

HISTORY OF THE 437th AIRLIFT WING



Prepared by the 437th Airlift Wing History Office

THE HISTORY OF THE 437TH AIRLIFT WING AND THE 437TH OPERATIONS GROUP

THE 437TH TROOP CARRIER GROUP IN WORLD WAR II

Known as the 437th Operations Group since 1991, the 437th Troop Carrier Group (TCG) originally activated on 1 May 1943 under the command of Lt Col Cedric E. Hudgens at Baer Field, Indiana, where it began training with C-47 *Skytrain* aircraft in preparation for combat duty overseas. After initial training at Baer Field, the group moved to Sedalia Army Airfield, Missouri, for glider towing training. Next, the group went to Pope Field, North Carolina, for paratrooper airdrop and airborne training with the U.S. Army. Then it was back to Baer Field for two weeks until shipping out to Ramsbury, England, in January 1944.

While at Ramsbury, despite the constant threat of German air raids, poor weather, and even poorer living conditions, the group continued to hone their operational skills. The 437 TCG's four squadrons—the 83d, 84th, 85th, and 86th Troop Carrier Squadrons (TCS)—and their 52 C-47 *Skytrains* and 125 CG-4A *Hadrian* gliders continually practiced paradrop and glider towing operations, all in anticipation of the inevitable Allied invasion of mainland Europe.

On 29 May 1944, 18 C-47s and crews from the 85 TCS joined the 436 TCG at Membury, England. Simultaneously, 82d Airborne Division paratroopers arrived at Ramsbury. On 1 June, personnel were restricted to base and combat crewmembers segregated from the general populace because of their forehand knowledge of Operation OVERLORD—the imminent Allied invasion of Normandy, France.

At 2300 local time on 5 June 1944, the invasion began. The first to launch, the 85 TCS's C-47s left Membury towing the 101st Airborne Division to an area near Cherbourg, from where the 101st would help secure the route from the Utah beachhead. An hour later, the 83d, 84th, and 86th squadrons launched from Ramsbury, towing the 82d paratroopers into the fight.

All four squadrons braved heavy flak and ground fire on 6 to 7 June, both during the initial attack and during follow-on missions to deliver reinforcements, ammunition, and rations. In the end, the 437 TCG's four squadrons set a perfect record by delivering all their gliders and thousands of paratroopers into the battle.

The 437 TCG's participation in World War II had only begun with D-Day. The next month, in July 1944, the group contributed aircraft and crews to Operation DRAGOON—the invasion of Southern France. The operation utilized 413 C-47s and 407 gliders in its effort to engage the German army in the south and allow Allied troops to advance northward to Normandy. The 437th once again excelled, and the operation was a success.

Also in July 1944, the group began ferrying supplies to the front lines in France, but that mission was short-lived. The group was called to participate in Operation MARKET GARDEN—the Allied attempt to breach the Siegfried Line and cross the Rhine River into Germany. On 17 September 1944, the 437th launched 70 C-47s, each towing a glider loaded with the 101st Airborne Division bound for Holland. It was to be a bleak day. The heavy flak and small arms fire encountered during the daylight invasion took its toll on the 437th, and it lost more men that day than in all its previous missions combined. However, the 437th's strength and courage endured, and despite its losses the group successfully carried out its mission.

As the winter of 1944 approached, the 437th ferried supplies into France and Belgium and evacuated wounded back to England. In December, a freezing fog settled over England and northern Europe, allowing the Germans to advance and surround the 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne, Belgium, during the Battle of the Bulge. With severe weather grounding all flights from

England, it was not until 22 December that supplies could be airdropped into the area. At the front of this operation was the 437 TCG, whose ammunition and ration resupply missions on 22 through 26 December 1944 saved thousands of lives and helped stem the German advance.

On 24 February 1945, the group moved east of Paris to Coulommiers-Voisins where it conducted its last combat missions of World War II as part of Operation VARSITY—the airborne assault over the Rhine River. On 24 March 1945, the group helped airdrop and airland two British airborne divisions near Wesel, Germany, who then combined with other Allied forces to deliver a fatal thrust into the heart of Germany. The group's C-47s did double duty this time, towing two gliders each, and the operation was yet another success for the group, despite some narrow escapes after crash landings behind enemy lines.

Throughout March and April 1945, the group flew numerous missions to carry gasoline, food, medicine, and other supplies to ground forces pushing across Germany and to ferry wounded troops and released prisoners of war out of Germany to rear-zone hospitals. After Victory in Europe (V-E) Day on 8 May 1945, the group evacuated prisoners of war and displaced personnel to relocation centers. By the middle of August 1945, the group was back at Baer Field, Indiana, then on to Marfa Army Airfield, Texas, where the 437th Troop Carrier Group inactivated on 15 November 1945 as part of the post-war draw down.

For its accomplishments during the war, the 437th Troop Carrier Group earned several accolades: a Distinguished Unit Citation, France; the World War II American Theater service streamer; and seven World War II campaign streamers.

