



The Hard-Luck Herk 001's Licensed to do Anything Contrary

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OH, IT COULD FOOL YOU. The first time TSgt. Jack Parr saw it, for instance, it just sat there, looking all neat and slick and clean; a pretty, sparkling silver color all over. It looked just as innocent and honest and hard-working as any other C-130 on the flight line.

Hah!

Don't judge a book by its cover, and never, never judge an airplane by its color.

It was October, 1962, and Parr, Hercules flight mechanic, was getting his first look at 55001, the airplane with a problem. It would be a memorable association.

The first thing that struck Parr about the plane was its tail number. The 55 meant 1955, the year of purchase, and the last three digits, resembling a James Bond "license to kill," showed it was one of the first C-130s ever to be bought by the Air Force.

But it soon became too clear to Parr that 001 had a license to kill, too—it murdered its maintenance crew's schedules regularly.

The second thing that struck Parr was that 001 never ran right, no matter how its crew pleaded with its electrical system or coaxed its engines. It was the 315th Air Div.'s prodigal plane.

"We seldom could ever finish a mission without feathering (disconnecting) an engine or running a day late in those days," Parr sighs.

One of his earliest, warmest memories of 001 was the electrical fire it had back in 1964, near Shikoku over the Pacific. He was flight mechanic then—one engine had to be feathered and all generators taken off the line in flight. This meant no power, no radios, no instruments.

THICK, acrid white smoke choked the cabin, and the crewmen took apart part of the plane in flight, searching for the fire. They found it only after the Hercules had limped into Naha AB, Okinawa, diverted from Taiwan.

Of course, technically, C-130s are never supposed to have airborne electrical fires, but 001 always was individualistic.

Then there was the chronic fuel leak that sprang up later that year, because of gradually loosening rivets in the wing. It took them a long time to locate the exact trouble—no one knows how many missions had to be scrubbed because fuel mysteriously began oozing out of the plane before takeoff, but the mechanics at Naha finally certified the wings were cracked.

This meant a little flight—fuel still dripping—back to Robbins AFB, Ga., to the Hercules factory. There it

was decided 001 needed a new pair of wings.

Now, normally, on any other C-130, this operation takes about two weeks.

001 was in the hangars for more than seven months. No 315th people were with her, so no one knows what agonies the Lockheed engineers underwent at the hands of 001.

But there were some indications of the success of the surgery. The division's MSgt. Jim Feltham was engineer on the trip back to the Pacific. He said the plane only had to land 13 times because of engine failure.

Now, it would seem, on a mathematical basis, that there are just so many things that can go wrong with any collection of mechanical equipment—even an airplane. But 001 was a true artist. It turned up unique things to go wrong with it.

Take May of 1966. On a flight to Saigon's Tan Son Nhut AB, things were going fine. It was shortly after takeoff—all engines were running perfectly as the plane climbed up, up—through 10,000 feet, 12,000, up into the 15s.

Then, for no particular reason, the power dropped on No. 2 engine. The pilot fed it more fuel, kept her climbing. As the altimeter needle topped 16,000, the power in No. 2 automatically started back up.

THAT was the story for the rest of the flight. No one could find out why, but No. 2 was just "altitude sensitive." Between 15,000 and 16,000 feet, it lost power. Just like clockwork, it stopped when flight mechanic SSgt. Vern Hassell got tired of chasing the mystery malfunction responsible and replaced No. 2.

But the best saga of 001 is yet to be told. It was April 19, last year. Parr was flight engineer, Maj. Ken Wilson, pilot, Capt. Drury T. (Duke) Wellington III, co-pilot, Lt. Col. Willie Woldt, who made his new silver leaves on that trip, navigator; SSgt. Bill Gibson, loadmaster, and A2C Gary Glasscock, crew chief. Old 001 was on the shuttle run in Vietnam.

At Bien Hoa AB, 001 had just disgorged a load of cargo and was readying to leave when its pilot was told to divert to An Khe, in the Vietnam highlands. An armored brigade had to move the next day, an someone had to be there to move it.

An Khe, where they landed at sunset, was a miserable mudhole.

After a dinner of C-rations, Parr and Glasscock settled down to sleep in the plane. Gibson crossed the runway to sleep on a spare cot in an Army dispensary tent set up there.

Parr remembers waking up at about 1:30 a.m. because of noise and lights down the runway, where engineers were repairing the strip. He didn't know why, but he had a funny feeling. The Army people had told him the airfield was secure, but he decided to close all the airplane doors anyway.

He went back to sleep.

The next thing he heard was a chain of loud pops that reminded him of strings of Chinese firecrackers he had heard once at a Taiwan wedding ceremony. They were machine guns. The VC were attacking the airfield.

Parr looked out of a window, saw that the engineers' lights were doused. The strip was bathed in moonlight. At one end of the field was the Army camp; the other end was a blaze of fire and tracers—all aimed at Parr.

There were two or three loud bangs—rifle fire slamming into 001. Parr hit the deck. Glasscock, who was sleeping in the cockpit, opened the forward crew door, peered out. He shouted to Parr that he was going to run. Parr yelled back "No! Just stay put! You don't know who's going to kill you."

BOTH men were unarmed, and Parr knew bullets were flying like hailstones all around the plane. Suddenly, the tiny plastic and wood ATCO office, 100 feet away, blew up in a shower of splinters. Glasscock dove into the back of the plane.

Bullets began ripping into 001 again. The two men could see big showers of sparks where the slugs were plowing through radior gear up in the nose.

Parr half-opened the small crew door in the back of the plane, peered out. He could see the C-130 was

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Crew Chief Hassell can always find something on Old 001 that is in need of adjustment.