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The Four Horsemen

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by Maj Tim Brady *illus. 8-10*

The cover of the January 18, 1960 issue of AVIATION WEEK AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY featured the following headline: "C-130 Team Flies Air Show Formations." The cover photograph was that of four C-130s in a very unusual formation and was captioned: "Four Horsemen Begin Bomb-Burst."

Bomb-Burst?

C-130 Aerial Demonstration Team?

Four Horsemen?

Somebody's got to be kidding!

Kidding? Hardly. The Four Horsemen did, indeed, exist. From 1956 to 1960 they thrilled audiences throughout the country with precision four-ship formations in the big Hercules C-130. To "thrill" was not

their goal. To demonstrate the performance, versatility, and multi-role potential of the C-130 was. And there was another, completely understandable, goal. For years the primary airlift aircraft was the C-119, a good airplane but not particularly endowed with spectacular performance. But now the airlifters had themselves an airplane with power, maneuverability, speed, and endurance; a gut airplane which could do everything better. And with the C-130, the airlifters had a chance to demonstrate that as professional pilots there were none better anywhere.

Such must have been the thought when in 1956, while on a training mission at Fort Campbell, the aircraft commanders who were to become the Four Horsemen, conceived the idea of a C-130 demonstration team. That

turned out to be the simple part; promoting it to a practical reality became the difficult task.

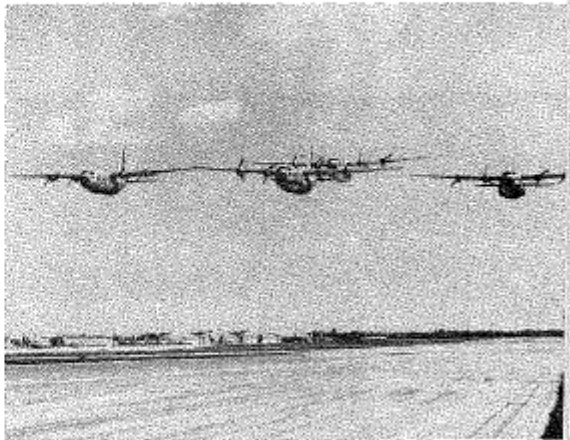
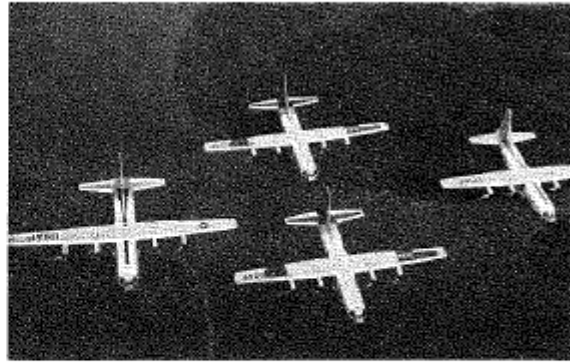
Hours upon hours of research into regulations, tech orders, and safety standards, coupled with the tedious job of placing the show formations on paper, finally paid off in the form of TAC approval. The Four Horsemen became a sanctioned aerial demonstration team.

The team was not formed as a separate unit with their own airplanes, maintenance teams, and crews; rather the crews and airplanes were drawn from the resources of the 774th Troop Carrier Squadron which, during this period, was stationed first at Ardmore AFB, Oklahoma, then Sewart AFB, Tennessee. Of course, the same crews that made up the Four Horsemen team always flew together but the airplanes were picked from the operational aircraft on the flight line.

The flying time necessary to practice the show formations and to give performances came out of the squadron's hide and had to be sandwiched in between such things as the Lebanon crisis, the Quemoy-Matsu thing, and numerous side trips to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and Pope AFB, North Carolina for airborne troop and heavy equipment drops, and scores of other operational missions and exercises.

Soon after the team was formed, the word about "those guys that fly the big airplanes" spread and requests for demonstrations came hot and heavy. And no wonder; the shows were exciting and completely unique in that a big four engine turboprop was being used as the show aircraft rather than the traditional fighter.