THE 437TH TROOP CARRIER WING IN KOREA

No sooner had the parades and celebrations marking the end of World War II ended than Europe once again found itself facing the threat of war. Continental Europe, which had recently been divided by World War II, was now being divided between the communist controlled Eastern Block and the free countries occupied by the Allies in the west. Furthermore, increasing tensions in Korea resulted in the now independent U.S. Air Force increasing its strength around the globe.

As part of this build up, on 10 May 1949, the inactive 437th Troop Carrier Group was redesignated the 437th Troop Carrier Group, Medium and assigned to the 437th Troop Carrier Wing (TCW), Medium upon their activations in the Reserves on 27 June 1949. Concurrent with the wing and group activations, the group's four World War II flying squadrons also activated on 27 June—the 83d, 84th, 85th, and 86th Troop Carrier Squadrons—and were once again assigned to the group.

Also activated and assigned to the wing on 27 June 1949, were the four groups that remain with the wing today. As already mentioned, the 437th Troop Carrier (now Operations) Group was assigned to the wing, as was the 437th Air Base (now Mission Support) Group, the 437th Maintenance and Supply (now Maintenance) Group, and the 437th Medical Group. Familiar squadrons assigned to these groups included, as known now, the 437th Maintenance, Logistics Readiness, Security Forces, and Communication Squadrons.

The wing's first assignment was at Chicago-Orchard (now O'Hare International) Airport, Illinois. While there, the wing trained with Beech T-7 *Navigator* and T-11 *Kansan* aircraft under the supervision of the 2471st Air Force Reserve Training Center. In July 1950, the wing was designated for mobilization and assignment to Far East Air Forces, but no one expected it would see service in Korea so soon. Less than one month later, on 10 August 1950, the unit was ordered to active service and four days later moved to Shaw AFB, South Carolina, to train with Curtiss C-46 *Commandos* for its mission during the Korean War.

The first of the 437 TCW's C-46 aircraft traversed the Pacific Ocean and reached Brady Field, Japan, at sundown on 8 November 1950. Support personnel and equipment moved by ship and disembarked in Japan on the same day, meeting the crews at Brady on 9 November. Less than 36 hours after arriving in Japan, the 437 TCW crews flew combat cargo missions into Korea. The men of the 437th had "arrived too late to fight the North Koreans but they would make their presence known to the Chinese Communists." And that they did.

Assigned to the 315th Air Division and commanded by Col John R. Roche, the 437 TCW's C-46s helped evacuate threatened airfields, hauled gasoline, napalm, and other explosives, dropped cargo and paratroopers, and flew spraying missions to rid areas of insects. Despite being classified as obsolete, the *Commando* aircraft flown by the wing provided the 315th Air Division's more spectacular C-119s and C-54s a reliable cushion of airlift. In turn, this reliability allowed the division to maintain adequate airlift in months when the other aircraft were in logistical slumps.

The wing's most intense participation in the war came in March 1951 as part of Operation TOMAHAWK. The operation was an extension of Operation RIPPER and was designed to trap enemy troops fleeing northward from Seoul by attacking them near the Imjin River. On 23 March 1951, the 437th's *Commandos* dropped 1,436 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team paratroopers and 15.5 tons of ammunition, food, and signal equipment in the second largest airdrop of the Korean War.

For its accomplishments during the Korean War, the 437th Troop Carrier Wing earned six campaign streamers and the Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation for its role in evacuating more than 66,500 personnel from the combat zone. On 10 June 1952, the 315th Air Division inactivated the wing and its units and assigned its assets to the 315th Troop Carrier Wing, returning the 437th designation to the Reserve.

Five days later, on 15 June 1952, the Air Reserve activated the 437th Troop Carrier Wing and its previously assigned units back at O'Hare International Airport under the command of Tenth Air Force and Continental Air Command. While there, the wing continued to fly C-46s and also began flying C-47 *Skytrains* in 1955. On 16 November 1957, just after transitioning to the C-119 *Flying Boxcar*, the Air Reserve inactivated the wing and its units.

THE 437TH MILITARY AIRLIFT WING AT CHARLESTON AFB

By 1960, the Military Air Transport Service's (MATS) airlift mission evolved from supporting Strategic Air Command's (SAC) nuclear forces and Tactical Air Command's (TAC) fighters and bombers to deploying U.S. Army and Navy combat forces worldwide and maintaining an aerial resupply system. In order to carry out its new combat airlift mission, MATS made significant organizational changes including a change of host unit at Charleston AFB.

On 27 December 1965, the 437th Troop Carrier Wing was redesignated the 437th Military Airlift Wing (MAW) and activated at Charleston AFB, replacing the 1608th Air Transport Wing as host unit effective 8 January 1966. On that date, Brig Gen Howard E. Kreidler took command of the new wing, which was assigned to Twenty-First Air Force, relinquishing his command of the 1608th with its inactivation. The 437th Air Base (now 437th Mission Support) Group also activated on 27 December and was assigned to the wing. The 437 MAW was assigned the air transport squadrons from the 1608th: the 17th, 41st, and 76th. The 3d Air Transport Squadron was also assigned to the wing on 8 January, and concurrently all the squadrons were redesignated Military Airlift Squadrons (MAS).

