

185 SPECIAL OPERATIONS SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

620 Bombardment Squadron (Dive) constituted, 25 Jan 1943

Activated 4 Feb 1943

Redesignated 506 Fighter-Bomber Squadron, 10 Aug 1943

Redesignated 506 Fighter Squadron, 30 May 1944

Inactivated, 9 Nov 1945

Reconstituted and redesignated 185 Fighter Squadron (SE) and allotted to the OK NG, 24 May 1946

185 Fighter Squadron (SE) extended federal recognition, 13 Feb 1947

Redesignated 185 Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, 1 Feb 1951

Redesignated 185 Fighter-Bomber Squadron, 1 Jan 1953

Redesignated 185 Fighter Interceptor Squadron, May 1958

Redesignated 185 Air Transport Squadron, 1 Apr 1961

Redesignated 185 Military Airlift Squadron, 1 Jan 1966

Redesignated 185 Tactical Airlift Squadron, 10 Dec 1974

Redesignated 185 Airlift Squadron, 15 Mar 1992

Redesignated 185 Air Refueling Squadron, 1 Apr 2008

STATIONS

Key Field, MS, 4 Feb 1943

Congaree AAFld, SC, 3 Ju1 1943

Burns AAFld, OR, 2 Sep 1943

Myrtle Beach AAFld, SC, 13 Nov 1943-13 Mar 1944

Winkton, England, 5 Apr 1944
Chapelle, France, 6 Jul 1944
Bretigny, France, 29 Aug 1944
Juvincourt, France, 11 Sep 1944
St-Trond, Belgium, 1 Oct 1944
Keltz, Germany, 30 Mar 1945
Fritzlar, Germany, 12 Apr 1945
Stuttgart, Germany, 23 Jun-Aug 1945
Drew Field, Fla, 11Sep-9 Nov 1945
Westheimer Field, Norman, OK
Will Rogers Field, Oklahoma City MAP, OK, Sep 1949

DEPLOYED STATIONS

Shaw AFB, SC
Ramey AFB, PR

ASSIGNMENTS

404 Bombardment (later Fighter-Bomber; Fighter) Group, 4 Feb 1943-9 Nov 1945
137 Special Operations Group

WEAPON SYSTEMS

Mission Aircraft

A-24, 1943
P-39, 1943
P-47, 1944
P-51, 1949
F-51
RF-51
RF-80, 1952
F-80
F-86, 1960
C-97
C-124
C-130, 1979

Support Aircraft

C-47
T-6
C-45

COMMANDERS

LTC James E. Hill
Maj Monte Deere
LTC Mitchell McDonald

HONORS

Service Streamers

American Theater

Campaign Streamers

Air Offensive, Europe

Normandy

Northern France

Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace

Central Europe

Air Combat, EAME Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citation

Germany, 10 Sep 1944

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award

Apr 1987-Mar 1988

French Croix de Guerre with Palm

29, 30, and 31 Jul 1944

Cited in the Order of the Day, Belgian Army

6 Jun-30 Sep 1944

1 Oct-17 Dec 1944

18 Dec 1944-15 Jan 1945

Belgian Fourragere

EMBLEM



On a white disc, border triparted blue, white, and red, a charging, caricatured red bull, horns white, trimmed in black, blowing two light blue aerial bombs from the nostrills, all emitting speed lines gray. (Approved, 26 Aug, 1943)



The 185's new insignia was an Indian warrior dressed in a red breech-cloth and moccasins, sitting atop a flaming jet engine. The warrior held a tomahawk topped with a bomb in one hand, and in the other he held onto the engine as it sped downward to the attack. The Indian held a machine gun in his teeth. The insignia was in a blue circle outlined with black. Shortly thereafter the proposed emblem was registered by the heraldic branch of the air force.

When the 185 acquired the lineage of the WW II 506th Fighter Squadron they also acquired its insignia. This consisted of a full left profile of a rampaging bull snorting two bombs from his nostrils. His tail is erect and his hooves are throwing up dust. Beneath him are several lines representing the ground and trees. All this is enclosed within a brown circle. It was not a popular patch with the pilots and in fact none has ever surfaced nor does a photo of anyone wearing one seem to exist. Oddly enough it would remain with us until late 1953 when it was replaced with the new Injun Joe insignia which we still wear to this day.

The insignia will face toward the front of the aircraft. This insignia was automatically carried over to the 185 when that unit accepted the lineage of the wartime 506th. It was not a well liked insignia but the press of events during those years was so intense that little thought was ever given to the design of a new insignia. It wasn't until we entered the jet age that a dedicated movement began to change this emblem to one more nearly indicative of our new jet fighters. On 8 Sep, 1953, Cpt Doyle Hastie, 185 Commander, wrote to the Chief of the National Guard Bureau stating that the unit had no present organizational insignia and requested 'Injun Joe'. On 22 Sep, 1953, Col Clayton Hughes, Chief, O&T Branch, Air Force Division, wrote us back stating "records of the NGB indicate an organizational insignia exists for the 185 FBS and has since 1943. On 3 Oct 1953, MG Roy W. Kenny wrote to the Chief, NGB and stated "The old insignia is very unpopular with the personnel, old and new, of the squadron. This unpopularity is carried to the extent that the insignia is never displayed.



