manager Directive" also made Secretary of the Air Force the head of all strategic airlift, shifting MATS away from its status as a DOD command and making it more like an Air Force command comparable to SAC and TAC.¹⁴²

A follow-on reorganization of MATS in 1958 made MATS even less of a unified command and more of a traditional Air Force command, albeit one that just so happened to have a Navy component assigned to it. That year, MATS created the Western Transport Air Force (WESTAF) to replace the Pacific Division as well as the Eastern Transport Air Force

¹³⁹ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Government Operations, *Military Air Transportation: Twenty-Eighth Report by the Committee of Government Operations*, June 26, 1958, 85th Congress, 2d session, 1958, H. Doc. 2011, 13.

¹⁴⁰ U.S. Congress, *Military Air Transportation: Twenty-Eighth Report by the Committee of Government Operations*, 13.

¹⁴¹ Jack Raymond, "Pentagon Forms New Airlift Unit; Big Agency to Take Over All Existing Transport Groups-Quarles to Be 'Manager,'" *The New York Times*, December 14, 1956.

¹⁴² Raymond, "Pentagon Forms New Airlift Unit; Big Agency to Take Over All Existing Transport Groups-Quarles to Be 'Manager.'"

(EASTAF), which replaced the Atlantic Division.¹⁴³ The Continental Division's assets were divided up between WESTAF and EASTAF, so that the Continental Division itself ceased to exist. Command of WESTAF and EASTAF was also reserved for Air Force general officers, effectively cutting out any chance for the Navy to have any significant influence on MATS at the division level. The Navy squadrons assigned to MATS were also reassigned away from their Air Force host wings and placed into their own separate Naval Air Transport Wings. VR-3, for example, was removed from the 1611th Air Transport Wing and reassigned to Naval Air Transport Wing, Atlantic under EASTAF.¹⁴⁴ After the transfer, VR-6—also a part of Naval Air Transport Wing, Atlantic—ceased flying duties and assumed all maintenance responsibilities for VR-3. The reorganization effectively ended the integration of Air Force and Navy MATS personnel and instead separated them into different commands. While they all still fell under MATS, Air Force and Navy crews experienced less interservice interaction at the wing, group, and squadron levels. The MATS structure that had fostered jointness between Air Force and Navy crews through interaction at the lower levels no longer existed. Stanley Ulanoff also noted: “In 1958, the year following MATS’ big reorganization, the outward similarity between it and the United States commercial airlines was pronounced.”¹⁴⁵ This similarity proved to be too much for American civilian air carriers to ignore, and MATS soon found itself fighting for survival as the air carriers swarmed to takeover MATS’ domestic transport contracts.

¹⁴³ Ulanoff, *MATS: The Story of the Military Air Transport Service*, 56.

¹⁴⁴ “VR-3 Marks 23 Years Active Duty,” *Naval Aviation News*, August 1965, 18.

¹⁴⁵ Ulanoff, *MATS: The Story of the Military Air Transport Service*, 58.

Holding the Line: MATS versus the ATA

General Tunner returned to MATS in July 1958 as its next commander, having served as Commander of USAFE for four years starting in 1953 and after a short one-year assignment at Headquarters U.S. Air Force in 1957. Tunner's return could not have come at a better time for the command. Earlier that January, Stuart G. Tipton, president of the Air Transport Association (ATA)—a lobbying group and trade association for North American airlines—lobbied the House Military Operations subcommittee calling for MATS' domestic military flights to be reduced and for the surplus to be flown by commercial airlines to improve their profits.¹⁴⁶ *The New York Times* explained that Tipton believed "M.A.T.S. operations [should] be confined to those fields requiring specialized transport aircraft, unusual security safeguards or 'a direct close working relationship with tactical combat units.'"¹⁴⁷ Tunner called Tipton and the Air Transport Association's lobbying attack on MATS an "all-out assault on military air transport" fueled by the ATA's unfulfilled "dream of a great air transportation boom" following World War II.¹⁴⁸ The hopes for a booming aviation industry post-war quickly faded and instead gave way to a harsher reality. The airline industry of the 1950s was extremely competitive, and civilian airlines in the United States were desperate for whatever extra income they could get. Thus, the ATA targeted MATS because the civilian airlines wanted to squeeze extra profits from government contracts for military cargo and personnel flights, and, thanks to the ATA's complaints, Tunner and MATS faced a Congressional investigation into the matter.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ "M.A.T.S. Criticized," *The New York Times*, January 9, 1958, 66.

¹⁴⁷ "M.A.T.S. Criticized", 66.

¹⁴⁸ Tunner, *Over the Hump*, 290.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 291.

A report on *Military Air Transportation* by the House Committee on Government Operations in June only made the summer of 1958 worse for MATS.¹⁵⁰ The subcommittee assigned to the investigation noted “a surprising degree of unanimity in the testimony from witnesses representing industry and labor organizations and the civil agencies of Government,” demonstrating that the ATA had rallied supporters from across the airline industry against MATS. Tunner, later in October, compared MATS’ position against the opposition to “the Marines at Hagaru-ri—surrounded.”¹⁵¹ The committee acknowledged Tunner’s argument that MATS needed peacetime “exercises” to maintain its readiness for the “D-Day mission,” but the committee also explained that it became “a proper subject of inquiry to ascertain how far MATS is departing from its defense role when it engages in commercial-type operations.”¹⁵² By the end of its investigation, the committee concluded that “the Military Air Transport Service is in effect preempting a field which should be occupied by the commercial air carriers,” adding that “the subcommittee believes that such training could best be achieved by use of the transport fleet for handling nonscheduled and emergency traffic, for special requirements beyond the capability of civil carriers, and for various technical missions.”¹⁵³ Some of the report’s recommendations did provide MATS with an opportunity to improve its operations by asserting that the Air Force vigorously focus on procuring large jet transports for MATS. Still, the rest of the recommendations catered to the ATA’s demands. The committee called on MATS to redraft its

¹⁵⁰ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Government Operations, *Military Air Transportation: Twenty-Eighth Report by the Committee of Government Operations*, June 26, 1958, 85th Congress, 2d session, 1958, H. Doc. 2011, 1.

