

737 EXPEDITIONARY AIRLIFT SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

737 Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) constituted, 14 May 1943

Activated, 1 Jun 1943

Redesignated 737 Bombardment Squadron, Very Heavy, 5 Aug 1945

Inactivated, 17 Oct 1945

Activated in the reserve, 12 Jul 1947

Inactivated, 27 Jun 1949

Redesignated 737 Troop Carrier Squadron, Medium, 26 May 1952

Activated in the reserve, 13 Jun 1952

Inactivated, 1 Jan 1953

Redesignated 737 Expeditionary Airlift Squadron and converted to provisional status

STATIONS

Alamogordo AAFld, NM, 1 Jun 1943

Davis-Monthan Field, AZ, 1 Jul 1943

McCook AAFld, NE, 31 Jul 1943

Charleston AAFld, SC, 3 Oct-8 Dec 1943

Toretto, Italy, 16 Jan 1944

San Giovanni, Italy, 24 Jan 1944-Jul 1945

Sioux Falls AAFld, SD, 1 Aug 1945

Pyote AAFld, TX, 17 Aug-17 Oct 1945

McChord Field, WA, 12 Jul 1947-27 Jun 1949

Portland Intl Aprt, OR, 13 Jun 1952-1 Jan 1953

Ali Al Salem Air Base, Kuwait

ASSIGNMENTS

454 Bombardment Group, 1 Jun 1943-17 Oct 1945
454 Bombardment Group, 12 Jul 1947-27 Jun 1949
454 Troop Carrier Group, 13 Jun 1952-1 Jan 1953
386 Expeditionary Operations Group

WEAPON SYSTEMS

B-24, 1943-1945
C-130

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

Offensive, Europe
Air Naples-Foggia
Rome-Arno
Normandy
Northern France
Southern France
North Apennines
Rhineland
Central Europe
Po Valley
Air Combat, EAME Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations
Bad Voslau, Austria, 12 Apr 1944
Linz, Austria, 25 Jul 1944

EMBLEM



737th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron emblem: On a disc Azure, a bend Sable surmounted by a lightning bolt Or, overall a fox head Proper snarling, in sinister chief and dexter base a mullet Argent, all within a narrow border Black. Attached above the disk, a Red scroll edged with a narrow Black border and inscribed "DESERT FOXES" in Black letters. Attached below the disk, a Red scroll edged with a narrow Black border and inscribed "737TH EXPEDITIONARY AIRLIFT SQ" in Black letters. **SIGNIFICANCE:** Ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The lightning bolt on a field of night was a component of the historical patch of the unit. It continues to represent the present unit's ability to conduct its mission anytime, anywhere. Two stars are the beacons of peace and democracy the Squadron strives to bring to a war torn area. The Desert Fox is a wily, cunning creature, well adapted to its tasks and environment and reflects the tenacious manner with which the unit conducts its assigned missions.

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The 737th Bombardment Squadron of the 454th Liberator Bombardment Group was formed at Tucson, Arizona, under the command of Captain Herschel Carithers, on July 1, 1943. Two days later, the model crew and the section heads of the squadron left for Orlando, Florida, for advance training. At the time, Captain James Huff was operations officer, Captain James Ford was the squadron bombardier, and Captain James Brothers was the squadron navigator.

The ground officers were Major Joseph Minotty, Captains Arthur McClure, Glen Porter, Edward Stein, Frederick Vickers, and Lieutenant Frederick Brent. At the end of the month, the entire outfit moved to a spanking new air base which hadn't quite been completed on the outskirts of a little town in Nebraska. The town was McCook and the time was August first. The permanent party of the base had warned every last gal in McCook that we were headed overseas- a rough bunch but the damsels didn't seem to frighten easily, judging from the welcome they gave us. Gradually the 737th got under way, slowly at first, gaining speed as each man became accustomed to the job. Most of us were right out of tech schools and we needed plenty of experience.