Whether anybody knew that the 185 Fighter Squadron already had an insignia or not will probably never be known. What is known is that Capt. George Masterson lived across the street from the Daily Oklahoman's chief political cartoonist, Jim Lange. Their wives were close friends. Masterson ask Lange to submit a drawing for an insignia that would illustrate the fact that we were Air Guard, Oklahomans, and flying a jet fighter. Injun Joe was selected by Jim Lange because of the fact that, at the time, Oklahoma contained approximately two thirds of the American Indian population of the world. The design was submitted, in triplicate, to the Chief of NGB for his approval citing the insignia's conformance with APR 900-7 and ANGR 900-7.



On 28 Dec. 1961, LTC George N. Masterson, 137th Air Transport Group CO, sent a letter to the Personnel Services Division, Directorate of Military Personnel, requesting a change in the insignia to reflect our new mission. The change from 'Injun Joe' diving down astride the jet engine became 'Injun Joe' riding a pony 'bareback' down through the clouds while pulling a boulder roped to a travois. On 26 Apr 1962 LTC R.D. Norton, of the Directorate of Military Personnel, approved the change. The new insignia was selected by the officers and enlisted men of the unit. LTC Newman and BG Ed Johnson endorsed the change.





MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Combat in ETO, 1 May 1944-4 May 1945.

On 25 Jan 1943, the forerunner of the Oklahoma National Guard's 185 Fighter Squadron was reconstituted as the U.S. Army Air Corps' 620th Bombardment Squadron (Dive) of the 404th Bombardment Group, which was activated on 4 February 1943. Originally equipped with Douglas A-24 dive bombers, the army's version of the navy's SBD Dauntless dive bomber, the 620th trained at Key Field, Mississippi, and Congaree Field, South Carolina, before being redesignated as the 506th Fighter-Bomber Squadron of the 404th Fighter-Bomber Group in August of 1943. With the reorganization, the 506th exchanged its A-24s for P-39 and P-47. Early in September, the unit was transferred to Burns Army Air Field in Oregon.

On 13 Nov 1943, the 506th returned to South Carolina and resumed its training at Myrtle Beach Army Air Field, where it remained until 12 March of 1944, when it was ordered overseas. Stationed at Winkton, England, the 506th FBS was assigned to the Ninth Air Force. The 404th was reorganized as a fighter group in May of 1944. Equipped with P-47s, the 506th Fighter Squadron began flying combat missions over France to prepare the way for the Normandy invasion. When the Allies stormed ashore on D day, 6 June 1944, the unit was a part of the air cover for the ground troops.

Shortly afterward the unit moved its operations to the Continent and provided close air support for ground troops until the end of the war. The 506th provided cover for the Allied breakout at Saint-Lo and for the drive through Holland, and it helped blunt the German onslaught at the Battle of the Bulge. In addition to its ground-support role, the unit also flew interdiction and escort missions against enemy troop concentrations, railroads, bridges, ammunition and fuel dumps, and other targets during the fighting. Following the Allied advance across Europe, the

506th was stationed at Capelle, Bretigny, and Juvincourt in France; at Saint-Trond, Belgium; and at Keltz, Fritzlar, and Stuttgart in Germany.

After the war in Europe ended on 8 May 1945, the 506th helped disarm and dismantle the German aircraft industry before being returned to Drew Field, Florida, for inactivation in Nov 1945. For its participation in World War II, the 506th was awarded the distinguished unit citation, the French croix de guerre with palm, and a citation from the Belgian government for its actions. On 24 May 1946, allotted to the Oklahoma Air National Guard, it was reformed as the 185 Fighter Squadron. Four months later, on 1 Oct 1947, it was assigned to the newly formed 137th Fighter Group commanded by LTC Hill.

Before World War II, the 125th was Oklahoma's only Air National Guard unit, the first to organize after the fighting ended was the 185 Fighter Squadron S.E. (Single Engine). Located at Norman, Oklahoma's Max Westheimer Field, the 185 was formed by LTC James E. Hill, a native of Stillwater and a World War II ace. The 185, which was granted federal recognition on 13 Feb 1947.

Hill had strict entrance requirements for the 185 and initially selected only those pilots with fighter-plane combat experience. Because of his stringent criteria for pilots, the squadron had well-qualified pilot officers. Eight of the pre-Korean mobilization pilots assigned to the 185 eventually became general officers: General James E. Hill; major generals Ray A. Robinson, Grover H. Isbell, and Stanley F. H. Newman; and brigadier generals Walter F. Daniel, Doyle W. Hastie, George N. Masterson, and Robinson Risner. Each pilot faced a personal interview with the commander. You were then placed on a waiting list with the understanding that, if you were accepted, you would be brought in as a Second Lieutenant regardless of your present rank. Drill was held four Monday nights each month from 1900 hrs until 2100 hrs.

The choice of Max Westheimer Field at Norman as the home base for the Oklahoma City unit was initially a good one. Westheimer, which during the war had been called Norman Navy North Base was close to Oklahoma University. Due to the many ex-GIs attending OU under the GI Bill there were literally hundreds of people to select from.

Originally the 185 equipped with the P-51D, which became known as the F-51 in 1948. In addition to the Mustangs, the Oklahoma national guardsmen had several T-6s, C-47, and B-26s. The T-6s were basically a training aircraft. The Oklahoma guardsmen used the aircraft for utility flights, such as towing targets or for transport

Hill had hoped that the 185 would receive its Federal Recognition no later than 1 February, 1947 but due to delays in the arrival of the inspection team this was not realized. The unit was finally inspected on 13 Feb 1947. Cpt Woodrow W. Donnell became the first Operations Officer of the 185. Two active duty Air Force officers were assigned as our first Air Advisors. They were Col Jack Jenkins (senior advisor) for the 137th Fighter Group and Maj Ralph Embree for the 185 Fighter Squadron. Interestingly, the 185 started out life with only one full time member; MSG Floyd Hauser. He was the squadron first sergeant which in those days was called a 'caretaker'.