¹⁵¹ Tunner, *Over the Hump*, 298.

¹⁵² U.S. Congress, House, Committee, *Military Air Transportation*, 4.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 5.

roles and regulations “to eliminate the preferential position of the Military Air Transport Service in peacetime military airlift and to establish, consistent with other recommendations in this report, a full partnership role for civil carriers.”¹⁵⁴

Tunner’s arrival in July commenced MATS’ counterattack against the ATA and its supporters. According to Tunner, the public assumptions that the ATA’s attacks were built on sound logic had been false. “Only three of the well-known airlines worked with us, and they accounted for more than 70 per cent of all business given to commercial carriers,” Tunner stated, “with a swarm of small companies fighting for the balance.”¹⁵⁵ It was the small airlines that took the most potshots at MATS in an attempt to gain contracts. Tunner aimed at the smaller airlines by explaining that “some of [them] were skating so close to the edge of unsafe operation that it was questionable whether they should have any government business at all, much less more of it.”¹⁵⁶ The counterattack stalled as the fight against the ATA drew more powerful figures to the airlines’ side. Far from the days of fighting for Air Force independence, former Secretary of the Air Force turned U.S. Senator Stuart Symington, ironically enough, came out in support of the ATA: “The simple fact is that M.A.T.S. cannot be both a commercial-type airline, with 480 stewardesses, and a combat airlift force constantly on the alert, comparable to the Strategic Air Command.”¹⁵⁷ Retired Lieutenant General Elwood “Pete” Quesada, another household name in the Air Force and the first administrator for the Federal Aviation Agency, submitted plans to

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵⁵ Tunner, *Over the Hump*, 292.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Edward Hudson, “M.A.T.S. ATTACKED IN CONGRESS AGAIN; Two Senators See Conflict Between Airline Operation and Military Mission,” *The New York Times*, August 30, 1959, 13.

President Eisenhower for turning the bulk of MATS' routes over to the civilian airlines.¹⁵⁸ Even *The New York Times* jumped on the ATA bandwagon with an editorial "The Airlines and Logistics" that called Congress' plan to reorient MATS a "long overdue" measure that would improve both economic opportunities for the airline industry and national defense.¹⁵⁹

The public nature of the fight between MATS and the ATA mobilized significant opposition against MATS, but it also presented Tunner an opportunity to make the most of the attention and fight for the importance of strategic airlift on the public stage. Rather than attempt to defend MATS by trumpeting it as some dominant military force, he explained MATS' shortcomings. Tunner wrote a rebuttal to *The New York Times* on 12 October arguing that any cut to MATS peacetime operations would degrade the command's "ability to meet the demands of its assigned military D-day mission" and that MATS already suffered from an aging transport fleet struggling to meet the routine DOD demands.¹⁶⁰ Tunner was not admitting defeat, though. Instead, he was slowly orchestrating a demonstration that would show both MATS' strengths and its flaws.

A Calculated Gamble: Operation BIG SLAM

The reliance of both the Truman and the Eisenhower administrations on nuclear deterrence and massive retaliation dominated United States defense strategies throughout the 1950s, but these strategies failed to address conventional threats. The Korean War, the failure of

¹⁵⁸ Hudson, "M.A.T.S. ATTACKED IN CONGRESS AGAIN; Two Senators See Conflict Between Airline Operation and Military Mission", 13.

¹⁵⁹ "The Airlines and Logistics," *The New York Times*, September 19, 1959, 22.

¹⁶⁰ William H. Tunner, "Military Airlift Backed; Cut in Peacetime Operation Opposed as Damaging Its Capability," *The New York Times*, October 12, 1959, sec. Letters to The Times, 18.

the French armed forces at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, and the suppression of proponents of democracy at the time of the Hungarian Revolution all demonstrated this failure since the United States was unwilling to employ nuclear weapons to end these crises. As a result, it became increasingly clear that these “limited” conflicts required an appropriately measured response. By the close of the decade the Army was experimenting with the rapid deployment of reaction forces to conflict areas as part of a limited warfare doctrine, but limitations with high-speed, long-range transport almost saw the Army give up on the idea.¹⁶¹

Tunner approached Army Chief of Staff General Lyman L. Lemnitzer early in March 1960 with a proposal for a large multi-service exercise that would solve the Army’s transport problem and draw positive public attention to MATS amidst its battle with the ATA.¹⁶² At first, the Army envisioned an exercise limited in nature with 6,000 troops and 6,000 tons of equipment for the airlift, but Tunner wanted to demonstrate the full capacity of what MATS could accomplish. The Army then promised him 15,000 troops, but Tunner wanted 20,000 to push MATS’ airlift to its limit. Playing on interservice rivalry, Tunner brought up the idea of having Marines fill in the remaining numbers. Explaining the reaction to his proposal, Tunner recalled: “For a full minute there was not one sound in that room. I don’t believe anyone breathed, much less spoke. Finally, the Chief of Staff cleared his throat. ‘I think,’ he said, ‘that the Army will find you twenty thousand men.’” The Army agreed to give him 21,000 troops and 11,100 tons of cargo for Operation BIG SLAM.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Robert C. Owen, “The Hearings That Revolutionized Airlift,” *Air Force Magazine*, November 2014, 64.