Upon their assignment to the wing, the 41 MAS and 76 MAS flew C-130 *Hercules* aircraft, while the 3 MAS flew the new C-141 *Starlifters* and the 17 MAS flew C-124 *Globemaster IIs*. But

the Air Force had changes in mind. By July 1966, the 76 MAS completed its conversion to C-141s, as did the 41 MAS on 27 June 1967, when the last C-130 departed Charleston AFB. The 17 MAS continued operating C-124s until its inactivation on 8 April 1969, with the loss of the last C-124 on 15 May 1969.

During the late 1960s, the wing flew channel missions around the world and supported the NASA Gemini program, but its highest priority was to provide airlift to and from Southeast Asia in support of the Vietnam War. Only four days after its assignment to the 437th, on 12 January 1966, the 3 MAS with other C-141 units airlifted the 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division from Honolulu, Hawaii, to Pleiku, South Vietnam. Codenamed BLUE LIGHT, the operation airlifted 3,000 troops and 4,700 tons of equipment in 231 sorties. By April 1966, the wing began operating new cargo channels using a modified polar route. These channels originated at Charleston and served offload points in the Philippines and Vietnam via Alaska and Japan.

As the U.S.'s involvement in the Vietnam War escalated, so did the wing's support of it. In November 1967, the wing helped transport the 101st Airborne Division from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to Bien Hoa Air Base, Vietnam, during Operation EAGLE THRUST, at the time the longest airlift of combat troops from the U.S. to a war zone. Then on 13 February 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson visited Pope AFB to initiate Operation BONNY JACK, the no-notice combat airlift of the 82d Airborne Division to Vietnam. The 12-day operation was an outstanding success, finishing 23.5 hours ahead of schedule. The wing's C-141s and other C-133 aircraft flew 161 missions, airlifted 3,719 troops and 2,273.3 tons of cargo, and established a 99 percent on-load reliability rate.

It was during one of the wing's countless Southeast Asia missions that a C-141 came under fire. On 26 July 1968, four crewmembers were wounded, two seriously, when their aircraft was attacked by Communist guerillas forces while parked at Udorn Air Base, Thailand. The 76 MAS crew was there to complete a medical evacuation mission. Flight engineer TSgt Paul E. Yonkie died of his wounds on 1 September 1968, after being evacuated to Clark Air Base, Philippines. He was Military Airlift Command's first casualty of the Vietnam War and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery on 10 September. A year later, the wing dedicated its new squadron operations building (building 54) to his memory.

The 1970s

Another aircraft change was in the works for the wing in the early 1970s. On 6 June 1970, the wing received the C-5A *Galaxy*, making the 437th the first C-5 operational unit in the Air Force. On 29 October 1972, the 3 MAS began the first C-5 round-the-world trip, logging 95.5 flying hours during the 16-day trip that required six C-5 aircraft and 17 missions through seven countries. However, the C-5 was not to remain at Charleston for long. On 1 August 1973, the 3 MAS was reassigned to the 436 MAW at Dover AFB, Delaware, and the 20 MAS to the 437 MAW. The aircraft each flew changed places as well, with the 437th's 16 C-5s moving to Dover and Dover's C-141s coming to Charleston. The last C-5 left Charleston on 27 August 1973.

During the 1970s, the wing's mission was similar to today's. The 437 MAW conducted channel missions around the globe, Special Assignment Airlift Missions (SAAMs) supporting thousands of users, presidential and vice presidential support missions, hundreds of humanitarian relief missions, and thousands of missions supporting the other Services during Service, joint, and international exercises. The wing flew missions supporting the hostages in Tehran. It airlifted the U.S. Navy's porpoises around the world. It repatriated two Navy Sailors held hostage by Eritrean rebels. It airlifted children out of Saigon during Operation NEW LIFE. It assisted the Marines during the USS

Mayaguez incident. And in Operation SNOW GO it assisted Buffalo, New York in digging itself out of the blizzard that had buried the city. For its exceptionally meritorious service from 1966 to 1973, the wing received five Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards.

In December 1975, the 437 MAW ferried one of its C-141A *Starlifters*, tail number 66-0186, to Warner Robins, Georgia for Project Pacer Plug. This project stretched the C-141 23 feet (13 forward and 10 aft of the wings) and modified its fuel system, which increased its payload capacity without drastic power plant changes and increased its range with in-flight refueling. The 437th received its first new B-model C-141, tail number 66-0176, on 1 December 1979, and by the end of 1980, the wing owned 18 C-141Bs. This new aircraft model brought with it a new mission: Special Operations Low Level II (SOLL II). Crews began training immediately, and the wing soon had nine crews qualified for night vision goggle low-level flying, night vision goggle landing, and rapid cargo off-load.

The 1980s

The next milestones for the 437th came in 1983. First, on 19 October, a military council killed the Prime Minister and seized the independent Caribbean nation of Grenada. The U.S. was concerned about the safety of 1,000 foreign students on the island, most of them American, and about the stability of the region. So, on 22 October 1983, the U.S. began Operation URGENT FURY to extract Americans and other foreign nationals and to overthrow the revolutionary Marxist forces. The U.S. invaded the island nation on 25 October, depending heavily on Military Airlift Command's ability to airdrop nearly 500 Army Rangers and airlift thousands of personnel and thousands of tons of cargo into the fight. The combined 417 aircrew members from the 437 and 315 MAWs flew 105 missions airlifting personnel, equipment, and supplies to Grenada, Barbados, Puerto Rico, and Howard AFB in Panama for URGENT FURY, which officially ended in December 1983.