Later this would be changed to Air Technician. As the unit grew three more caretakers were added. LTC Jim Hill as the 185 Commander; Cpt Woodrow Donnell as the Operations Officer; and Maj Ray Robinson as the Maintenance Officer. Later a fourth caretaker, Cpt Bob Burnham would become the Supply Officer. This was soon followed by yet another full-timer, Col Maurice Marrs (later BG) as the first base commander.

First annual federal inspection was held in Mar 1948. Except for a few minor write-ups the unit was graded satisfactory.

Our first field training session was held at Vance AFB, OK from 15 Aug 1948 to 29 Aug 1948. Although Vance had been abandoned by the military after WW II and housed only a caretaker command, the Oklahoma guardsmen did the best they could with what they had available. By the end of their two week camp they had been successful in reactivating much of the base, including the facilities swimming pool. Because of the proximity to civilian property, air to air gunnery was out of the question, but air to ground practice was extensively carried out at the nearby Great Salt Plains. From that day until Apr of 1949 recruiting and training were the order of the day.

At about this time the 185 Fighter Squadron and the 137th Fighter Group were assigned to the 63rd Fighter Wing. This WWII organization had been assigned to the Texas National Guard on 24 May, 1946 and received its Federal recognition on 23 May, 1948. While assigned to this Wing we flew a number of operations throughout TX.

Al Donnell crashed while landing at Vance AFB, OK during the 1948 Summer Camp. Mustang was totally destroyed and Al was literally hurled from the wreckage, still strapped to the seat. Miraculously he suffered only cuts and bruises. On another occasion Ray Robinson used a P-51 to plow a Norman, OK cornfield on a maintenance test hop.

On 30 April, 1949, at 1505, a tornado struck the base at Norman. One building was destroyed and some records were lost but incredibly, no airplanes were lost. This in spite of the fact that some of them were tied down in rows only a few hundred feet from the destroyed building. Because the damage was considered to be too extensive to economically repair and because of our growing need for more space and longer runways, the decision was made to move the entire unit to Oklahoma City's Will Rogers Field. On 6 September, 1949, the move was accomplished.

During the fall of 1950 when it became obvious to the powers that be that the war in Korea would not go away nor resolve itself, the reserve forces began to be called up. In Oklahoma this was done in a totally piecemeal fashion. Our first Korean War assignment was to send the 237th Air Service Group, Detachment "C" to Summer Camp at Kelly AFB from 13 August to 27 August, 1950. This order came down as Detachment order #11 dated 1 Aug 1950. It would seem that as soon as this Summer Camp ended the 237th was given their marching orders as they were the first to leave during the fall of 1950 along with headquarters, 137th Fighter Group.

1 April, 1951 the 185 Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron were federally activated for a 21 month tour of active duty. Our equipment consisted of 7 F-51D's and 11 RF-51's. Initially we remained at home station Will Rogers Field, and this became somewhat of an embarrassment to us. It seems that several of our pilots had, upon receiving their active duty orders, been given farewell parties by families and friends and after much fanfare and celebrating, they were still here. A pilot would get up in the morning from his own bed, don his flight suit and leave for the base. He would come home at the end of the day and go to bed with his spouse. The friends and neighbors who had thrown him the party were just a little confused. Was he on active duty or This call-up was initiated by 14th Air Force and finally, during Jan 1952, we received our long-awaited movement orders. The 185 RS was assigned to Shaw AFB, SC and placed under the 9th Air Force's 118th TRG. Our new squadron commander at this time was regular Air Force Lt. Col. Stanley W. Irons. Our aircraft were now the RF-80 We received 18 RF-80A's, two T-33's, and two T-6's. Our RF-51s were transferred to the 118th Maintenance and Supply Group at Shaw AFB. Within a month most of the Oklahoma Air National Guard pilots who had not already been scattered all across the Air Force were on their way to the Far East as replacement pilots. It was a great disappointment not to be able to go as an integral unit but as individual replacements. While this was considered to be a less than ideal situation it eventually proved to be highly beneficial. Because of their generally greater experience the Air Guardsmen were usually assigned to command or supervisory slots once they arrived in the battle zone. Almost half of the 185's pilots found themselves assigned to the Fifth Air Force and stationed at Kimpo (K-14) Air Base near Seoul. Once again we found ourselves flying the RF-51. As our 185 boys were rotated to the Far East their places at Shaw were taken by pilots from other units who had already completed their tours in Korea. The reason for our switch back to the Mustang at this time is that we were assigned to the 67th Tactical Reconnaissance Wings 45th Tac Recon Sq and this was the plane they flew. It was while we were assigned to the 45th that we adopted the dark blue with white polka dot markings we would bring back to Oklahoma with us after the war.

When the Air National Guard pilots arrived in Korea most were assigned to the Forty-fifth Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron where they initially flew the RF-51D; later, they also piloted RF-80As and F-80Cs. The planes usually were paired together for missions, with the wingman providing protective cover for the leader, who completed the visual reconnaissance assignment. As the unit received jet aircraft, the wingman flew the F-80C, which carried six .50-caliber machine guns in its nose, and the leader flew the RF-80A, which carried cameras instead of guns. The arrangement prompted a saying among the RF-80A pilots of being "alone, unarmed, underpaid, but scared shitless."