¹⁶² Tunner, *Over the Hump*, 307.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 308.

BIG SLAM's objective was straightforward – to airlift the 21,000 troops and their equipment to Puerto Rico from fourteen air bases across the United States and then back as quickly and safely as possible. Without sacrificing service of its routine routes and support for SAC's daily operations, MATS assembled a fleet of 447 aircraft—291 C-124's, 107 C-118's, 56 C-121's, and 29 C-133's.¹⁶⁴ The Navy component of MATS participated by sending a few crews to operate Air Force C-121's, but none of the VR squadrons or their R-series aircraft took part. For fifteen days starting on 14 March, this massive fleet of aircraft shuttled the Army to Puerto Rico and back without incident. The operation also drew the attention of a wide-ranging audience, from curious Congressmen to allied military observers. Tunner also got the press attention he sought with 352 correspondents attending the exercise. One newsman told Tunner: “You got more correspondents here than were at the Normandy invasion.”¹⁶⁵

During the analysis and debrief of BIG SLAM, Tunner drew attention to both the successes MATS demonstrated during the lift and the setbacks that kept the command from performing at its peak. MATS achieved an on-time percentage of 93 percent during the lift with an aircraft arriving in Puerto Rico every seven-and-a-half minutes alongside an almost perfect safety record—minus a few bumps and scratches from turbulence over the Caribbean.¹⁶⁶ Nor did MATS sacrifice any of its support assets dedicated to TAC, SAC, and the DOD. Despite the impressive performance, the aging piston-driven transports of MATS lacked cargo space and speed. None of the transports could carry the Army's latest tank model and excessive

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 309.

¹⁶⁵ News correspondent, quoted in Tunner, *Over the Hump*, 309.

¹⁶⁶ Robert A. Slayton, *Master of the Air: William Tunner and the Success of Military Airlift* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 240.

maintenance of aging airframes reduced overall efficiency across the fifteen days of the lift.¹⁶⁷ Tunner made it clear to the press and the DOD that MATS needed a dedicated jet transport. MATS' success during BIG SLAM set in motion the development of the C-141 Starlifter, which later came into service in April 1965.¹⁶⁸ The fact that MATS met the demanding requirements to complete the airlift also silenced the airlines' claims that they could perform MATS' duties. If MATS had to maximize its efforts to complete the exercise, then a group of uncoordinated airlines had little chance of replicating the same outcome.¹⁶⁹ BIG SLAM achieved what Tunner hoped it would. One of Tunner's advisors, Ray Towne, called the exercise "the most spectacularly successful failure in the history of military training."¹⁷⁰ BIG SLAM had both confirmed that air transport was vital to moving the Army's troops rapidly and intentionally demonstrated the shortcomings of MATS' piston transport aircraft in order to justify the need for the development of dedicated jet transports. Yet, BIG SLAM also had the unintended consequence of placing MATS on a path that brought it into conflict with two of its original partners—SAC and the Navy.

In the Shadow No More: MATS and Combat Airlift

MATS dedicated a large portion of its transport assets to the support of SAC's nuclear mission under the Eisenhower Administration's New Look policy. Throughout the 1950s, SAC relied on MATS transports to deploy and maintain the readiness of nuclear bomber forces

¹⁶⁷ Owen, "The Hearings That Revolutionized Airlift", 66.

¹⁶⁸ Ulanoff, *MATS: The Story of the Military Air Transport Service*, 95.

¹⁶⁹ Tunner, *Over the Hump*, 311.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

throughout the United States and overseas. The relationship between SAC and MATS during this time can be considered analogous to that of an older sibling teasing and sometimes brushing aside a younger sibling.

General LeMay's aggressive and combative personality developed a culture in SAC that idealized itself as the nation's most prominent offensive force.¹⁷¹ Melvin Deaile has argued that this idealization led many SAC members to think that they were part of a special outfit that was better organized and better disciplined than other commands—"the cream of the crop of the Air Force."¹⁷² When asked for their opinions about other commands with which SAC worked, a SAC member said that MATS lacked military prestige and that they "were trying to figure out if they were a commercial airline or a military organization."¹⁷³ SAC viewed MATS simply as the command responsible for hauling SAC personnel and their gear around. Proponents of air transport's importance, such as Tunner, disdained the subordination of MATS to SAC's needs, but MATS continued to provide SAC with its support in carrying out its deterrence mission. Typifying this support, starting in 1959, MATS hauled various Atlas, Titan, and Minutemen nuclear missiles to SAC's missile fields across the United States without problems.¹⁷⁴ Compared to the nuclear strike mission, hauling SAC cargo from point A to point B prevented MATS from accumulating any real prestige to leverage against SAC.

¹⁷¹ Melvin G. Deaile, "The SAC Mentality: The Origins of Strategic Air Command's Organizational Culture, 1948–51," *Air and Space Power Journal* 29, no. 2 (April 2015): 55.

¹⁷² Deaile, *Always at War: Organizational Culture in Strategic Air Command, 1946-1962*, 185.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Ulanoff, *MATS: The Story of the Military Air Transport Service*, 90.

