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C-141 APPROACHES HISTORICAL CONCLUSION AS LAST FLIGHT NEARS

by Gene Vandeventer Air Force Reserve Command Staff Historian

ROBINS AIR FORCE BASE, Ga. (AFP) -- Since its first flight Dec. 17, 1963, the C-141 Starlifter has enjoyed a prestigious history.

The last chapter of that history will be written in October when the Air Force's last C-141 unit, the 445th Airlift Wing at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, starts replacing its Starlifters with the C-5 Galaxy.

Over the years, C-141s have carried cargo, passengers and patients around the globe. Air Force reservists flew many of those missions, first in an associate-unit capacity, and later in a unit-equipped role.

In 1987, the 459th Military Airlift Wing at Andrews AFB, Md., was the first Air Force Reserve Command unit to receive C-141s. The 445th AW became the second Reserve wing equipped with C-141s in October 1994.

The Reserve's 34th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron flew C-141 aeromedical missions in May 1968 when it was recalled to active duty to support combat forces in Vietnam. During the unit's 179-day activation, squadron reservists flew medical evacuation routes from Vietnam to the United States, participating in about 1,262 combat missions in Southeast Asia and 948 evacuation missions from Japan to the United States.

Overall, Military Airlift Command, in conjunction with the Air Force Reserve, evacuated more than 400,000 patients, including 168,000 battle casualties between 1965 and 1973, with a perfect flying record.

Operation Homecoming, the repatriation of American prison-

ers of war near the end of the Vietnam War, witnessed once again C-141 aeromedical evacuation missions. Between Feb. 12, 1973, and April 4, 1973, Air Force Reserve aircrews, doctors, nurses and medical technicians participated in five Homecoming flights.

The first 40 American POWs to leave Hanoi's Gia Lam Airport were aboard a Starlifter (tail number 66-0177). That aircraft, dubbed the "Hanoi Taxi," now belongs to the 445th AW and features the plane's original white and gray paint scheme.

Between April 1975 and June 1975, Guard and Reserve C-5 and C-141 crews flew nearly 775 sorties, airlifting evacuees and refugees during Operation New Life, the Indochina refugee airlift. C-141s transported 949 Vietnamese orphans in 24 Operation Babylift missions beginning in April 4, 1975.

Most noteworthy during the 1990s were aeromedical evacuations performed by active duty and Reserve crews during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. From August 1990 to March 1991, the Starlifter, along with other airframes, combined to airlift 4,437 litter patients and more than 7,800 ambulatory ones on intertheater flights. Additionally, the aircraft participated in carrying 1,600 litter and 2,424 ambulatory patients in the intratheater arena.

In its role as a force provider, the Starlifter aided immeasurably in the delivery of war-fighting equipment and forces to the Persian Gulf. C-141s, along with

other strategic airframes, flew more than 15,000 missions carrying more than 500,000 people and more than 500,000 tons of cargo during deployment and redeployment phases.

Throughout the years, the Starlifter underwent airframe modifications that improved performance and capability. By 1977, Lockheed began a government contract to stretch the C-141A aircraft, incorporating aerial refueling and other upgrades resulting in the redesignation, without serial number change, to the C-141B. In the 1990s, a portion of the C-141B fleet received glass cockpit upgrades, resulting in changing the name to C-141C.

Over the years, Air Force Reserve C-141 crews served as America's ambassadors, delivering food, clothing and medicine in crisis areas around the world. This assistance sometimes involved evacuating people to safety zones.

Those missions included:

- Evacuating wounded Marines from Beirut, Lebanon, in 1983.
- Providing medical relief to Armenia's earthquake victims in 1988.
- Delivering medical supplies to Mongolia in 1991.
- Offloading food and medicine to Somalia in Operations Provide Relief and Provide Hope in 1992.
- Airlifting disaster relief items in Florida after Hurricane Andrew, in Hawaii after Typhoon Iniki and in Guam after Typhoon Omar in 1992.
- Delivering humanitarian supplies to Bosnia (Operation Provide Promise) and to Rwanda (Operation Support Hope) in 1994.

(Continued on page 2)

Dates to Remember
Mark your calendar

Next Foundation Meeting 7/19/06

Special points of interest:

• Next issue:

The Story of Maj. Thomas B. McGuire Foundation

C-141 APPROACHES HISTORICAL CONCLUSION AS LAST FLIGHT NEARS (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

-- Transporting support equipment to Oklahoma City, in response to the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah U.S. Federal Building in April 1995.

-- Delivering aviation and relief cargo to Guam after a Korean airlines crash in August 1997.

-- Airlifting supplies and personnel in response to the tsunami in Southeast Asia in January 2005.

-- Performing its last Operation Deep Freeze airlift support mission to McMurdo Research Station in Antarctica in February 2005.

-- Evacuating patients from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina slammed the Gulf Coast Aug. 29, 2005.

From Vietnam to present-day Iraq, Air Force Reserve C-141 crews have played a significant force-projection role. These airlifters were in Grenada in October 1983 for

Operation Urgent Fury, Panama in 1989 for Operation Just Cause, Somalia in 1993 and 1994 for Operation Restore Hope. They were in Kosovo in 1999 for Operation Allied Force, the United States in 2001 for homeland defense in Operation Noble Eagle, Afghanistan in 2001 for Operation Enduring Freedom, Guantanamo Bay in Cuba during 2002 to deliver the first Taliban and al-Qaida detainees from Operation Enduring Freedom, and in Iraq in 2003 for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The 445th AW is scheduled to fly its last C-141 mission in the spring of 2006. (Courtesy of AFRC News Service)



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