Major General Newman, who had first joined the 185 in 1948 and later became commander of the 137th Military Airlift Wing, was among the first four Oklahoma air guardsmen to report to the Forty-fifth Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron in March of 1952. Newman was somewhat dismayed to learn that the only thing that separated the Kimpo Air Base from North Korea was the Han River and a rather thin line of ROK infantry. Although the river was a formidable natural barrier when it was flowing, when Newman arrived it was frozen solid, and only a few ROK

troops patrolled its banks. It was not until some U.S. Marines were assigned to hold the ground between the base and the river that the pilots felt secure. The Oklahoma guardsmen were frequently harassed at night by an enemy PO-2 biplane, which would fly over the base and merely "putt-putt" back and forth just enough to alert the defenses and ruin their sleep.

The 185, minus its pilots and some other key personnel, continued to serve as a tactical-reconnaissance squadron at Shaw Air Force Base until 31 Dec 1952. At that time the 185 designation was returned to Oklahoma City, and the unit was reorganized as the 185 Fighter Bomber Squadron. The 185 reunited home under the command of Capt. Doyle Hastie. Less than 25% of the pilots returned to Oklahoma City

The reconnaissance pilots were assigned specific zones to patrol day after day. Although it became almost routine, the repetitious missions familiarized the pilots with the terrain and made the task of spotting enemy targets easier. Often the routine was broken by Communist flak or by being assigned to fly alternate missions adjusting naval gunfire on the coast of North Korea.

The reconnaissance pilots agreed that the greatest drawback to their missions was the limitation placed on the use of their weapons; they could fire only in self-defense. Once Newman was walking to the operations room when he received word that another reconnaissance pilot had spotted a group of camouflaged Communist tanks but was running too low on fuel and had to return to base. Hurriedly briefed by intelligence and quickly airborne, Newman located the tanks parked in a valley along with anti-aircraft guns on the valley floor and in the surrounding hills. The hillside weapons were able to spread a network of tracer fire across the valley. Newman led two flights of fighter-bombers on their bombing runs and marked the targets with his machine guns. After the fighters completed their work, Newman recorded the destruction with his reconnaissance camera and returned to base.

After their tour in the Korean War, only a quarter or less of the 185 pilots returned to the Air National Guard. The rest chose to remain on active duty and complete their careers. When first reorganized as a fighter-bomber squadron, the 185 had one F-51H, one C-47, and one T-6 with which to train. The unit quickly qualified its new pilots in the T-6, and soon it was granted federal recognition.

The aircraft shortage was alleviated somewhat about six months later when four additional P-51Ds were assigned to the unit and the F-51H transferred out. By the summer of 1953, when the 185's first post-Korea training camp was scheduled for Casper, Wyoming, the unit still had only four of its fighter aircraft available for duty. The 185 was able to arrange with another Air National Guard unit at Albuquerque, New Mexico, which had a similar shortage, to combine the two squadrons' planes so that each would have eight aircraft available for their summer camps that were scheduled to be held in succession at Casper. That summer the 185 went to camp with four of the "old gang" and four newly assigned pilots.

The 185 returned to the jet age in July of 1953, when the F-51Ds were phased out in favor of

the F-80B, and redesignated as the 185 Fighter Squadron (Single Engine) Jet. A year later the Oklahoma guardsmen flew their F-80Bs to the Lockheed Aircraft plant at Burbank, California, where they were modified into F-80Cs by installation of a more powerful engine and more efficient fuel control.

1 Jan 1953 the newly reorganized and redesignated 185 Fighter-Bomber Squadron, the 137th Fighter-Bomber Group, and then the 137th Fighter-Bomber Wing were reestablished. The aircraft we expected to get was the F-51D. The only problem was that there were no Mustangs available.

On 1 April 1953 when the 185 Fighter-Bomber Squadron was redesignated as the 185 Fighter-Bomber Squadron (Augmented). The unit was equipped with the F-80B and the T-33A. We were 'augmented' because, among other things, we still had a few F-51's assigned. Between July and August, 1953, the entire group became jet equipped. The 185 Fighter-Bomber Squadron (Augmented) became the 185 Fighter Squadron (SE). Doyle Hastie was still our commander.

1957 the Oklahoma Air National Guard was given a major role as a fighter interceptor unit in the Air Forces Air Defense Command. At first glance it would seem illogical to place an interceptor unit in the middle of the country. It would seem to make more sense to position them along the nation's borders. There was, method to the madness. There is a seasonal flow of the upper jet stream from Siberia down across the Great Plains into the Southwest, and then toward the industrialized northeastern United States. Some Air Force strategies reasoned that by utilizing the powerful west to east jet stream over Siberia, Soviet bombers could sweep diagonally across the Pacific, and stay in the jet flow across Baja, California, New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma to targets on the east coast. Although this flight would cover a longer ground track than would a direct flight across the North Pole, it would be as effective because of the added speed that could be achieved by riding the high velocity upper air currents. It was obvious that, with its relatively slow (for a jet fighter) speed, the F-80 could not fulfill this mission. Consequently, on 1 May 1958, the Oklahoma Air National Guard units at Tulsa and Oklahoma City were equipped with the F-86D. Flying the Dog necessitated a change in the location of our Summer Camp. With the F-80's we traveled to Casper, Wyoming.

Once equipped with the D's the Oklahoma guardsmen began to conduct Summer Camps at Gulfport, Mississippi where they could actually fire the Mighty Mouse rockets out over special ranges in the Gulf of Mexico. Oklahoma Air National Guard was given a major role as fighter-interceptors in America's Air Defense Command.