The second significant event of 1983 began within days of URGENT FURY. On 23 October, 241 Marines were killed in Beirut, Lebanon when a suicide driver crashed his dynamite-laden truck into a barracks. A 437th C-141 was one of the first aircraft to land in Beirut and carried 12 injured personnel and 36 remains to Germany. During later support missions, the wing airlifted to and from Beirut hundreds of Marines, jeeps, trailers, concertina wire, resupply equipment, and personal effects. For its part in these operations and many other missions and events during 1982 to 1984, the wing received its sixth Air Force Outstanding Unit Award.

Keeping up the pace set by the first part of the 1980s, the second half of the decade did not allow the wing to relax. In January 1986, the wing supported NASA by transporting Space Shuttle Challenger debris and crew remains. A month later, the wing's SOLL II crews airlifted two deposed presidents: Jean Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier of Haiti flown to France and Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines flown to Hawaii. On 5 January 1987, the wing began standing 24/7 alert for Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) taskings with its C-141s. The 17 MAS activated once again on 1 August 1987, bringing the wing's flying squadrons back to four. In February 1988, the Air Force announced Charleston would be the first base to receive the new C-17 *Globemaster III*. On 1 July 1988, the 437th flew the Air Force's first airlift cargo mission into Moscow. For its service during the 1980s, the wing earned its seventh and eighth Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards from 1984-1986 and 1988-1989.

1989 was a year of significant humanitarian efforts. The wing flew relief missions for the Armenian and San Franciscan earthquakes, flew United Nations humanitarian relief missions to Pakistan, and flew missions in support of the Nicaraguan Contras. Charleston International

Airport served as the hub for Operation BLADE JEWEL: the voluntary repatriation of all U.S. citizens from Panama in light of the nation's growing unrest.

Even as the wing and Charleston AFB supported the rest of the world, they suddenly faced their own possible demise. Hurricane Hugo tore through the Low Country on 21 September 1989, causing billions of dollars in damage. Yet, despite the destruction around the base, the 437th continued to help others, flying relief missions to St. Croix, Virgin Islands, which Hugo decimated. For its "superior teamwork and dedication," the wing received its ninth Air Force Outstanding Unit Award from 21 September to 31 October 1989.

Then, on 20 December 1989, 14 of the wing's C-141s teamed up with 70 other aircraft to airdrop almost 5,000 paratroops from about 500 feet over Panama. Operation JUST CAUSE had begun. This operation was significant for the Air Force in that it marked the first use of night vision goggles during a contingency. The 437th flew 51 missions during the operation, which at the time was the largest and most complex air operation since Vietnam and the largest nighttime airborne operation since World War II. For its actions during JUST CAUSE, the wing received its tenth Air Force Outstanding Unit Award from 1989 to 1990 and earned its only Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamer: Panama 1989-1990.

The 1990s

True to form, the Air Force expected no less of the 437th Military Airlift Wing during the 1990s than it did during the previous decades. In August 1990 Iraq invaded Kuwait, and by 13 September 1990, Twenty-First Air Force had established stage operations at Charleston for the entire East Coast. The next month "Desert Express" began at Charleston AFB, a daily C-141 flight dedicated to airlifting critical spare parts to Operation DESERT SHIELD units deployed to the Persian Gulf. During the crucial build up of U.S. forces in the Middle East, Charleston personnel supported 839 aircraft departures from 28 November to 28 December 1990. Only 20 days later on 17 January 1991, the U.S. and Coalition forces began the first phase of Operation DESERT STORM. In February 1991, MAC added a second Desert Express mission to Charleston AFB's repertoire.

The wing remained a significant player in the Middle East even as conflict began to decrease. The wing's C-141s participated in Operation DESERT CALM, the redeployment of troops after the formal ceasefire agreement signed 4 March 1991. On 14 March, MAC ended the second Desert Express mission and moved the original Desert Express mission to Dover AFB on 14 April. Then, on 7 April 1991, Operation PROVIDE COMFORT began and the wing's aircraft airlifted relief supplies to the Kurds in Iran, Turkey, and Northern Iraq. On 27 April, the 437th flew to Tehran to deliver 15 tons of supplies for Kurdish refugees, marking the first time in 12 years a MAC aircraft had landed in Iran. In less than one year, from 7 August 1990 through 30 June 1991, the 437 MAW flew more than 2,000 missions as part of five operations supporting combat actions and humanitarian efforts in the Middle East.