We got as much as we could from tinkering with old 247, the first B-24 that the squadron had. For many of us, this life in a regular squadron was a lot different from our past experience in the reception center, basic training base, school, or the overseas pool. We'll never forget the first day in the squadron. No whistles or bugles to wake us up at 5:30 in the morning. We began to take notice of the guy working next to us, figuring that we'd probably be together for quite a while. Most important of all, though . . . we had a job to do. Not just digging holes or drilling, but a regular job which was part of the over-all squadron set-up. Some of the more unfortunate among us had made the acquaintance strictly from the business (KP) angle-of our first sergeant, Thomas McLaffon.

He was destined to play an even more sinister role- as far as details went- when the squadron moved on to Charleston. Just about the time that we felt we knew what the score was, they told us to get set to move. It was to be strictly a secret troop movement . . . at least that's what the girls in the U. S. O. in McCook said. Remember? The whole town was at the railroad station to see us off that rainy night of September 28th. The band insured us that the whole deal was hush-hush, but they could have played a little softer just the same. And the train! For three days and four nights we enjoyed the luxurious comfort of those hard wooden benches. The square wheels that each box-car possessed didn't help either. At intervals during the trip they took us off the train for a few minutes calisthenics- a weak excuse to find out just how many of us could still walk. The guys who flew down were really lucky! It was dark, on October first, when we finally arrived at the Charleston Army Air Base. Loaded down with equipment, we stumbled out of the cars and blindly followed the leader. This game brought us to a row of empty barracks and, at the command, we all rushed into the nearest shack, threw off our packs, and hit the sack in record time. The next morning we waded through a pile of bags, trying to find the right one; then we took a look at the new base.

There was a big PX, complete with a couple of good-looking girls, a barber shop, chapel, and movie house. The service club came into its own right here as a place to go when there wasn't any other place to hide. Besides that, it was located right across the road from the mess hall- an excellent location. This camp also brought a new innovation- the mess pass. It was supposed to keep other squadrons from eating our wonderful (?) food, but the M.P. 's at the main gate seemed to think that it was a pass to Charleston. We let them think so. It didn't take long to find out that Charleston was a rather crowded place. Only the strong and courageous ventured to King Street during any of the rush hours. One of the only havens was the U. S. O. at George and Meeting. The other "havens" were Gamlin's and the Windmill.

There were plenty of dances if we knew where to look- one practically every night in the week. If we didn't feel like going all the way to town, well, there was always the Port U. S. O. right across the highway from the air base. Plenty of fellows got lost in North Charleston, too, because of the way the streets were laid out- especially if they had been drinking. In between the reviews on the drill field and the barracks inspections, the squadron got in a lot of practice missions. Major Jack Graham was the operations officer in charge of the training of the new crews that were coming in all this time. We lost our first place on one of these missions. Flight Officer Juett's plane blew up over the bombing range, killing two.

The whole squadron was a little more sober after this. Later, we lost another ship on a 1,000 mile overwater flight to Kindley Field, Bermuda. Details came fast and thick in Charleston. We pulled K.P. for a week at a time, and there were plenty of other little jobs to do. None of us will

ever forget the sight of the first sergeant popping into the front door of the barracks unexpectedly, yelling: .. Bolt that back door! Don't anybody leave the barracks until I get my detail" Men were seen diving under the barracks in more than one instance. Then there was bivouac. In order to keep us reminded that we were headed overseas, we were piled into trucks, driven to a desolate spot near Walterboro, South Carolina, and dumped. After living in comparative comfort at the air base, this life in pup-tents was a definite change.

There just wasn't enough room in one of those things, and it seemed that either our head or feet had to be out under the stars. Major Milton Heath, our executive officer then, made history when he ordered everyone, including the officers, to sweat out the chow lines. For a couple of days we ate C and Krations, supplemented by candy and anything else we could get to eat at the Walterboro Air Base. We all lived through it, though, and there was a real celebration when we arrived back at our air base. We had a change in our staff officers about this time. Major Heath shipped out, Major Minotty was made the executive officer, and Captain Robert Sullivan was made the adjutant.