In the late 1950s, a movement began among senior Army officers—most notably Army Chief of Staff General Maxwell D. Taylor—opposing the United States’ reliance on Eisenhower’s New Look policy grew in strength.¹⁷⁵ The movement argued that depending on nuclear weapons and massive retaliation strategies severely handicapped the warfighting abilities of conventional U.S. forces.¹⁷⁶ Taylor, frustrated by Eisenhower’s resistance to altering his New Look policy, retired from his post in June 1959 and later published a book *The Uncertain Trumpet* in January 1960 staunchly criticizing the president for his inflexibility regarding the New Look issue. With the arrival of the 1960 presidential election season, Taylor gravitated toward supporting Democratic candidate John F. Kennedy, who openly criticized Eisenhower’s New Look policy and instead called for a new national strategy emphasizing the flexibility of U.S. forces to respond to varying levels of conflict—both limited and total war. Upon Kennedy’s election to the presidency, the new president was determined to revitalize conventional forces through rapid mobility—an opportunity that MATS could capitalize on.¹⁷⁷ Kennedy’s defense policy, later known as Flexible Response, guided MATS to a closer partnership with the Army that both improved the Army’s ability to deploy around the globe and enhanced the importance of strategic airlift—and MATS—within the Air Force.

After MATS executed BIG SLAM alongside the Army in March 1960, the relationship between MATS and its “bigger brother” SAC changed. MATS now possessed an important role in national defense as the key to the Army’s push for increased mobility. MATS and Tunner

¹⁷⁵ John B. Wilson, *Maneuver and Firepower: The Evolution of Divisions and Separate Brigades*, Army Lineage Series (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, 1998), 279.

¹⁷⁶ Wilson, *Maneuver and Firepower: The Evolution of Divisions and Separate Brigades*, 286.

¹⁷⁷ Tunner, *Over the Hump*, 319.

drew the attention of Representative L. Mendel Rivers. Carl Vinson, Chairman of the House Committee on Armed Services, directed Rivers to lead a subcommittee in a study of the airlift situation. Rivers became a staunch supporter of Tunner's push to make strategic airlift a priority in national defense.¹⁷⁸ After Tunner testified before the committee about the positive results BIG SLAM, Rivers said to Tunner: "You have fought a good fight and, at long last, it looks as if the help which has been so elusive in the past is about to arrive in the form of interim modernization for MATS as well as a firm program for the future."¹⁷⁹ So determined was Rivers to support Tunner's cause that he and the committee responsible for making recommendations called for MATS to be given "a designation which is more consistent with its mission. Accordingly, the subcommittee recommends that the Military Air Transport Service be designated the 'Military Airlift Command' (MAC)."¹⁸⁰ The recommendation effectively meant that MATS was on a par with SAC as airlift proved itself just as effective as nuclear bombers toward furthering national defense. In October 1961, Lieutenant General Joe W. Kelly, MATS Commander from 1960 into 1964, remarked on MATS' transition:

The increased emphasis on limited war capability, the Presidential Approved Courses of Action, and the language of MATS' modernization legislation all point to a reorientation of MATS' activity from a predominantly scheduled operation to a posture responsive to the requirement for rapid global deployment of limited war forces as well as the requirements of general war.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Hanson W. Baldwin, "The Airlift Problem III; Military Transport Studies Questions of Tactics, Equipment and Command," *The New York Times*, March 25, 1960, 11.

¹⁷⁹ Tunner, *Over the Hump*, 317.

¹⁸⁰ Slayton, *Master of the Air: William Tunner and the Success of Military Airlift*, 242.

¹⁸¹ History of the Military Air Transport Service, 1 January-30 June 1962, 6, quoted in *Anything, Anywhere, Anytime: An Illustrated History of the Military Airlift Command, 1941-1991* (Scott AFB, IL: AMC History Office, 1991), 114.

In February 1962, Kelly requested approval from the Air Force to again reorganize MATS to better reflect its growing role in combat airlift with the Army. The Air Force granted Kelly's request and on 14 June, Kelly moved to redesignate EASTAF and WESTAF as the 7th and 11th Air Forces respectively.¹⁸² As Congressional efforts toward reorganizing MATS into MAC ran parallel with Kelly's push for the creation of the 7th and 11th Air Forces, the Air Force issued a letter of revocation before Kelly could enact his desired changes of EASTAF and WESTAF into the 7th and 11th Air Forces. MATS continued to develop its role in combat airlift by adding airdrop training. The C-124 and C-130 aircraft made excellent platforms for the refinement of combat airdrops of troops and supplies due to their handling characteristics at low speed and due to their versatility. In July 1963, MATS issued a revised mission statement for the command that included the "aerial delivery of troops, equipment, and supplies."¹⁸³ All crews assigned to the C-124 and C-130 were also directed by Headquarters United States Air Force to develop their proficiency in "single ship or three ship element formation techniques" during airdrops as part of MATS' new combat role.¹⁸⁴ Airdrop competitions soon became a new element of MATS culture as both troop carrier units and air transport units competed to perform the most accurate deliveries.

The recommendation by Rivers and the House Armed Services Committee presented MATS an opportunity to involve itself in a new mission that garnered it the prestige and support it had long sought. Fighter aircraft had proven themselves in World War I; bombers had gained

¹⁸² *Anything, Anywhere, Anytime: An Illustrated History of the Military Airlift Command, 1941-1991*, 115.

¹⁸³ Air Force Regulation 23-17, "Organization and Mission-Field, Military Air Transport Service", July 9 1963, quoted in *Anything, Anywhere, Anytime: An Illustrated History of the Military Airlift Command, 1941-1991*, 112.