In early 1992, the wing began transferring out its first few C-141s in preparation for the arrival of the Air Force's much-anticipated C-17A *Globemaster III* aircraft, even while continuing its worldwide mission. During 1992 alone, the wing flew countless channels, exercise support missions, SAAMs, and more than 200 humanitarian missions in support of Operation PROVIDE HOPE I and II in the crumbling former Soviet Union, Operation RESTORE HOPE in famine-gripped Somalia, Hurricane Andrew that destroyed Homestead AFB in Florida, and Operation PROVIDE RELIEF (formerly PROVIDE PROMISE) in Yugoslavia, which ended in January 1996 making it the longest humanitarian airlift mission flown yet. In early December 1992, the wing participated in the first combined U.S.-Mexico airborne training drops at Santa Lucia Air Base

outside Mexico City. At the end of that month, one of the wing's aircraft, tail number 65-0269 became the first C-141 Air Force One, flying President George Bush and his entourage from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in support of his trip to Mogadishu, Somalia.

But the early 1990s not only saw combat. In 1991, the Air Force underwent its largest reorganization since post-World War II, converting from the Tri-Deputate or Deputy Commander System to the Objective Wing Organization, the four-group system similar to what the wing operates with today. In mid-1991, the 437 MAW began restructuring under this program, realigning its maintenance and flying squadron work force and establishing the 437th Logistics Group and 437th Operations Group, originally the 437th Troop Carrier Group. (The units now known as the 437th Mission Support Group and 437th Medical Group were already assigned to the wing at this time.) The program also redesignated many of the Air Force's units by dropping the "Military" from their names. Thus, on 1 October 1991, the 437 MAW became the 437th Airlift Wing and soon after the 17, 20, 41, and 76 MAS became simply Airlift Squadrons (AS).

On 1 April 1992, the wing made another change, inactivating the 41 AS and activating in its place the 14 AS, which came from Norton AFB, California. On 1 June 1992, the Air Force responded to changing international relations, to evolving military doctrine, and to the Department of Defense's declining resources by consolidating airlift components of both Strategic Air Command (SAC) and Military Airlift Command (MAC) to form Air Mobility Command (AMC), the wing's new higher headquarters.

In the midst of all the restructuring, the wing prepared for its final aircraft change. It had begun readying its units and personnel for the switch in early 1992, and finally received its first C-17A on 14 June 1993, when the U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen Merrill A. McPeak landed tail number 89-1192 on the Charleston runway. But, as usual, an aircraft change meant more organizational changes, and this was no exception. Effective 1 October 1993, AMC moved the 20 AS to Travis AFB, California, and the 76 AS to Ramstein Air Base, Germany, replacing them with the 15 AS and 16 AS. The 17 AS was the first airlift squadron in the Air Force to reach full operating capability with the new *Globemaster IIIs* on 17 January 1995, with the 14 AS following closely behind later that year. The 15th and 16th continued to operate C-141s until 1997 and 2000, respectively.

For the rest of the 1990s, the 437 AW remained at the forefront of every major operation that took place. In 1994 Haiti overthrew its president again triggering Operation MAINTAIN DEMOCRACY, and ethnic conflict raged in Rwanda spurring relief efforts as part of Operation SUPPORT HOPE. In 1995 Operation JOINT ENDEAVOR began, a peacekeeping mission to Bosnia as part of the Dayton Peace Accords after four years of conflict in the Balkans. This marked the first systematic employment of C-17s in contingency operations. Also in 1995, the wing performed the C-17's first Strategic Brigade Airdrop. In 1996 Liberia exploded into civil war and as a result Operation ASSURED RESPONSE took place that April, in which the wing's C-17 first airlifted special operations helicopters. In June, two wing members sustained injuries during the Khobar Towers bombing in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, which spurred Operation REPATRIATION and the creation of the Security Forces Phoenix Raven program in early 1997.

In 1997 the wing participated in Operation GUARDIAN RETRIEVAL in Zaire, Operation PIVOT SAIL in Moldova, and Operation PHOENIX SCORPION in Southwest Asia. Also in 1997 the 15 AS fully transitioned to C-17s leaving only the 16 AS flying C-141s for the wing. In 1998, wing transported Keiko the killer whale to his freedom in Operation KEIKO LIFT, conducted humanitarian missions supporting people affected by Canada and Maine winter storms, an earthquake in China, and Hurricane Georges in the Caribbean, supported Operations

PHOENIX DUKE, NOBLE SHIRLEY, and DESERT FOX in the Middle East, and flew Christmas gifts to Bosnian children in Operation CHRISTMAS CHILD. In 1999 Operation ALLIED FORCE (also known as NOBLE ANVIL) took place in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia and marked the first expeditionary deployment of a C-17 squadron: the 437th Air Expeditionary Group operating out of Ramstein Air Base. At the end of this operation, the wing once again had the honor of transporting the President of the United States, this time President William Clinton, into Macedonia to become the first C-17 Air Force One.

The 2000s

The new millennium for the 437th Airlift Wing began much as the last had ended, with its aircraft and personnel spread across the globe on worldwide taskings. But 2000 was another year of change when the last C-141B departed the Charleston AFB runway ending a 35-year relationship between the Lowcountry and *Starlifters*. With the loss, the 16 AS inactivated in preparation to activate as the wing's fourth C-17 squadron in 2002.