Then the inspectors came around to see if we were ready to go overseas, and they declared us in- definitely. After that it was just a matter of time, we were told. Everyone got busy packing boxes and loading them on freight cars. On December 8, 1943, we left Charleston for Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia, a camp none of us knew even existed. The next day, around noon-time, we pulled into Patrick Henry, got off the train with full field packs on our backs, and marched to our new home. We had a hard time comprehending the vastness of the place. All branches of the service were represented at the PX and service clubs. We knew that we wouldn't be staying there very long. All the ground men of the 737th were in barracks according to which of the five platoons they were in. Harry Wilson was in charge of the first platoon, Ernest Stormo, the second, Robert Cullison, the third, Richard Zylman, the fourth, and Joe Clague, the fifth and last platoon. Many things happened during our stay at Patrick Henry, but one instance will stand out vividly in our memories for all time.

It was, of course, our final overseas physical. We had to strip completely and then, wearing only an overcoat, march over to the dispensary for inspection. We walked up to the medical officer, turned our backs to him, and threw our coattails up into the air. He said, "Okay," and that was it. The guys who had been bragging that they would never be able to pass the final physical were left speechless by this procedure. On Friday, December 13th, we left for the boat. They fell us out in front of the barracks with our duffel bags and field packs, and then politely told us that the trucks which were going to take our bags were two blocks away. They couldn't drive up to us. We had to drag ourselves to the trucks.

It was a rough war from then on. We climbed onto an old dilapidated train, and had just about eased our packs off our backs when the thing stopped and we were told that this was it. For most of us, this was the shortest train ride in our army experience- and the last one in the United States for some time. There was a brass band waiting for us at the covered pier where we got off the train. They struck out with the Air Corps song as we formed our platoons and struggled along under the ever-increasing weight of those duffel bags. They were getting to be more of a problem after every step. We rounded the corner of the warehouse-like structure and there it was- the boat- gangplank and all. The band was playing "Chattanooga Choo-Choo" as we moved up the inclined gangplank, and more than one of us swallowed twice. Never before had we been so crowded.

There was just room enough to sit down on the deck back-to-back. Most of us were thinking about the same thing. We'd never make it across in this old tub. The first big wave would finish us. No one had the presence of mind to speak up to the multitude and assure us that it was only the ferry to another dock across the bay. The army was going all-out for brass bands that day. There was another one on the dock at the end of our ferry ride. They were playing, strangely enough, "I Love to Ride a Ferry," which was as far from the truth as it could be. We moved off the ferry, struggled through another dock house, and suddenly came out next to a 10,000 ton Liberty Ship, the Button Gwinnette.

Nobody had to tell us that this was the real thing. As we started up the gangplank, our names were checked off a list, and the twenty per cent overseas pay officially began. None of us remember too much about that first week at sea except for the fact that the ship never was in an upright position for more than a few moments at a time.

We were either walking up-hill or down the other side continuously. We couldn't go anywhere without our life-preservers, but we got used to them after we found that they made swell seats. We could be comfortable no matter where we had to sit down. Rumors about where we were headed were circulating all the time. No one even thought of mentioning our final destination-Naples. We all thought that the Germans were too close for us to risk a landing there. As a matter of fact, we did see the flashes of the front line guns when we arrived there, but that's getting ahead of the story. As our convoy sailed past the Bahama Islands, a PBY patrol plane buzzed our ship, coming so close that we could easily see the pilot giving a V-for-Victory sign with his two fingers. It was a break in the monotony.

The captain of the Button Gwinnette couldn't figure us out. The last bunch of men he had taken across had been quiet, they had prayed a lot, and seemed frightened about the whole thing. He said that we were just the opposite, always noisy and without a care in the world. We just didn't know any better. The convoy finally made it across the Atlantic, sailed through the Straights of Gibraltar, and on into the Mediterranean Sea. When we reached Bizerte, we dropped anchor and all of us thought that it would be just a matter of time before we disembarked. We stayed there three days and nothing happened. Then we pulled out of the harbor and headed for Naples, Italy, the largest port in Allied hands. At this time we had a close shave. During afternoon chow on the day we left Bizerte our ship narrowly missed a floating mine which had broken loose from an American mine-field.

