

38 Group—Tactical Support

by Stephen P. Peltz

Author's photos

A SPECIALIST TACTICAL transport group in R.A.F. Transport Command, No. 38 Group was re-formed in January 1960 to plan and control all tactical transport operations, particularly those concerned with Army support.

No. 38 Wing first came into being at Netheravon in Wiltshire in 1942, and, re-named as 38 Group became an Army support Group in 1943, building up a powerful fleet of troop carriers and gliders. At the time of D-day it consisted of: Nos. 295, 296, 297 and 570 Squadrons equipped with Albemarles; Nos. 106, 190, 299 and 670 Squadrons equipped with Stirlings; and Nos. 298 and 644 Squadrons with Halifaxes. In June 1945 when it was transferred to Transport Command it was the largest group in the R.A.F. but after progressive reductions in forces resulting from the end of W.W.II, and then the end of glider towing operations, the Group disbanded in 1951.

The Group was re-formed in 1960 and its first task was to build a mobile tactical force and an R.A.F. organisation for the joint control of tactical task forces. The Group Headquarters moved to R.A.F. Odiham in May 1960 and its present forces consist of Beverleys, Hastings and Argosies, for transporting the task forces from their bases to the area of operations, Whirlwind, Belvedere and Wessex helicopters for taking troops and equipment

to the front line and Hunter FGA.9 ground-attack aircraft for giving covering fire and softening targets for the troops. There are also a few Pioneers and Twin Pioneers that are used on ambulance duties; the Group's helicopters can also be used for this purpose. Future equipment will include the 748MF Andover tactical transport, the Hawker Siddeley 681 STOL transport, and probably the P.1154 V/STOL strike-fighter.

A Field Force Organisation has been built up, for 38 Group must be able to operate its aircraft in an area far from normal facilities and its operating methods must fit into the pattern of a joint Services task force, if necessary working in a wilderness. The Headquarters at Odiham is therefore equipped with tentage, mobile radio communications and air portable equipment, and the whole force is always ready to move at a moment's notice.

Thus equipped and organised, 38 Group is prepared to support anyone, at any place or in any formation. But its principal interest is the Army's Strategic Reserve stationed in the United Kingdom which includes the regular Parachute Brigade, its most likely partner in joint operations.

The most interesting facet of the Group's work is its share in the production of a Joint Tactical Task Force. Each Service makes its contribution to such a force and the R.A.F. contributes Trans-

LEFT: A Beverley of No. 47 Squadron flies in heavy equipment during manoeuvres. RIGHT: Troops descend from a 225 Squadron Whirlwind HAR.10

port Command, with 38 Group on the spot. Because of the great flexibility of air forces, the air contribution, both inside and outside 38 Group, can be widely varied to suit the circumstances, and assistance can come from almost any other operational Command. Thus it is essential that the Group's mobile, air portable, and therefore lightweight command facilities and field communications are able to handle not only its own aircraft, but considerable reinforcements also.

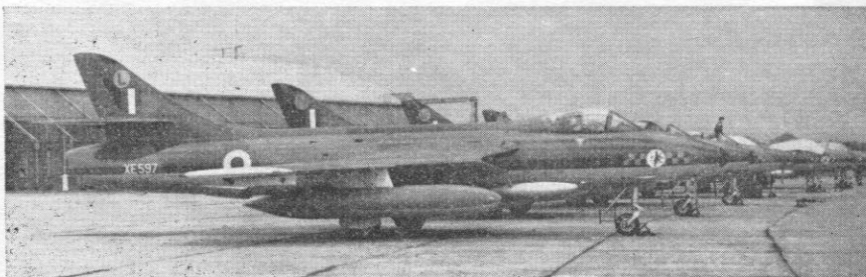
If this Joint Task Force is activated it must move fast. Unchecked emergencies grow like an epidemic, and a situation that can be controlled by a small force on Friday is beyond control by any force on Monday, as has been shown by the situation in Malaysia. The Army Strategic Reserve and 38 Group, committed to a trouble spot, can be on the move, by strategic and tactical air transport, within hours of warning; the Naval component will then be closing in on the area, if it lies close to a coast.

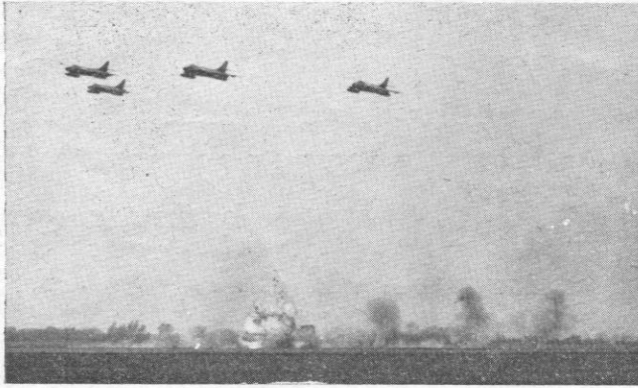
When the forces arrive on the spot, the tactical and strike aircraft remain to work while the strategic transports go back to bring the second wave of the lift and to set up a continuous chain of supplies.

From the end of the strategic line, which stretches back to England, the force moves forward to fulfil its mission. The Army is at "light scales" and has no heavy transport. It must be airlifted into contact with the enemy. To do this a piece of ground may have to be seized by paratroops assisted by air-to-ground fire support. On to this unprepared surface, once it is held by our own forces, the tactical transports will come pouring in, bringing the airborne infantry, the fighting supplies, the heavier weapons. Soon the helicopters and light transports will be working from this airhead, and the Army, safe on the ground and developing its plan of operation, can go forward from the airhead to complete its mission.

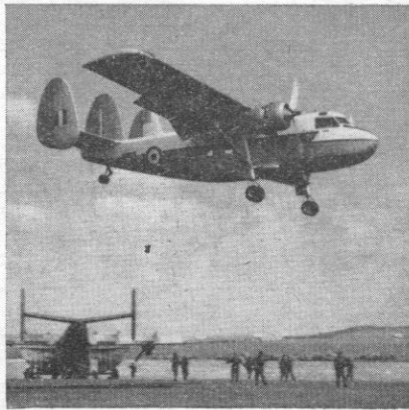
Today, with the only alternative to an all-out nuclear war being the so-called "brush-fire" war, 38 Group is an indispensable part of Britain's armed forces.

Apart from its transports and helicopters, 38 Group controls two ground-attack squadrons. Illustrated here are the Hunter FGA.9s of No. 54 Squadron





ABOVE: No. 54 Squadron's Hunters show how to "soften up" an enemy position in preparation for the troops who will be following



RIGHT: Casualty evacuation by Twin Pioneer, a duty also performed by the Group's helicopters



ABOVE: Troops are flown up to the front line by helicopter—a Belvedere HC.1 of No. 72 Squadron illustrated. Latest 38 Group helicopters are the Wessexes of No. 18 Squadron (see September issue). BELOW: Paratroops drop from a 114 Squadron Argosy



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Cadetships are also available in the Equipment and Secretarial Branches and R.A.F. Regiment.

Joining ages, 17½—19½. Next entry, April 1965. Time to find out, now—closing date for applications is October 31st.

For full details, please write, giving date of birth and educational qualifications, to Group Captain J. W. Allan, D.S.O., D.F.C., A.F.C., R.A.F., Adastral House (GR 169), London WC1


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