18 Feb 1959, Lt. Karl Keller experienced a flame-out in his F-86D. He executed a safe landing at Tinker AFB OK. Less than one month later, on 17 March, 1959 we lost another F-86D when Cpt Jerry Gardner of Norman was killed in the crash of his jet into a wheat field North of El Reno.

3 Mar 1960 the 14th FIS from Sioux City flew in 25 F-86L aircraft to replace our F-86D's. On 11 Mar we flew 15 of these -D's to Davis-Monthan AFB in AZ for storage.

23 Jun 1960, 2Lt. Raymond L. Sanders, 24, was killed parachuting from his F-86L while returning to Oklahoma City from Denver, CO. .

In April of 1961 the Oklahoma City Air National Guard unit also was reorganized as the 185 Air Transport Squadron, an element of the Air Transport Command, which later evolved into the Military Airlift Command. Initially, the two squadrons had different versions of the aircraft. Originally, from Apr of 1961 through Feb of 1963, the 185 was equipped with the KC-97F. Later, in Feb and Oct 1963, the guardsmen were assigned the more advanced KC-97Gs. Although both planes had originally been built to serve as tankers, the 185 Air Transport Squadron used the aircraft only as a cargo carrier by removing the refueling boom and refueling tanks that were installed in the cargo compartment of the tanker version. In October of 1963, the unit's KC-97Gs were converted to C-97Gs through the addition of clam-shell doors, improved avionics, and a cargo-configured interior.

April 1, 1961 we received our first KC-97F when one of our own crews delivered one (tail number 10309) Plattsburgh AFB, New York. These first airplanes carried the aerial refueler nomenclature although the refueling apparatus had been removed and they were configured strictly as cargo aircraft. Although we were cargo haulers there were still more of our pilots current in the F-86 than in the C-97's so, in order to keep our pilots proficient, some of the F-86's were kept back for this purpose. This presented the sight of F-86's and C-97's in the same markings sharing the same ramp. Our major command at this time was Air Transport Command so we were designated as the 137th Air Transport Wing and the 185 Air Transport Squadron.

During the switchover to C-97s, the 185 was given a specially equipped C-97E, the "Miss Oklahoma City"—better known as "Talking Bird"—for utilization as an airborne command post. From 1961 to 1972, Talking Bird was deployed throughout the world on various communication missions. KC-97E/SC s/n 51-224. Known to the Air Force as a C-97 Special Category Airborne Command Post. She always was, and always will be, our "Talking Bird". This was arguably the most beautiful and most perfectly maintained C-97 in the inventory. Clearly shown here are the highly polished prop blades with their distinctive red, white and blue tips as opposed to the standard black blades with 6" yellow tips.

On March 25, 1952, the United States Air Force accepted delivery of a KC-97E aerial tanker, serial number 51-224 from the Boeing Company plant at Seattle, Washington. Its first assignment was with the 305th Bombardment Wing, Strategic Air Command, at McDill AFB, Florida. Fifteen months later, during July of 1953 it was transferred to the 44th Bomb Wing, SAC, Lake Charles AFB, Louisiana. The 44th operated it until it was sent to the 3510th Combat Crew Training Wing, Air Training Command, Randolph AFB, Texas. Its next move was just across the ramp when it was transferred to the 4397th Air Refueling Wing, SAC, at Randolph, in July, 1958. In August of 1960 the aircraft was transferred to the Oklahoma Air Material Area, Tinker AFB, Oklahoma City where she underwent modification to a C-97E/SC standard with the refueling apparatus removed. It was the SC in her type designation that set her apart from every other C-97 in the inventory. The SC stood for Special Category and this made the "Bird" unique. She was a flying communications platform. She was the first pure communication

aircraft in the inventory and was the precursor of dozens of types that followed. This was a three month operation and by November, 1960, the 'new' plane was sent to the 4th Tactical Fighter Wing at Seymour-Johnson AFB, North Carolina. She was at Seymour-Johnson only briefly before being sent to the 125th Air Transport Squadron of the Oklahoma Air National Guard based at Tulsa. This event took place in February, 1961.

It was during this time that the 'BIRD' flew her first two missions as a command post airplane. The first was a 71 day, 16,596 mile deployment to Clark AFB, the Philippines on a SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organization) mission. This would last from 21 March to 31 May, 1961. Her only other mission under the 125th was a two day trip to Pope AFB, North Carolina in support of Operation Swift Strike, 17 through 19 Aug, 1961. By September, 1961 the plane had relocated to Will Rogers ANGB and the 185 Air Transport Squadron, Oklahoma Air National Guard. Talking Birds schedule would continue at the same pace with the Will Rogers crews. In all, during the 11 months of 1961 that the Oklahoma Air National Guard would have the plane it would log some 350 flying hours and travel over 66,000 miles visiting 22 countries. She would spend some 140 days out to accomplish this. And that was only the first year! Her next move was a paperwork only move. She was transferred from the 185 Squadron to the 137th Wing, Oklahoma Air Guard, still at Will Rogers. In 1961 alone, counting the two missions flown with the 125th, Talking Bird would deploy to twenty-two foreign countries. It was used to maintain constant secure communications between the nations capitol and President John F. Kennedy during the chief executives visit to Venezuela in 1961. She was given the name "Miss Oklahoma City". She would also be called 'Talking Bird' and on another occasion, 'El Loro'. She would remain at Will Rogers for the next nine years. She would carry us to over 34 countries during 82 missions in that time. In September, 1972 she was delivered to Davis-Monthan AFB, Tuscon, Arizona for storage and eventual scrapping.