Our lookout spotted it just in time, the Button Gwinnette veered sharply to port, and the mine floated by about ten feet off our starboard beam. If it hadn't been sighted in time, the squadron history could very well have ended here. We were to find out later the damage that exploding gasoline made. We arrived in Naples harbor and stayed there three days before we could get in to the docks. The ground men of the 737th Bomb Squadron hit Italian soil on January 13, 1944, just 31 days after leaving the United States. We were all very glad to get off the ship and were ready for anything. They took us to an Italian college on the outskirts of Naples where we slept on cold, hard marble floors until January 16th. We shared the grounds with a bunch of Arabs who were headed for the front lines. At night we could see the flashes and hear the rumble of the front-line artillery. The ride from Naples over the mountains to Cerignola was a nightmare. Just as it was getting dark, we left in open trucks. Many of the drivers had never driven a truck before, and none of us ever figured out how we made it without an accident. To add to the danger, it rained while we were high in the mountains, making the slippery roads still more treacherous.

The truck convoy pulled into the narrow streets of Cerignola about five the next morning and stopped in front of the Music Hall.

Most of us were numbed from the extreme cold ride, and we had a hard time trying to walk around after climbing off the truck. We were hungry enough to eat anything in sight. On the dreary afternoon of the 17th we pulled into our first camp site, located several miles outside of town. We formed our platoons again and received orders to pitch our tents. The cold grey afternoon had almost passed. We went to work, but were stopped in the middle of the tent-pitching to form platoons again so that we could be assigned tents according to the roster. It was a slow tedious process, and by the time we all were given tents, afternoon had turned into pitch black night. Many of us crawled into any tent we could find. The next day we took inventory of our surroundings and found that we were located next to a field of British Wellington bombers, better known as "Wimpys."

We spent most of our time here answering formations every other hour and drilling. One of the things we remembered from this place was the racket every morning as the tail gunners on the "Wimpys" let go with tracers, trying to shoot down some of the ducks that flew over regularly. Very few ducks were hit. January 22nd, the 737th moved to a new location. Trucks rushed us to San Giovanni Field as if there was gold to be found in them thar hills. We all wanted to get there first so that we could have first pick of the tents which were already set up for us. We were told to fix our pyramidal tents up as best we could and most of us made many improvements in a short time. After we were settled, they pulled the old army game on our once happy outfit. We had to move into pup-tents to make room for the combat crews which were due to arrive the 26th.

During eighteen months overseas, this phase of our life was the roughest. It rained almost continuously, creating a variety of mud that we came to hate with all our hearts. The pup-tents weren't any larger than they had been on bivouac in South Carolina and the ground was a lot wetter. We ate out in the rain unless we were lucky enough to find shelter somewhere. By some miracle, very few of us got sick or had any trouble. There was plenty of guard duty at this time, too. Things got better, though. We finally got tents, lights, COts, and a mess hall, all this happening over a period of months. Later, the "Club 37" was built, and the place began to look presentable. Gradually we built the area into a mlmature city. There were some changes in our staff. David Sayers was now the first sergeant. Captain Donald Martinson took Captain Sullivan's place, and Major Henry Moore was our new executive officer. During our eighteen months overseas, we had six different commanding officers.

Mter Captain Carithers left the 737th, Lt. Col. James Mears took over. Later on, there was Major Jack Graham, Captain Billy Jacobs, Major Ralph Dench, and our present boss, Major William Fitzpatrick. No matter how much time passes, though, we'll all smile or chuckle a little as we recall those famous words of one of the better known southern ball players of the 37th-Major Moore. "Y'all play ball with me, and I'll play ball with y'all." The only trouble was that he was always at bat.