A typical show began with a four-ship, two second interval takeoff. Since normal spacing for formation takeoffs is fifteen seconds, the two seconds used by the Horsemen made the takeoff appear to be a simultaneous four-ship maneuver. Takeoff roll was less than 2000 feet. The gear came up on all four aircraft simultaneously and the flaps were milked up while climbing out. Passing the end of the ten thousand foot runway, the Horsemen were tucked in "diamond" formation and passing 1500 foot altitude while climbing at 4000 feet per minute. Next came a high speed pass (about 270 knots) over the field in diamond formation, followed by a diamond formation chandelle. The Horsemen then changed to an "arrow head" formation for another fly-by, followed by a single file "arrow" formation fly-by. Each formation change was a crisp maneuver done in perfect coordination within full view of the audience. The next-to-last maneuver was a bomb-burst done from the diamond formation. The spectacular maneuver was begun on command of the slot man, at which time he started a steep pull up with a 45 degree left bank; at the same time the leader pulled up and to the right at 45 degrees of bank and the wingmen



the four horsemen

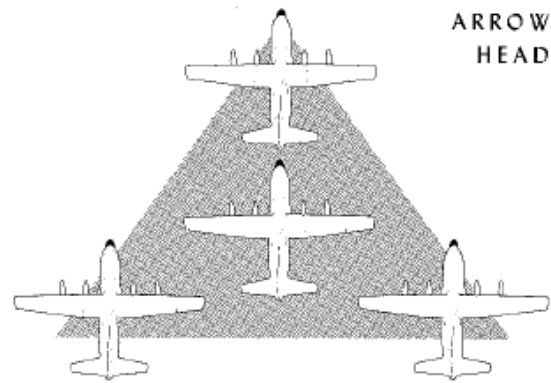
broke to the left and right, respectively, using 90 degrees of bank. After the bomb-burst, the formation quickly rejoined and came over the field in echelon formation for a simultaneous "fan break" overhead pattern. The Horsemen rolled out on downwind in close trail formation, which was maintained to landing, with each succeeding aircraft touching down on alternate sides of the runway.

With their impressive performances, the Four Horsemen carved out a little piece of history for themselves and for all airlift (troop carrier as it was then called). And, like the old saying, "It was great fun while it lasted." In the spring of 1960, the team was disbanded because of the pressing operational need of the C-130 capability.

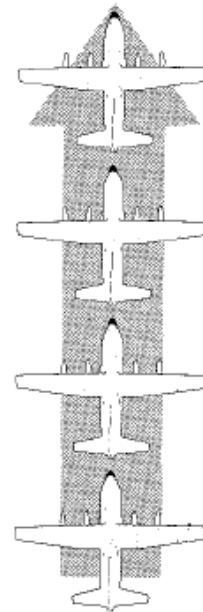
The Four Horsemen achieved their objectives. They brought the capabilities of the C-130 to the forefront of discussion and they proved that as professional pilots and crews, there are none better in the world than those in TAC airlift. And that's true today. ➔



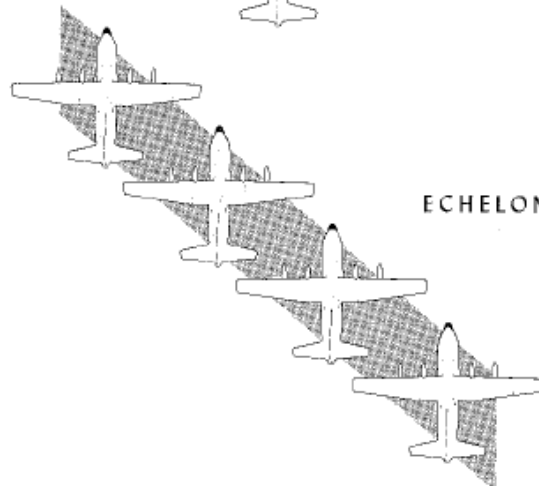
THE FOUR HORSEMEN (1960). FROM LEFT TO RIGHT : CAPT HUBERT E. (GENE) CHANEY, CAPT WILLIAM H. HATFIELD, CAPT JAMES F. AKIN, AND CAPT DAVID L. MOORE



ARROW
HEAD



ARROW



ECHELON