When the plane operated with the regular Air Force it looked just like any one of the other KC-97's in the inventory. It was an unimposing airplane. Then it went to Tinker for modification. The plane became a prototype, designed by the Air Force to provide improved methods of world-wide communications in the event of any foreseeable emergency. Outfitted and tested at Tinker, the plane carried both secured voice and secured teletype command communications. It was turned over to the Oklahoma Air Guard and was manned and maintained by us. Its crew, although all guardsmen, were on constant four hour alert. Unique to this one aircraft was the fact that it was the only element of the Air National Guard which operated under the direct command of Headquarters, United States Air Force. The 'birds' orders came direct from Washington. The amount and the type of equipment the plane carried and the size of the crew were strictly dictated by its operational requirements. These were: first; the plane must be ready to go in four hours; second, that it must be capable, once deployed, of operating on a twenty-four hour basis for a minimum of four days; and thirdly, that it must carry enough tools and spare parts for one week of sustained operations. The on-board equipment consisted of coding and decoding equipment, communications systems for transmitting and receiving messages while airborne, a complete command post to be set up at its destination, and a complete switchboard to receive telephone messages from the field and transmit them back to the United States. The aircrew consisted of at least nine persons; two

pilots, a co-pilot, and two navigators plus flight engineers and any other essential airmen. There were at least ten persons aboard to operate the communications equipment. But these were only the minimums. More people were required for longer or more specialized flights. And the bird was not known for its short hops! Counting back-up crews and ground support personnel it was obvious that it required dozens of men to keep the bird ready to move out. In any other situation there would be a back-up aircraft or a 'spare' plane in the unlikely event that a primary bird would fail to get off the ground. This was not a luxury enjoyed by the maintenance people tasked with keeping 51-224 up to snuff.

When she first became operational as a command post there were thirty-nine men under the command of LtTC Paul D. Kerr involved in just the communications side of the plane. They included a communications officer, technical controllers, radio and crypto operators, and maintenance repairmen. Arguably the most famous of her exploits was the 22 day trip to Dublin and Rome as President Kennedy's communications link with Washington, D.C. This 10,000 mile sojourn lasted from 16 June to 7 July, 1963 and was referred to as Alliance HI; Special Mission, Presidential. None who was on that trip ever spoke of it in anything but the most positive tone. It was indeed a highlight of many a guardsmans career.

The crews of the Talking Bird all wore the bright orange flight suits and everyone had the special 137th Airlift Wing patch with the Latin inscription *Tonitrus E Caeli* on them rather than the traditional 137th Airlift Wing logo. When the bird was parked somewhere she stood out from all the other C-97's because she was polished to a blinding, mirror-like shine. Another of her distinctive features were the individual propeller blades. The standard scheme for an Air Force cargo plane was black blades with a six inch wide yellow tip to enable someone to see the whirring prop blades. The blades on Talking Bird were highly polished metal with red/white/blue tips. To see this plane taxiing in with all four turning and the subsequent red/white/blue blur was truly a sight to behold. Sitting still on a ramp these polished blades made the bird very easy to spot. The requirements for the team members were similar to those of a SAC crew. Each man had to have a regular physical examination for flying duty, and up-to-date shot records, passports, visas, I.D. and dog tags. In the event that a Guardsman's term of enlistment was up while he was on an operation with the plane, he was immediately re-enlisted by his units personnel section back home.

Sometime after the 'bird' was sent off to Davis Monthan AFB to be converted into pots and pans we received a crate from there. Inside was a section of the fuselage from the plane. It was the lower fuselage section, left side, forward from the crew access hatch at the front. The piece was about eight feet long and 3 1/2 feet high. It was the panel that had the 34 flags of the nations visited by the plane in the eleven years we operated her along with the name "Miss Oklahoma City". For several years this panel was passed around the base from unit to unit until it wound up sitting across some desks at the back of the security police classroom. It sat there for over a year before someone from security decided to move it or scrap it. TSG Mel Sumter was NCOIC of the photo lab and he and one of his new troops, Sgt Rich Lindsey carried it off to the photo lab. It sat there for about another year until Charles "Flip" Phillips assumed the job of NCO Club manager. Lindsey asked Flip if it could be hung in the club to honor those who flew

on the plane and Flip immediately said yes.

The 185 was not called to active duty during the Berlin crisis, it flew numerous support missions, often lasting five or six days, to resupply American bases in Europe and seven-day missions to Japan. At the same time, Oklahoma City's Talking Bird was rushed to Iceland to monitor the deployment of two hundred Air National Guard aircraft to Europe as part of America's military buildup. Later, in 1965, Talking Bird was similarly scrambled when President Lyndon Johnson ordered American troops into the Dominican Republic to protect Americans caught in a civil disorder.

In the early 1960s the squadron was assigned a wartime support role under Western Transport Air Force, now the Twenty-second Air Force, which had under its control all airlift capability from the Mississippi River westward to India. With this assignment the Oklahoma Air National Guard began to play an active role in the American involvement in South Vietnam, as the 185 ATS began flying missions to Southeast Asia. A typical mission might originate in Oklahoma City or Tulsa, fly to the West Coast, load supplies, and then make its way across the Pacific to one of the major air bases in Vietnam. Once on the ground in Vietnam, the guardsmen were not scheduled to remain longer than four hours and normally were turned around as quickly as possible. The large cargo aircraft made tempting targets, and if they remained stationary for any length of time it increased the chance of drawing enemy fire. As a result, the Oklahoma guardsmen were always certain of expeditious handling during their Vietnam ground times.