Expeditionary Airlift Unit Expands Portfolio: The 737th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron, a C-130 unit, recently added another accomplishment to its resume: delivering supplies via airdrop to ground troops in Afghanistan. "By accomplishing this task, we validated a concept that increases the airdrop capability throughout the entire theater," said Lt. Col. Ken Gjone, a 737th EAS

operations officer. The busy squadron is part of the 386th Air Expeditionary Wing that operates at an undisclosed air base in Southwest Asia. Although the wing has been operating for more than 10 years, its airlifters had never performed airdrop missions over Afghanistan. That changed on Nov. 21 and Nov. 24 when 737th EAS aircrews flew over that nation's mountains and released more than 46,000 pounds of cargo, validating this delivery method. Prior to this, the 386th AEW's airlift support in Afghanistan has been limited to landing at airfields to deliver cargo. 2010

The 737th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron and the 386th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron have two different missions, yet work together every day to ensure the single mission of the C-130 Hercules can equip and prepare our forces to stay in the fight another day. "The professionalism of total force Airmen," said Maj. Kenneth Jensen, 386th EAMXS maintenance operations officer. "It's amazing to watch members of many Air National Guard units, the active duty, Reserve and contractors come together to seamlessly achieve the mission every day." This rotation, the Alaska and Ohio Air National Guard have been filling the task for the 737th EAS. This could possibly be Alaska ANG's last C-130 deployment as they transition to the C-17 Globemaster III, while this is Ohio's first deployment back with the C-130H after transitioning to the C-27J Spartan for a short stint. "They have represented their states and the Air National Guard wonderfully. It is difficult for guard members to leave their full-time civilian jobs to deploy, but they always do their duty with no complaints," said Lt. Col. Michael Cummings, the 737th EAS commander. "Their dedication to the mission, their professionalism and their sacrifice has made me extremely proud of these people." Members of the 737th EAS and 386th EAMXS are faced with challenges such as older aircraft, extreme environmental conditions with temperatures reaching up to 140 degrees, and being separated from their loved ones. "I'm most proud of our team for enduring the challenges that come with operating in a deployed location," Jensen said. The maintenance crews overcome these challenges to make sure the aircrews have safe and working aircraft to carry out the air tasking orders. Whether it's an all-weather airdrop that has an accuracy of 15 yards within target from an altitude of 18,000 feet, a tactical assault landing on unimproved fields or an endurance of enemy fire to get the equipment and supplies to ground forces, these two units work together to get the mission accomplished. Cummings said they would see severe degradation to the mission of defeating Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists without C-130H operations, maintenance and support personnel. Support from the 737th EAS and 386th AMXS has and will continue to play a crucial part in delivering decisive airpower and securing basic freedoms.2016

The 737th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron flew two C-130J Super Hercules into Qayyarah West Airfield, Iraq, Oct. 21, the first coalition aircraft to land on the airfield since the start of Operation Inherent Resolve. The aircraft landed mere hours after repairs to the runway were completed, a project that's been underway since Iraqi security forces retook the airfield from Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in July of this year.

"It's taken several months to plan this mission," said Lt. Col. John Poole, the 386th Expeditionary Operations Support Squadron commander. "A big part of it was since before the airfield was taken, we knew that it had been damaged significantly by (ISIL) as they were either holding the field or then evacuating the area as the Iraqi security forces liberated the field. It's

taken several months to repair that damage." The airfield serves as a staging hub for forces fighting to liberate Mosul from ISIL. Its degraded state has made supplying front line fighters difficult, but the successful mission has helped ensure the base is ready for more robust operations.

The C-130s were carrying firefighters and their equipment into the airfield in order to establish a fire rescue capability there for future flights. They also brought along ammunition, both for defense of the airfield itself and for ground troops moving into Mosul. Being the first aircraft to fly into a newly renovated airfield under cover of darkness presented a particularly difficult challenge, said Maj. Jeff Noble, a 737th EAS instructor pilot and the aircraft commander for the flight.

"When there is no other lighting around, it can be very difficult to see other features, so you have to trust in your planning in order to make sure that the mission is successful," he said. "Sometimes it can be just landing in a black hole with four little lights, which is what we had the other night." Despite the challenges, Noble and his crew felt confident about the flight due to all the support they received from the rest of the squadron.