¹⁸⁴ Air Force Regulation 23-17, "Organization and Mission-Field, Military Air Transport Service", July 9 1963, quoted in *Anything, Anywhere, Anytime: An Illustrated History of the Military Airlift Command, 1941-1991*, 112.

significant attention during World War II; and now transports for airlift had gained full recognition and legitimacy. As a critical element in the United States' new approach toward limited wars, MATS broke out from the shadow of SAC. The reorganization of MATS into MAC would not occur for another six years until 1966, but the ramifications of the recommendation to reorganize the command only contributed to the end of jointness between the Air Force and Navy through MATS.

BIG LIFT, QUICK RELEASE and the Navy's Dwindling Role in MATS

In the aftermath of BIG SLAM and strengthened by the House Armed Services Committee's recommendation that MATS be elevated to a more prominent role in the nation's system of national defense, MATS continued to experiment with the Army and push the limits of strategic airlift. Looking to build on experience gained during BIG SLAM, MATS and the Army planned another major airlift exercise for the fall of 1963. MATS was tasked with airlifting the entirety of the Army's 2nd Armored Division and a million tons of their battle equipment to Germany and France. As a rapid response deployment to a simulated Soviet attack, completion of Exercise BIG LIFT was limited to two-and-a-half days—a far more demanding objective than the previous fifteen-day hop to Puerto Rico in 1960.¹⁸⁵

Unlike the previous BIG SLAM lift, MATS now had use of a narrow-body jet transport—the C-135 Stratolifter. With increased speed and range that allowed it to fly nonstop to Europe from Dover Air Force Base in just over ten hours, the Stratolifter focused on hauling personnel across the Atlantic while the older C-118s, C-124s, and C-133s carried the division's

¹⁸⁵ Ulanoff, *MATS: The Story of the Military Air Transport Service*, 47.

combat equipment. These older aircraft took about 30 hours with a stop in the Azores at Lajes Field to reach Germany and France, allowing them to make only one trip for the lift.¹⁸⁶ The Stratolifters on the other hand completed two or three missions each, proving that jet transports were essential to speeding the Army's deployments overseas. By the end of the two-and-a-half-day exercise on 24 October 1963, MATS had fully transported the 2nd Armored Division to Europe in record time, earning praise from Secretary of Defense McNamara, who called the lift "a new magnitude of U.S. military responsiveness."¹⁸⁷

Soon after, on 30 January 1964, MATS quickly followed up BIG LIFT with Exercise QUICK RELEASE—a smaller Pacific version of BIG LIFT. Four thousand troops of the 25th Infantry Division stationed in Hawaii were chosen to act as a rapid reaction force and fly 4,600 miles to Okinawa in a simulated deployment against Communist threats in Asia.¹⁸⁸ MATS allocated nine C-135s and seven C-124s to the lift with no participation from Navy MATS crews in their R6Ds or R7Vs.¹⁸⁹ By this point, MATS' ascension as a critical element in Flexible Response left the Navy squadrons sidelined as their narrow-body piston aircraft became less useful for moving troops and combat gear efficiently. Some of the VR squadrons had transitioned to the C-130 by the time QUICK RELEASE started, but it became clearer that Navy MATS squadrons would not play a crucial role once the Air Force's new C-141 Starlifter came into service. The Navy and Air Force did join forces through coordination between MATS and

¹⁸⁶ Ulanoff, *MATS: The Story of the Military Air Transport Service*, 48-49.

¹⁸⁷ Secretary Robert McNamara, quoted in Ulanoff, *MATS: The Story of the Military Air Transport Service*, 50.

¹⁸⁸ Jack Raymond, "Army to Airlift 4,000 Men 4,600 Miles in Pacific; Navy and Air Force Join in Test Shift of Combat Unit from Hawaii to Okinawa," *The New York Times*, January 14, 1964, 2.

¹⁸⁹ Raymond, "Army to Airlift 4,000 Men 4,600 Miles in Pacific; Navy and Air Force Join in Test Shift of Combat Unit from Hawaii to Okinawa", 2.

the MSTs much as they had during Operation BLUE JAY.¹⁹⁰ MATS flew in the troops and their basic gear, while the Navy victory ships acted as forward depots that housed tanks, artillery, and other heavy supplies.¹⁹¹ Much like its European predecessor BIG LIFT, QUICK RELEASE achieved its overall aims and added to MATS' list of successful rapid deployment exercises.

The Navy viewed the successes of BIG LIFT and QUICK RELEASE as a potential threat. As had occurred in the late 1940s, so in 1964, the Navy found itself in the crosshairs of McNamara and the DOD. McNamara was a numbers man who surrounded himself with a group called the Whiz Kids, brought in from the RAND Corporation, who sought to use economic analysis, game theory, and other modern management concepts to run the DOD.¹⁹² Their obsession with cost-effectiveness caused them to question many of the Navy's projects, including a request for a nuclear-powered carrier. When BIG LIFT demonstrated air transport's efficacy to deploy troops overseas quickly, McNamara and the Whiz Kids took aim at the MSTs and the Navy's transport ships.¹⁹³ They argued that if transport aircraft could move combat forces faster than sea transport then there was no need for a large fleet of transport ships.