By the mid-1960s four or five missions each month were being routinely flown to Vietnam by each Oklahoma Air National Guard squadron. The number continued to grow until in 1966 the 185, for example, flew 119 overseas flights, with 85 of the missions terminating in Southeast Asia. As a result of the missions, 95 percent of the personnel then assigned to Will Rogers Air National Guard Base were awarded the Vietnam Service Medal.

The guardsmen continued to fly C-97s until February of 1968, when 185 were reequipped with the C-124C. our first C-124C 52-1028 didn't arrive until Feb, 1968 from Hickam AFB, HI. Even after we completely converted to the C-124C a second C-97 stayed at Will Rogers for some time. The first was, of course, # 224, Talking Bird. The second (tail number 030233) was held here until around 1 Aug 1968 when, after it had been outfitted as a VIP aircraft, Stan Newman flew it to Salt Lake City and turned it over to that guard unit.

The Oklahomans flew several missions involving cargo too large for anything but a Globemaster to DEW-line installations along the Arctic Circle where primitive landing strips ruled out using the C-5s. The huge carrying capacity of the C-124s also came in handy when, in 1969, the 185 was called upon to ferry the Apollo VIII mission exhibit from place to place in Europe, including from West Berlin, Germany, to Zagreb, Yugoslavia. Mission planners believed that two Air National Guard C-124s would be ideal for the mission and because of its part in it, the 185 became the first Air National Guard unit to visit a Communist nation.

The guardsmen also were heavily involved in disaster relief missions and riot duty during this

decade. When Hurricane Camille struck Gulf Coast in August of 1969, the 185 flew 101 members of the Mennonite Disaster Service to Mississippi to aid in the cleanup campaign. When western Oklahoma was struck by a severe blizzard in the early 1970s, the guardsmen flew missions during Operation Hay Lift to carry feed to stranded cattle. When the inmates of the State Penitentiary at McAlester rioted in the summer of 1973, both army and Air National Guard troops were called in to quell the disturbance, and members of the Oklahoma Air National Guard spent several weeks patrolling the corridors of the penitentiary.

We would receive a total of eight Globemasters with a further eight going to Tulsa. These sixteen aircraft were designated UEA (Unit Equipment Available). There was, a second category called NOA (Not Operational - Accountable). This second category of planes allowed a unit to have extra planes available to fly when the 'regular' squadron planes were on extended trips, down for repairs or some similar reasons. For this reason we usually had approximately twenty-two of these C-124's on our ramps at any one time although we were only tasked for sixteen.

On 10 December, 1974 the 137th Military Airlift Wing was redesignated the 137th Tactical Airlift Wing and we received the C-130A. This was not a planned changeover but one of forced circumstances. The C-124 had all but been removed from the Air Force inventory and was being operated by only a few Air Guard units around the country. It was proving difficult to get servicing done as the old birds traveled from stop to stop performing their missions. The final death knell was sounded when the non-destructive inspection technicians at Will Rogers discovered a main wing spar crack that was found to be fleet-wide by all the remaining C-124 units. It seems that one of the mightiest airlifters of all time would be shot down forever by a hairline fracture and an administrator's pen. The a/c were all immediately grounded until a decision was made to allow a single last flight whereby each C-124 would be delivered to the cutters blade at Davis Monthan AFB, AZ. It was because of this premature retirement of the C-124 that we were given the Herks. Short range, low level, tactical airlift became the order of the day.

We received eight of the C-130A's. The first one of these arrived from Van Nuys, California on 2 August, 1974. The pilot was LTC Victor Kelly. He was received by our Group Commander, Col. Fred C. Seals, Jr. A few of these aircraft were real classic birds as they were the older 'Roman Nose' versions so called because of the lack of the radome nose that is the characteristic trademark of the Herk. This variant was also sometimes referred to as the 'Cricket' for the same reason. This was because the nose of these planes also bore a resemblance to the profile of the Walt Disney character 'Jimminy Cricket' We operated the third and the fifth production C-130A's in the inventory. After much hard usage a problem occurred. It would appear again and again. Propeller failure. We were plagued with it. The 'A's three-bladed props kept cracking. This problem was Air Force wide. For long periods of time it was common for the ramp here to be full of C-130's all without props as the maintenance people switched the good ones from plane to plane in an attempt to get one or two birds off on schedule.

In the meantime we had received C-130 #004 and although G-460 had superseded G-419 almost 2 weeks earlier, we did have the TAC mission and subsequently #004 was given the

standard TAC 2-letter tail code. The letters OK were applied. The only reason that #004 even got the OK on her tail was that it was in for maintenance and was the only one that would be around for a few days. When MAC saw this they immediately ordered the offending letters removed. It would come to be that although we were flying the TAC mission with a TAC Wing designation, we were still MAC and the marking was a no-no! This plane would become the only 137th bird to be painted this way albeit for only a few days. Over the next few months more S.O.'s would come in. One of these would even rescind G-588 but we would stay a tactical airlift wing under MAC until 16 March, 1992 when we would lose the TAC label and become the 137th Military Airlift Wing. Finally we would lose the word Military from the logo on 1 October, 1993 when we became just an Airlift Wing.