The next test for the wing and the U.S. as a whole came on 11 September 2001 when Al Qaeda terrorists hijacked several commercial jets and plummeted them into the World Trade Center twin towers and the Pentagon killing thousands of people from some 80 nations. In response, President George W. Bush initiated Operation ENDURING FREEDOM—air and ground strikes against terrorist organizations and training camps in Afghanistan. “Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered great loss. And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment. Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom—the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time — now depends on us.” [President Bush] Only hours after Coalition forces bombed terrorist targets inside the country, two 437th C-17s dropped 35,000 packets of Humanitarian Daily Rations over Afghanistan, escorted by F-15 fighters ensuring air superiority and supremacy for the Air Force's newest airlifters.

The rest of 2001 and all of 2002 can be summed up simply by relaying the list of C-17 firsts. The first C-17 combat dirt landing using night vision goggles. The first employment of a C-17 in a medium-threat environment. The first use of night vision goggles in a C-17 formation drop. The highest C-17 airdrop altitude. The longest continuous C-17 mission. Delivery of the first troops and supplies into Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan.

On 1 October 2002, while continuing to support the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), the wing transformed itself under the Air Force Chief of Staff's Combat Wing Organization. “The U.S. Air Force will exploit three core competencies—to operate air and space weapons systems, to maintain these complex weapons systems, and to enhance direct mission support of our expeditionary, rapid reaction, contingency-based Air Force,” said Gen John Jumper. “Therefore, as part of the Air Force transformation, we're aligning our wing organization structure to mirror these competencies. This will help us to become more expeditionary and allow us to train our leaders in war fighting, maintenance, and expeditionary operations. These changes are needed to further the Air Force's abilities to sustain home station operations and rapidly deploy for worldwide operations.”

To achieve these goals, all maintenance functions in the airlift squadrons moved under the 437th Maintenance Group, formerly the 437th Logistics Group. The 437th Logistics Support Squadron was redesignated the 437th Maintenance Operations Squadron and remained assigned to the 437 MXG. The 437th Contracting Squadron was reassigned to the 437th Mission Support Group, formerly the 437th Support Group. The 437th Logistics Readiness Squadron, formerly

the 437th Supply Squadron, also was reassigned to the 437 MSG, and this squadron incorporated into it the functions of the inactivated 437th Transportation Squadron.

In early 2003, AMC designated Charleston AFB the U.S. C-17 stage location and deployed C-17 crews and personnel from the 62 AW at McChord AFB to South Carolina to assist operations. Unknown to most people at the time, this was in preparation for a second GWOT campaign that began on 19 March: Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. Only a week later, on 26 March, 15 C-17s assigned to the 62 AW and the 437 AW airdropped 1,000 “Sky Soldiers” of the 173d Airborne Brigade over northern Iraq—the first C-17 combat insertion of paratroopers. On 10 April, 437 AW C-17s airlifted cargo and personnel to Baghdad International Airport under cover of darkness to establish a mobile command post. The C-17s landed on the airport ramps because the fleeing regime obstructed the runways. In addition to combat, in December 2003 wing C-17s landed in Kerman, Iran to deliver earthquake relief supplies to the devastated Bam region.

During 2004, the 437th Airlift Wing continued its hectic pace around the globe. For the fourth time in as many decades, civil war tore through Haiti and the wing found itself flying mission back into Port-au-Prince. The wing’s C-17s delivered the personnel and outsized equipment need to construct Forward Operating Base Carlson in Afghanistan, conducting AMC’s first C-17 low altitude airdrop during contingency operations. Later that year the wing landed the first C-17 aircraft on that 90-foot-wide dirt strip at FOB Carlson, validating the C-17’s ability to operate in a high altitude, mountainous environment. Also in 2004, the wing flew interim government of Iraq President Sheikh Ghazi Al-Yawar from Balad Air Base, Iraq to Andrews AFB for former President Ronald Reagan’s state funeral ceremony. The wing’s C-17s supported Secretary of State Colin Powell’s first visit to war-torn Sudan, marking the first time a C-17 ever transited El Fashir. The wing turned its own hurricane evacuation missions for Charley into FEMA relief missions, then assisted numerous agencies with Gaston and Ivan relief missions throughout Florida and other hard-hit areas.

In 2005, the 437 AW continued its channels, SAAMs, and contingency missions in support of OEF and OIF. The wing responded immediately to the tsunami-devastated southern Asia as part of Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE. It focused on its Operational Readiness Inspection in April, during which it excelled. A round of changes of command came and went throughout the summer. Then in August, Hurricane Katrina tried to wipe New Orleans off the map, with Ophelia and Rita only making matters worse as wing personnel did their part to assist. Then in October it was off to Pakistan to provide humanitarian relief after a devastating earthquake. In December, the 437th Airlift Wing demonstrated the prowess of the Air Force’s strategic airdrop capability when Team Charleston launched the largest formation of C-17s assigned to a single base; 17!