"That's why we're able to do what we do," he said. "Go out and execute the mission, because we're well prepared and well taken care of." Moving forward, Qayyarah West Airfield will continue to play a significant role in supplying the fight in Mosul and beyond. "This will help us support our Iraqi security forces and our partners in the coalition into liberating the city of Mosul and handing over a free city back to the people of Iraq," Poole said.

Big changes are in the works for two Air National Guard units deployed to the 737th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron at the 386th Air Expeditionary Wing in Southwest Asia. The Connecticut ANG has transitioned from the A-10 Thunderbolt II and the C-21 Cougar to the C-130H Hercules, which it is currently flying on its first C-130 deployment. On the other hand, the Charlotte ANG, out of North Carolina, will be flying its last Hercules mission as it prepares to transition to the C-17 Globemaster III.

Whether big or small, change brings many challenges. In the case of flying new aircraft, these challenges include incorporating new procedures and personnel requirements, among others. "On a C-17 you don't have navigators or engineers, so just the manning document itself is going to change," explained Lt. Col. Gary Dodge, the 737th EAS commander. "The logistics – the buildings, the training, the air frames – it's a huge puzzle. Trying to make that transition is challenging, but I'm sure it'll be successful."

One piece of this puzzle is training maintainers in the skills they'll need to keep their new aircraft flying sorties. For Charlotte ANG members, this means learning the ins and outs of the Globemaster III, while Connecticut ANG members focus on the Hercules. "You're basically taking people with different skill sets and teaching them about the C-130, which is an extremely difficult airplane to employ, just because of the diverse role," said Maj. Paul Fiasconaro, the 737th EAS director of operations.

This diverse role includes everything from air drops to flights requiring night vision goggles. Furthermore, many of the Connecticut ANG pilots are used to taking off and landing on larger runways, but C-130 missions often require landing on a small dirt strip, Fiasconaro explained. Although the Connecticut ANG has been flying C-130s since 2013, a deployment to Southwest Asia in support of Operation Inherent Resolve has provided them lots of opportunities to fly

sorties and gain experience with their new aircraft. Additionally, they work closely with the Charlotte ANG to learn from their experiences with the Hercules.

“Our aircrew, our maintenance folks are all learning from Charlotte (ANG Airmen) so it’s taking a squadron that’s very new in the C-130 up against a squadron that’s been doing it for a very long time and doing it very well,” said Fiasconaro. Armed with these advantages and opportunities to learn and grow, the two units have much to look forward to, whether it’s their first or last deployment with the C-130. Dodge said he and other members of the Charlotte ANG recognize the historical significance of this deployment, and look forward to not only flying one last C-130 deployment but also ensuring future success for the Connecticut ANG as well. “We were all raising our hand to volunteer and for me to actually get the opportunity to be the commander during that time frame has been a great honor,” said Dodge. “I’m surrounded by great talent not only from Charlotte but from Connecticut as well.” 2017

SOUTHWEST ASIA (AFNS) -- The Wyoming Air National Guard stands faithfully in support of both domestic and federal missions assisting victims in need throughout the world by providing aid when called upon. More than 100 Airmen from the 153rd Airlift Wing based in Cheyenne, Wyoming, deployed to the 737th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron recently in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. Of those deployed, approximately half were battling the wildfires in northern California with their Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System capability in September and October. The fires tore through California, scorching more than 160,000 acres and leaving more than 15,000 people homeless.

MAFFS is a self-contained aerial firefighting system owned by the U.S. Forest Service and operated by three Air National Guard wings, and one Air Force Reserve wing. It can discharge 3,000 gallons of water or fire retardant in less than five seconds, covering an area one-quarter of a mile long by 100 feet wide. Once the load is discharged, it can be refilled in less than 12 minutes. “What we hope is gained is everything our Airmen put forth in their training aspect, they can apply here flying real world missions,” said Lt. Col. Todd Davis, 737 EAS director of operations. At home station, Davis is the commander of the 187th Airlift Squadron and part of the 153rd Airlift Wing. He and his guardsmen joined forces with the 158th Airlift Squadron from Savannah Air National Guard Base, Georgia, to make up the 737th EAS. “Working with the Savannah team has been a great experience. We have deployed with the Savannah wing previously and it has been a great opportunity to work with them again,” explained Davis.