At noon on the Saturday, 23 June, 1979 UTA the family day picnic and open house occurred. The event was to herald the arrival of the latest airplanes to become operational with the Oklahoma City based 137th. We were receiving factory-fresh airplanes. We received the first four production C-130Hs built. They even landed in sequence. The first one over the field and touching down was 78-0806 with Albert W. Wright as aircraft commander. Copilot was Robert Bordwine; navigator was George Soupine; flight engineer was Carlis Bruce; and loadmaster was Kenny Howerton. The second plane in, 78-0807 was flown by Stan Newman with Robert 'Butch' Melrose as copilot; Cecil Brinegar as navigator; B.L. Miller as flight engineer and John Carlile, the loadmaster. Third in was 78-0808 with Stan Weid as aircraft commander; Franklin Lane as copilot; Dale Moore as navigator; Sammy Green, flight engineer; and Albert K. Seville as the loadmaster. Fourth down was 78-0809. Jerry Whitman was aircraft commander; Ron Fowler was copilot; Jean Blackard was navigator; Jimmy Connell was flight engineer and Charlie Val Bracht rode the loadmaster position.

Aircraft number 78-0812 would come in later but it took us somewhat longer to get 78-0811 from Lockheed. They kept it at the plant in Georgia to do some testing on it. We were all surprised to see a copy of Air Force magazine with a picture of 0811 showing a pair of side-by-side fin 'strakes' on it and running fore and aft under the fuselage at the extreme end of the tail. This fiberglass pair of strakes were about 50 inches long and stuck down about 10-12 inches at their maximum but tapered back towards the tail. They were about 4-6 inches thick. It was claimed that they acted much as airfoils under the tail and made for a smoother ride with less tail vibration and increased fuel economy. Speed was also said to be slightly increased. The article went on to say that these kits would be standard on all upcoming C-130H's and would be sent out to the units to be installed on all Herks already in the inventory. Oddly enough, after we received 0811 (without the two 'strakes') nothing more was heard of them or the program.

As a part of America's tactical airlift capabilities, the 185 has a global mission to resupply any military post by either conventional landings, air drop, or assault landings. The unit's main concern is with getting badly needed equipment and personnel into forward positions occupied by ground troops where landing strips are either primitive or nonexistent. If no landing facilities are available, the cargo can be parachuted from the aircraft into the perimeter occupied by friendly troops. Our crews flew into and out of such places as Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Peru, Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, Barbados, Netherlands Antilles,

Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the Azores, Hawaii, and Alaska.

On 5 Dec, 1981 when, for the first time, units of the Oklahoma National Guard and the Oklahoma Air National Guard planned, directed, and executed Operation Ripe Harvest. The coordinated exercise was the first to be totally conducted and carried out using a mix of Oklahoma Guard units. The stated purpose of this exercise was to provide Army Guard, Army Reserve, and Air Guard mutually beneficial offensive weapons tactical training under realistic conditions. This was followed by Gallant Eagle 82; the dropping of nearly 3000 parachutes as part of a 90 ship airdrop during a joint readiness exercise.

The year 1986 started off with a bang when we deployed to Panama as part of Volant oak. We used a total of six C-130's on a rotational basis. During February and March we were tasked to support the air deployment of five of five drifting data-buoys in remote ocean areas near New Zealand and Australia. We also participated in Ripe Harvest at Ft. Chaffee during June of 1986.

The unit participated in Sentry Rodeo during 2-8 Apr, 1990 and held the Purple Penny 90-03 mobility exercise during 2-4 Jun, 1990. This exercise was conducted to assess the viability of the 137th Wing mobility program.

The 185 deployed eight crew members to Al Ain Airbase, United Arab Emirates. They also participated in Coronet Sentry from 15-26 Oct. During this deployment they flew a total of 228 sorties and over 700 flying hours. This was followed by Operation Reforger Operation Display Determination and Operation North Star from 11-29 Sep, 1991. There were two Volant Oak rotations. The first was 23 Nov-21 Dec 1991 and the second from 9-23 Mar 1992.

During FY93 the 185 AS deployed six crews and two aircraft to Kauai to support Hurricane Iniki victims, 25 Sep -11 Oct, 1992, with 103.5 flight hours; to Bitburg, GE, two crews and two aircraft, 12-26 Jun, 1993 with 107.3 flight hours; Red Flag with three crews and three aircraft, 10-24 Jul, 1993 with 51.0 flight hours. Two Operational Readiness Exercises (ORE) per performed 12-15 Nov, 1992 with eleven crews and six aircraft, 4-7 Mar, 1993 with twelve crews and eight aircraft. The Operational Readiness Inspection (ORI) was supported 14-18 Apr, 1993 with thirteen crews and eight aircraft. Deployment to Argentina with six crews and four aircraft 2-19 Sep, 1993, with flight hours of 257.5 hours.

28 December 2003. A C-130H and crew from the Oklahoma Air Guard's 137th Airlift Wing became the first U.S. Air Force assets to land in Iran in over 20 years when it delivered 27,000 pounds of purified water and blankets to an airport in Kerman, the provincial capital of a region that had been devastated by a 6.6 magnitude earthquake two days earlier. The Oklahoma Air Guardsmen had been participating in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

On September 20, 2007, the last three of the C-130Hs assigned to Will Rogers ANG Base left for Pittsburgh, PA. The 137th Airlift Wing and the 185 Airlift Squadron provided aircrews for the C-130s departing and the KC-135 flown to retrieve the aircrew and maintainers. The Wing was

commended on its ability to achieve such a seamless operation with the unique ability to fly both aircraft.

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