In the first half of 2006, Team Charleston hosted Vice President Richard Cheney’s visit to the base and local community, while C-17 operations supported the GO81 Summit, the Secretary of Defense’s trip to Iraq, the First Lady’s trip to Italy, the G-8 Summit, and Noncombatant Evacuation Operations during the Lebanon crisis. In March, the C-17 airframe marked a milestone, when it achieved its one millionth flying hour; the flight, a medical evacuation flight in Iraq was flown by a combined crew from Charleston AFB and members of the Mississippi Air National Guard. Later that year, Team Charleston participated in Exercise IRON THUNDER, a unique, 100-aircraft-strong, full-scale invasion of the North Carolina coast. Meanwhile, in the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility (AOR), the 437th established the 2 Expeditionary Airlift Squadron (2EAS) structure, providing deployment stability for personnel and increased C-

17 operational capability and reliability throughout the theater. Under 2EAS, an entire C-17 squadron deployed from Charleston to the AOR where they stood up as the 816th Air Expeditionary Airlift Squadron (EAS). The deployment of the 17AS in May marked the first deployment under the 2EAS structure.

In 2007, the 437 AW supported several deployments under the 2 EAS deployment structure as well as providing the primary airlift (military and civilian aircraft) for delivering the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) armored vehicle to the AOR. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates set a goal of 1500 MRAPS in theater by 31 December; on 20 December, 11 days before the deadline, the 1500th MRAP was delivered to the AOR. In July a routine mission turned into anything but routine when the crew of “Red 7,” flew a 6,000 mile non-stop mission from Iraq to Bethesda Medical Center, Maryland to transport a critically wounded Army Sergeant with a knife lodged in his skull.

2008 was no less busy for the Wing; 2EAS deployment cycles continued as well as the airlift of not only MRAPs, but now also the new High Mobility Engineer Excavator (HMEE), a heavily armored construction vehicle. On 14 June, the wing celebrated the 15th Anniversary of the first C-17 delivered to Charleston, 89-1192. In those fifteen years, the men and women who fly and maintain to C-17 have amassed an impressive list of accomplishments. The first flight for the C-17 occurred 15 September 1991 almost two years before the delivery of the first operational aircraft to the Air Force. According to Boeing, the C-17 has set/broken 33 world records to include payload to altitude, time to climb, and short takeoff and landing marks. As for real world operations, the C-17 has participated in Operations Joint Endeavor (Bosnia), Allied Force (Kosovo), Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan), and Iraqi Freedom. It has also been utilized for almost every humanitarian operation since its inception to include earthquake relief operations (Iran and China), tsunami relief operations (Bangladesh), hurricane relief operations (New Orleans) and civilian evacuation operations (Lebanon). Finally in November, the Wing received its first of ten new C-17s, 07-7180.

No matter the challenge—whether airdropping rations over Afghanistan or paratroopers over Iraq—the people assigned to the 437th Airlift Wing perform their duties with integrity, selflessness, and excellence. Just as they have done throughout the past six decades. Just as they will continue to do as the next challenges arise. From the North Pole to the South Pole, from Beijing to our own backyard, the 437 AW has been and will continue to be the Air Force’s preeminent airlift wing.

437TH AIRLIFT WING

Lineage

Established as 437th Troop Carrier Wing, Medium on 10 May 1949.

Activated in the Reserve on 27 June 1949.

Ordered to Active Service on 10 August 1950.

Inactivated on 10 June 1952.

Activated in the Reserve on 15 June 1952.

Inactivated on 16 November 1957.

Redesignated 437th Military Airlift Wing and activated on 27 December 1965.

Organized on 8 January 1966.

Redesignated 437th Airlift Wing on 1 October 1991.

Assignments

Tenth Air Force: 26 June 1949 – 14 August 1950;

Tactical Air Command: 14 August – 8 November 1950;

Fifth Air Force: 8 November 1950 (attached to FEAF Combat Cargo Command, Provisional, 8 November 1950-);

314th Air Division: 1 December 1950 (remained attached to FEAF Combat Cargo Command, Provisional, through 24 January 1951);

315th Air Division (Combat Cargo): 25 January 1951 – 10 June 1952.

Tenth Air Force: 15 June 1952 – 16 November 1957.

Military Air Transport Service: 27 December 1965 – 8 January 1966;

Twenty-First Air Force: 8 January 1966 – 1 October 2003;

Eighteenth Air Force: 1 October 2003 – present.

Assigned Components

Groups

437th Troop Carrier Group, Medium (later, 437th Operations Group): 27 June 1949 – 10 June 1952; 15 June 1952 – 16 November 1957; 1 October 1991 – present.

437th Maintenance and Supply (later, 437th Logistics, 437th Maintenance) Group: 27 June 1949 – 10 June 1952; 15 June 1952 – 16 November 1957; 1 October 1991 – present.

437th Medical Group: 27 June 1949 – 10 June 1952; 15 June 1952 – 16 November 1957; 8 October 1970 – present.

437th Air Base (later, 437th Combat Support, 437th Support, 437th Mission Support) Group: 27 June 1949 – 10 June 1952; 15 June 1952 – 16 November 1957; 27 December 1965 – present.

Airlift Squadrons

14th: 1 April 1992 – Present

15th: 1 October 1993 – Present

16th: 1 October 1993 - Present

17th: 8 January 1966 – 8 April 1969; 1 August 1987 – 1 October 1991; 1 October 1991 - Present

3d: 8 January 1966 – 1 August 1973

20th: 1 August 1973 – 1 October 1991.

41st: 8 January 1966 – 1 October 1991.

76th: 8 January 1966 – 1 October 1991.