Wyoming deployed C-130H Hercules aircraft with crew members; including pilots, navigators, flight engineers, and loadmasters. In addition, they have a maintenance support team to work and maintain aircraft while deployed. They also have medical technicians and logistics readiness squadron members to handle their supply needs. “On one end of the country we are fighting fires and on the other end we are helping with hurricane relief,” said Capt. Jonathan Lemley, 737th EAS pilot, of his unit’s missions at their home station. For 12 days this past summer Lemley relentlessly fought fires and after a brief break, he was activated to support the hurricane relief efforts before transitioning to Southwest Asia. “The transition between those missions and this one made it relatively seamless,” Lemley continued. “The challenges we had during the hurricane are very similar to here. The highly experienced men and women of the Wyoming ANG have proven to be valuable during a crisis and have demonstrated their ability to answer their nation’s call.

“Our goal is to get everybody home safely without incident, support the warfighter on the ground, and gain valuable experience that will allow us to continue to build our core of elite tactical airlifters from the state of Wyoming.” Davis said. Natural disasters and real world missions will continue to present themselves, but Lemley said the ability to help people in need is an honor and gratifying experience for this team. “There is nothing better than a real world mission and seeing how hard people will work when it comes to helping others out,” concluded Lemley. 2017

SOUTHWEST ASIA (AFNS) -- Not long ago, Airmen from the 158th Airlift Squadron, Savannah, Georgia, were delivering supplies with their fleet of C-130H Hercules to hurricane victims in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. But just a few weeks later, they find themselves on the other side of the world in Southwest Asia supporting Operation Inherent Resolve. Assigned to the 165th Airlift Wing, these Airmen demonstrate the Air National Guard’s dual mission of supporting state humanitarian missions at home and the federal missions abroad. “We pick up where the [previous] units left off,” explained Lt. Col. Sheldon Wilson, 737th EAS commander. “We continue the fight through air-land and air drop missions, distinguished visitor moves and medical evacuation flights.” Savannah served as a staging ground for disaster relief efforts. As Hurricane Maria intensified earlier this year, the Savannah ANG base was tapped to serve as a place to store food and water, shelter members of the military and corral aircraft ahead of anticipated humanitarian missions.

Around 75 percent of the squadron members supported the hurricane aftermath efforts in some capacity before deploying to Southwest Asia. “They want to be in the fight,” said Wilson. “We have volunteers for our aircrews and support personnel and do not have to force people to deploy. They know the mission well and are always looking for opportunities to excel. I want to make sure those people are recognized for the service they give.” The operation tempo and mission here is 24/7 and the Airmen witness first-hand the difference compared to home station, where flexibility allows for more control of their schedule. Furthermore, the opportunity to utilize systems and execute processes they normally train on back home raises their experience level. “The biggest challenge is saying goodbye to family and friends,” said Master Sgt. Robbie Harrell, 737th EAS loadmaster.

“But the experience and proficiency levels we gain during a deployment are worth (their) weight in gold.” This is Harrell’s third deployment and he explained that the highlight of his job is seeing the direct impact their mission efforts have on the faces awaiting their arrival. For one particular member of the team, the state mission really hit home. “Most of my immediate family lives in Puerto Rico,” said Staff Sgt. Jonathan Santiagobarrera, 737th EAS flight engineer. “I was worried about my folks down there and felt empowered to be in a position to help them.” Santiagobarrera was born and raised in Puerto Rico and joined the U.S. Air Force in 2000. During one of his trips home through relief efforts, he was able to hand deliver supplies to his mother and sister and spent a few minutes catching up with them before continuing on his next mission. It had been two years since he had been home last. “The biggest challenge is not being able to do more,” continued Santiagobarrera. “It was gratifying to see the impact we had there and I plan to visit home after this deployment.” 2017

Air Force Lineage and Honors

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Sources

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