

Life of a Ground Crew

I entered service late 1944 and assigned to the 308 Bomb Group (B-24s) in Chengkung air base, China.

To support the two of the group's four squadrons of bombers based in this base, it needs crews of different skills and ground crew to fuel, arm the guns, load the bombs, etc. Of equal importance: housing and feeding the personnel and myriad functions to keep the base operational.

When the planes take off for a mission, the ground crews responsible for those planes lumbering off with the heavy loads will be as apprehensive as those in the planes for a successful take-off.

The crews will anxiously await the planes return, meanwhile heading back to their barracks or Day Room (recreation room). The usually noisy place will be eerily quiet with the men reading or writing letters home (I suspect for most, this is the only time they do so).

As the planes return from a mission, all the base personnel will gather at the landing strip to count those returning; hoping any missing has landed or crashed in friendly territory and rescued by the natives, and not shot down or crashed elsewhere. Jubilations after a successful mission is short-lived, since preparations are needed and underway for the next.

Both the air and ground crews share lodging and dining facilities, which contributed greatly to the unusual camaraderie and life-long friendship for many. The saddest occasions are when the orderly collects the belongings of those who are either missing or killed in action, from the barracks. We had a kinship so strong that, decades later, we still keep in touch and think of each other with most special regards.

Even as victory is celebrated, it is not all glory; no one relish war, especially the dwindling number of us.

Robert Lee

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地勤人員的生活

李羅伯
莊可欣翻譯

我自一九四四年加入部隊開始服役，並被分配至中國呈貢空軍基地第三〇八轟炸大隊。當時，爲了維持該基地服役的兩架B-24轟炸機運作正常，需要一群不同領域的技術人員，以及負責燃料補給、彈藥裝填等各項工作的地勤人員。在基地裡，無論是負責運輸工作的人員或是其他爲了維持基地運作的所有工作人員，都是同等重要的。

每次，當基地的飛機準備出發執行作戰任務時，無論是地勤人員或是飛行員，大家皆共同爲了是否能讓裝載著沉重物品的飛機順利起飛而感到緊張及憂慮。同時，飛機起飛後，地勤人員也會回到自己的住所或是基地附設的康樂室裡，焦急地等待飛機的回航。這時，平常人聲鼎沸吵雜的這些地方會變得異常的安靜，而在裡面等待的隊員們，只是靜靜的坐在那裡閱讀或是寫信回家（我猜想這應該是唯一的一段時間，他們能如此平靜、寧靜地待在這地方吧！）。當飛機完成任務飛返基地時，所有基地的工作人員會聚集在飛行跑道上，認真的計算那些返航的飛機，心中期望著所有那些沒歸返的戰友，能降落或是迫降在友邦的領土上，而且是被當地居民所拯救，而不是被擊落在哪個不知名的荒野中。當然，在每一次圓滿執行任務後，會有一個短暫而簡單的慶祝活動，但僅只如此，因爲下一個任務已經又在準備進行中了。

在基地裡，空、地勤人員都生活在一起，並肩作戰、生死與共，很多人也因此建立起同袍間一輩子不凡的友愛與忠誠。但生活中總有令人難過的部分，尤其是在看到勤務兵來到隊上，整理那些在任務中未歸或是被殺的同袍物品時。在戰場上我們建立的情感，讓彼此擁有像家人般密不可分的關係，即使是數十年之後，我們仍保持聯繫或是不時致上特別的問候。

勝利並不是一件全然值得誇耀的事情，畢竟沒有人喜歡戰爭，尤其是像我們這些親身經歷的人……



（此圖轉載自《飛虎薪傳—中美混合團口述歷史》）