Having already suffered setbacks from McNamara's desire to cut expensive naval projects, the Navy was forced to take aim at MATS and argue for the relevance of sea transport and the MSTs. An article run in *The New York Times* by Hanson Baldwin defended the Navy's position:

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Baldwin, "The Fighting Ship Still Sails the Sea", 87.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

Sea power implicitly confers upon those who understand its use the invaluable military asset of mobility; navies can move rapidly, with heavy support and all the appurtenances of power, whether planes or tanks, from crisis to crisis, continent to continent. Neither the Air Force nor the Army can fill these roles; neither, alone or in combination, can, without the Navy, project power from the sea to the land.

Modern sea transport cannot match modern air transport in speed. But it has capabilities which air transport can never equal. It has first, flexibility; it does not require political friendship, overflight rights, prepared airfields, and refueling facilities. No national veto can be applied; the sea is free.¹⁹⁴

The article continued to tear into the praises of BIG LIFT, claiming that airlift would not work in a major wartime scenario since “airfields in Europe would have been closed to transports” by enemy attack or arguing that a fleet of transport ships could easily remedy the problem of depending on aircraft with smaller payloads that required two or three trips.¹⁹⁵ The Navy also cited the Marines Corps’ ability to conduct an assault on any enemy shore from the sea as a counter to the Air Force and Army’s partnership in paradrop operations. Any claims made by the Air Force for the importance of strategic airlift were challenged and countered by the Navy. The Navy, instead of arguing against strategic bombing and the Strategic Air Command as it had in 1949, was now openly attacking strategic airlift and MATS in a fashion reminiscent of the days of the Revolt of the Admirals. Air power and sea power once again found themselves at odds.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 290, 292.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 291.

Vietnam and the Rise of MAC

The United States had long been involved in Vietnam and more broadly in Southeast Asia before the French defeat at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, but hostilities between the United States and North Vietnam escalated after Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution on 10 August 1964. After a series of disputed confrontations between North Vietnamese gunboats and U.S. destroyers in the Tonkin Gulf, the Johnson Administration used the incidents as justification to commit U.S. forces to a war in Vietnam.¹⁹⁶ To avoid confrontation with the Soviet Union, the U.S. leaders pursued the Vietnam War as another limited war, and the Military Air Transport Service was poised to play a significant role in the buildup of troops in Southeast Asia.

The old but reliable C-124 made up the backbone of the MATS fleet at the start of the conflict and quickly began to show its age when it took the aircraft 95 hours to fly from Travis Air Force Base in California to the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon after refueling stops in the Pacific. By this time, the new C-141 Starlifter was coming into service with MATS squadrons to replace the aging piston-powered transports.¹⁹⁷ The Starlifter's arrival tripled MATS' airlift capability in speed, range, and capacity almost overnight. Now, troops and supplies could be flown across both the Pacific and Atlantic oceans non-stop at a cruising speed of 430 knots, far superior to that of the piston aircraft of the 1940s and 1950s. With the growing capability of strategic airlift to support their operations, Army leaders started to change their requirements for airlift. When the Army partnered with MATS at the start of the 1960s, the

¹⁹⁶ *Anything, Anywhere, Anytime: An Illustrated History of the Military Airlift Command, 1941-1991*, 117.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

Army had only planned to use cargo aircraft to deploy small rapid-reaction forces and their fighting equipment.

With the Vietnam War entering full swing, the Army now wanted MATS to airlift heavy infantry units with mechanized and armored elements. Tanks and other large equipment of that caliber did not fit in the new C-141, presenting MATS with an opportunity to request another upgrade for its fleet. The older turboprop powered C-133 capable of carrying outsize cargo, much like the C-124, was beginning to fall behind the needs of the time. Secretary McNamara announced on 22 December 1964 that the Johnson Administration was ordering the development of a new heavy transport aircraft later designated as the C-5A Galaxy. Johnson called the aircraft's development an effort to "further improve our ability to concentrate our power rapidly in a threatened area so as to halt aggression early and swiftly," adding that the C-5 represented "a dramatic step forward in the worldwide mobility of our forces and in American leadership in the field of aviation."¹⁹⁸ With the C-130 providing tactical-level support, the C-141 handling routine airlift requests, and the C-5 hauling heavy, outsize equipment, MATS found itself the master of the whole spectrum of strategic airlift.

MATS' strengthening of its airlift capabilities also sparked a revival of interservice rivalry with the Navy and the Army. Having proven that strategic airlift was an important component of national defense, the Army wanted to boost its relevance by incorporating tactical airlift with its Air Assault divisions. To increase the mobility of its ground troops, the Army wanted control of both helicopters and light transport aircraft attached to their respective Air

¹⁹⁸ History of the Military Air Transport Service, 7 July 1964-30 June 1965, 169-170, quoted in *Anything, Anywhere, Anytime: An Illustrated History of the Military Airlift Command, 1941-1991*, 121.

Assault divisions.¹⁹⁹ The Air Force saw this as a challenge to its role as single manager of all airlift, and it set upon a series of exercises to determine whose tactical airlift system was better. In November 1964, the Army and Air Force competed in exercises GOLD FIRE I and AIR ASSAULT II, which pitted the C-130 against the Army's CV-2B.²⁰⁰ Both exercises demonstrated the merits of both systems, resulting in an impasse. The Army kept its CV-2B aircraft for its use while the Air Force kept its claim that the Army's use of helicopters be limited. The situation would not be rectified until the Johnson-McConnell agreement of 1966, which saw the Army transfer its CV-2B aircraft to the Air Force in exchange for the Air Force's relinquishment of claims on limiting the Army's control of helicopters.²⁰¹

The Navy, ever cautious about supporting missions and roles that call traditional naval forces' relevance into question, eyed MATS' growth with resentment after the events with McNamara and the MSTs. The various reorganizations of MATS led to the Navy squadrons gradually having a smaller and smaller role in the command's strategic airlift mission. When the Vietnam War escalated after the Tonkin Gulf Incident in 1964, Navy personnel represented a minuscule eleven percent of all MATS personnel and no Navy admirals held command billets in MATS.²⁰² The recommendation that MATS be redesignated MAC to assume a status on a par with SAC and TAC only pushed the Navy over the edge. The Navy pulled its support of MATS

¹⁹⁹ Hanson W. Baldwin, "WAR GAMES TEST OPPOSING TACTICS; Air Force and Army Vie to Control Aviation Support," *The New York Times*, November 15, 1964, 80.