437TH AIRLIFT WING (con'd)

Stations

Chicago-Orchard (later, O'Hare Field-Chicago International) Airport, Illinois: 27 June 1949 – 14 August 1950;
Shaw AFB, South Carolina: 14 August – 16 October 1950;
Brady AB, Japan: 8 November 1950 – 10 June 1952.
O'Hare International Airport, Illinois: 15 June 1952 – 16 November 1957.
Charleston AFB, South Carolina: 8 January 1966 – present.

Aircraft

1949 – 1950: Beech (A)T-7 *Navigator*
 Beech (A)T-11 *Kansan*
1949 – 1957: Curtiss C-46 *Commando*
1955 – 1957: Douglas C-47 *Skytrain*
1957: Fairchild C-119 *Flying Boxcar*
1966 – 1969: Douglas C-124 *Globemaster II*
1966 – 1967: Lockheed C-130 *Hercules*
1966 – 2000: Lockheed C-141 *Starlifter*
1970 – 1973: Lockheed C-5 *Galaxy*
1993 – present: Lockheed C-17A *Globemaster III*
(No aircraft were assigned directly to the wing after 1 October 1991)

Honors

Service Streamers. None

Campaign Streamers.

Korea:

CCF Intervention
First UN Counteroffensive
CCF Spring Offensive
UN Summer-Fall Offensive
Second Korean Winter
Korea Summer-Fall 1952

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers.

Grenada 1983
Panama 1989-1990

Decorations.

Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation: 1 July 1951 – [10 June 1952]

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards:

11 July 1966 – 10 July 1967
11 July 1967 – 10 June 1968
11 July 1968 – 12 June 1969
13 June 1969 – 12 June 1970
1 July 1972 – 30 June 1973

437TH AIRLIFT WING (con'd)

Honors

Decorations.

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards (con'd):

1 July 1982 – 30 June 1984
1 June 1984 – 30 June 1986
1 July 1988 – 30 June 1989
1 July 1989 – 30 June 1990
21 September – 31 October 1989
1 July 1993 – 30 June 1995
1 July 1995 – 30 June 1997
1 July 1998 – 30 June 2000
11 September 2001 – 30 June 2003
1 July 2005 – 30 June 2007
1 July 2007 – 30 June 2008

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with Valor:

11 September 2001 – 30 June 2003 (only for people deployed to CENTCOM)

Bestowed Honors

The wing is authorized to display the honors earned by the 437th Operations Group prior to 29 June 1949.

Emblem (Approved on 24 November 1953).

A running figure of a Minuteman with rifle at high port, in blue silhouette, stands for control of the skies, the theater of Air Force operations. The golden background stands for excellence. White wings, encircle and joined, symbolize the global support and Samaritan missions of the wing. The American Colonial Minuteman symbolizes the courage and inspiration derived from our heritage and further represents preparedness and action at a minute's notice.

Motto: None



437th Airlift Wing Commanders

Col John C. Millander	25 Jun 2007
Col Glen G. Joerger	22 November 2005
Brig Gen (Sel) Susan Y. Desjardins	19 October 2004
Brig Gen (Sel) Brooks L. Bash	3 June 2002
Brig Gen Vern M. Findley II	20 March 2000
Brig Gen Robert D. Bishop, Jr.	8 June 1998
Brig Gen Steven A. Roser	2 July 1996
Brig Gen Gary A. Voellger	25 July 1995
Brig Gen Walter S. Hogle, Jr.	13 June 1994
Brig Gen Thomas R. Mikolajcik	25 July 1991
Col John W. Handy	10 May 1990
Col David B. Marcrander	17 May 1988
Col James F. Hinkel	11 June 1987
Col James C. McCombs	28 June 1985
Col Paul E. Landers, Jr.	20 July 1983
Col Donald A. Logeais	23 June 1981
Col Eugene D. Robinett	20 June 1979
Brig Gen George B. Powers, Jr.	1 March 1978
Brig Gen Tedd L. Bishop	14 March 1975
Brig Gen Thomas M. Sadler	1 February 1974
Brig Gen Robert L. Moeller	1 April 1972
Brig Gen Thomas B. Kennedy	1 August 1970
Brig Gen Clare T. Ireland, Jr.	1 March 1969
Brig Gen William V. McBride	26 July 1966
Brig Gen Howard W. Kreidler	8 January 1966
<i>[organized]</i>	<i>8 January 1966</i>
<i>[activated]</i>	<i>27 December 1965</i>
<i>[inactivated]</i>	<i>16 November 1957</i>
Lt Col Joseph E. Whitwell	2 May 1957 – 15 November 1957
Col John W. Lacey	ca. 10 January 1955
Lt Col Edwin L. Preston	1 September 1954
Col Reed G. Landis	15 June 1952
<i>[activated]</i>	<i>15 June 1952</i>
<i>[inactivated]</i>	<i>10 June 1952</i>
Col Kenneth W. Northamer	ca. 1 May 1952 – 9 June 1952
Col John R. Roche	26 February 1951
Col John W. Lacey	26 January 1951
Brig Gen John P. Henebry	27 June 1949
<i>[activated]</i>	<i>27 June 1949</i>