²⁰⁰ Baldwin, "WAR GAMES TEST OPPOSING TACTICS; Air Force and Army Vie to Control Aviation Support", 80.

²⁰¹ Ray L. Bowers, *Tactical Airlift, The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia* (Washington D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1999), 238.

²⁰² "4 Airlift Squadrons in Navy To Be Shifted to Air Force," *The New York Times*, April 27, 1966, 41.

as the command increasingly leaned away from jointness. On 1 January 1966, MATS completed its transition into MAC, and the Navy announced the end of its partnership with the Air Force. The remaining Navy squadrons flying C-130 aircraft assigned to MAC continued to fly with the command under orders that they would deactivate by July 1967 and transfer their aircraft to the Air Force.²⁰³ The MATS that cultivated jointness between the Air Force and the Navy during a time in their history when interservice rivalry was the norm officially ceased to exist. It was no longer a joint command. MAC was an Air Force command.

²⁰³ “4 Airlift Squadrons in Navy To Be Shifted to Air Force”, 41.

Conclusion: Journey's End

For most years of its existence, MATS did not conform to the interservice rivalry between the Air Force and Navy and demonstrated what could be accomplished when two or more services committed assets to a joint command. It was a critical first step among members of the U.S. military toward understanding true jointness even during a time when the services sought to differentiate themselves to maintain missions, assets, and relevance after World War II. Pushing through initial clashes of their distinctive institutional cultures, Air Force and Navy trained together as MATS crews and learned to operate as a joint team that saved a city, expanded the United States' defensive barriers, evacuated fleeing refugees, and so much more. MATS' partnership with the MSTTS and elements of the Army also demonstrated the way in which additional joint commands could coordinate their efforts during operations. For most of its eighteen years of service, MATS achieved what it was created to accomplish.

It was only after strategic airlift had gained prominence as a key element of Flexible Response and after MATS had achieved equal institutional status with other Air Force major commands that MATS' culture of jointness between the Air Force and Navy began to falter. The Air Force acknowledged the growing importance of strategic airlift as both another critical element of air warfare and a counter against the Navy's argument for sea power. To preserve control over the strategic airlift mission, the Air Force gradually isolated the Navy from MATS. This in turn caused the Navy to increasingly view strategic airlift as another challenge to its relevance. Thus, MATS fell victim to the resurgence of the interservice rivalry from which it had largely distanced itself in 1948. MATS was reorganized into the Air Force's MAC not because it had failed as a command but quite the opposite. Strategic airlift had succeeded too well.

The Vietnam War only aggravated the desire among the services for further separation. During the conflict's early phases, none of the services seemed willing to cooperate, and so no joint doctrine had been developed for the war.²⁰⁴ Historian and retired Air Force Colonel John Schlight noted: "Issues arose from doctrinal differences between the Army and the Air Force, as well as from different perceptions each service held of its roles and missions, not only in Vietnam, but in the broader arena of national security as well."²⁰⁵ Each service brought separate ideas about air power to the dispute and air transport was not the only system that faced debate. The Air Force was called upon to support a ground war with close air support and quickly came into conflict with the Marine Corps. Two separate targeting systems caused confusion between the two services' respective close air support aircraft, resulting in some targets being hit by both USAF and USMC aircraft while other targets were ignored in the confusion.²⁰⁶ The bitterness of the dynamic between the Air Force and the Navy in Vietnam fed the desire for separation among the services. Rather than attempt any form of joint strikes against targets in North Vietnam, the Air Force and Navy agreed to implement the route package system—dividing North Vietnam into six sectors.²⁰⁷ Under this system, Air Force and Navy aircraft struck targets within their respective sectors and avoided interfering in each other's operations. The Air Force and Navy agreed to disagree, but this did nothing to foster development of a more effective system between the two.

²⁰⁴ James A. Winnefeld and Dana J. Johnson, *Joint Air Operations: Pursuit of Unity in Command and Control, 1942-1991* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1993), 63.

²⁰⁵ John Schlight, *The War in South Vietnam: The Years of the Offensive, 1965-1968*, The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia (Washington D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1999), 11.

²⁰⁶ Schlight, *The War in South Vietnam: The Years of the Offensive, 1965-1968*, 285.

²⁰⁷ Winnefeld and Johnson, *Joint Air Operations: Pursuit of Unity in Command and Control, 1942-1991*, 77.

Even as the services struggled to find a workable system between their respective close air support and strike aircraft, MAC found some ways to carry on MATS' joint legacy during the Vietnam War. The official history of MAC called the war "a revolutionary one for the Military Air Transport Service/Military Airlift Command. The principal role of airlift changed dramatically, shifting to a greater emphasis on direct combat support."²⁰⁸ In mid-December 1967, Marine Forces at Khe Sanh became encircled by North Vietnamese troops, resulting in a siege that lasted from January to April 1968 when a land route to Khe Sanh was reestablished.²⁰⁹ Intensive fire from the North Vietnamese prevented resupply to Khe Sanh by land, leading to MAC taking up responsibility for resupplying the Marines against the encirclement. MAC C-130 and C-123 crews flew under heavy fire into Khe Sanh to make emergency supply drops, sometimes opting to fly in the clouds until nearly the last minute and then dive down toward the airstrip to evade groundfire.²¹⁰ Some aircraft and crews were lost to enemy rockets and artillery while unloading on the airstrip, but MAC pressed on. By the time the encirclement was broken in April, MAC had delivered 12,500 tons of cargo to Khe Sanh, arguably playing a major part in the Marines' withstanding the North Vietnamese assault.²¹¹ While MAC was not the joint command that its predecessor had been, it continued to provide crucial support to the military services other than the Air Force. Ironically enough, MAC's official history states that airlift's role in Vietnam "presaged the growing sentiment for the Military Airlift Command to become a

²⁰⁸ *Anything, Anywhere, Anytime: An Illustrated History of the Military Airlift Command, 1941-1991*, 145.

²⁰⁹ Bowers, *Tactical Airlift*, 314.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 134.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

specified command directly under the control of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,” bringing the whole argument full circle back to what MATS started.

The combined experiences of the Vietnam War, the costly embarrassment of a failed rescue attempt of American hostages in Iran during Operation EAGLE CLAW in 1980, and coordination issues during the invasion of Grenada in 1983 finally pushed the U.S. military to revisit the DOD’s command structure and seek a solution to curb the plague of interservice rivalry during the mid-1980s. Enter the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, which set in motion the most comprehensive reorganization of the DOD since its establishment in 1947. This effectively took away command of combat forces from the service departments and instead made the services responsible for training and organizing forces to support newly formed unified combatant commands. These combatant commands were designed from the outset to be joint commands that brought land, sea, and air forces under the authority of a single theater commander—one of these commands being the United States Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM).²¹²

USTRANSCOM’s establishment on 1 October 1987 finally realized the DOD’s goal of unity among the United States military’s transport assets. The Air Force’s MAC, the Army’s Military Traffic Management Command (MTMC), and the Navy’s Military Sealift Command (MSC), which was the successor to MSTC, were brought under a single command structure that separated them from the competitive influences and doctrinal differences of their respective service departments.²¹³ At first, some old problems of rivalry did carry over into

²¹² Danita L. Hunter, *United States Transportation Command: 10 Years of Excellence, 1987-1997* (Scott AFB, IL: Public Affairs Office U.S. Transportation Command, 1997), 9.

²¹³ Hunter, *United States Transportation Command: 10 Years of Excellence, 1987-1997*, 10.

USTRANSCOM as the service departments were allowed to retain their single-manager transport charters, causing USTRANSCOM to experience problems with coordination between the services.²¹⁴ Experiences from the invasion of Panama during Operation JUST CAUSE, the Gulf War with Operation DESERT STORM, and peacetime troop movements brought the issue of the single-manager charters to light. To expand USTRANSCOM's authority against the still active charters, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney signed a memorandum on 14 February 1992 declaring that USTRANSCOM was to "provide air, land, and sea transportation for the Department of Defense, both in time of peace and time of war."²¹⁵ The issue finally ended in January 1993 when Acting Secretary of Defense Donald J. Atwood declared the commander of USTRANSCOM to be the single manager for all DOD transportation except for "service unique or theater-assigned transportation assets."²¹⁶ At long last, the DOD had achieved jointness of its transportation assets.

The creation of a joint force in the DOD took many decades of trial and error, and MATS' legacy as the first unified command in 1948 helped start the effort. For eighteen years it struggled against interservice rivalry to prove that a joint force could work. It did so through numerous accomplishments, some well-known and others obscure, that demonstrated the effectiveness of MATS and joint commands. Even after MATS was reorganized into MAC, its legacy of jointness pushed, and sometimes stumbled, onward. That legacy's efforts were validated in 1986 with the DOD's major restructuring and the creation of USTRANSCOM, and

²¹⁴ Ibid., 16.

²¹⁵ Secretary Dick Cheney, quoted in Hunter, *United States Transportation Command: 10 Years of Excellence, 1987-1997*, 16.

²¹⁶ Secretary Donald Atwood, quoted in Hunter, *United States Transportation Command: 10 Years of Excellence, 1987-1997*, 18.

they were fully realized after 45 years in 1993 when USTRANSCOM gained full authority of all DOD transportation. MATS could then be seen as the first step on the arduous journey toward true jointness in the DOD.

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Appendix A - List of Abbreviations

AACS – Airways and Air Communications Services
ATA – Air Transport Association of America
ATC – Air Transport Command
AWS – Air Weather Service
DOD – Department of Defense
EASTAF – Eastern Transport Air Force
GCA – Ground-Controlled Approach
MAC – Military Airlift Command
MATS – Military Air Transport Service
MSC – Military Sealift Command
MSTS – Military Sea Transportation Service
MTMC – Military Traffic Management Command
NATS – Naval Air Transport Service
NME – National Military Establishment
SAC – Strategic Air Command
TAC – Tactical Air Command
USAF – United States Air Force
USAFE – United States Air Forces Europe
USAAF – United States Army Air Forces
USN – United States Navy
USTRANSCOM – United States Transportation Command
VR – USN Air Transport Squadron (until 1958)
WESTAF – Western Transport Air Force