A Celebration of Service

1963  2013

Also In This Issue: The Airmen  The Aircraft  The Achievements
Be Proud of Your Legacy

Happy 50th Anniversary 908th Airlift Wing!

From the wing’s creation in Mobile at Bates Field in 1963, the 908th established a proud legacy of achievement. Seven Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards are at the top of a very long list of organizational and individual awards earned by our wing.

From the early days flying the C-119, the brief transitions to the O-2 and U-3, a decade with the C-7 Caribou, and 30 years (so far) with C-130s, the wing has met or exceeded every challenge presented. The one constant through the years has been the dedication, patriotism and spirit of the people associated with the 908th. Across the command and visitors like the AFRC/IG, people have commented that our sense of family and esprit de corps here is unmatched.

This commemorative issue of the Southern Flyer is a chance to look back and appreciate the unit’s history and accomplishments. The unit has been through several transitions but none so significant as the one we’ve taken since Desert Storm from what had been a “strategic reserve” force to the operational reserve status we have today. As we look back on our first 50 years, I hope you will take an additional measure of pride in being part of that history. We have much to be proud of, and a responsibility to maintain the wing’s proud legacy going forward.

To celebrate our 50th Anniversary, planning is underway for a 50th Anniversary celebration and wing Christmas party on Saturday, December 7th. Further details will be forthcoming but please mark it on your calendar, invite your retired friends and family and plan to be part of the wing’s Golden Anniversary bash.

My goodness, 50 years have passed, where did they go? If I can correct this 50th anniversary comes along about the same time some of my 50th anniversaries do.

What? Well, August of 1963 comes very close to the beginning date of my ministry, and I started dating. Talk about something changing your life. Of course, there have been a lot of changes in my life in the last 50 years. I’m sure there have been a lot of changes in yours as well. Holy Cow, some of you weren’t even around 50 years ago.

Think of the Airframes that have come and gone for our flight personnel and maintenance folks. Think of the vehicles that have been driven, and how “the fins” have changed.

I used to work in the medical field, and there have certainly been a lot of changes there -- lots and lots of changes.

So, is there anything that has stayed consistent over the years? Well, I can only speak from my perspective, but let me say that while the mission and equipment for the wing have changed over the years … the “can do and will do attitude” of the people of this wing has stayed consistent, and has supported the Air Force mission through at least five or six “states of conflict.”

The faith that we have held in each other and in The Lord, has also remained strong through at least five or six “states of conflict.”

The similarities are,” said Dersch, “you’re taking care of people and taking care of people spiritually to meet the needs of people during very important times of their lives.”

Dersch explained how a civilian pastor does a lot more preaching and teaching while an Air Force chaplain does not do as much preaching and teaching but perform more counseling and visitation. “The similarities are,” said Dersch, “you’re taking care of people and taking care of people spiritually to meet the needs of people during very important times of their lives.”

Dersch finished by discussing how volunteering can be good for the soul. “If you want to do something, don’t be afraid to volunteer to help because if you volunteer to help, that’s a good thing.”

Wing Chaplain receives award

Dersch gets Maj. Gen. Thoralf T. Thielien Award

By Tech. Sgt. Jay Ponder

908th Public Affairs

Major (Ch.) David Dersch has been selected as the 2012 Outstanding Reserve Chaplain of the Year by the Air Force Reserve Command. Among the many accomplishments for consideration of the award were training, contributing to mission support, and exhibiting leadership in various activities within the military and civilian community.

Among the many accomplishments of the year for Dersch was serving as project coordinator for several projects including Family Day, attending a chaplain’s school, serving as the Yellow Ribbon representative working with deployers and he also deployed.

Dersch described how an airman is only as strong as the people he has around him. He praised his staff saying the chaplain section had received an excellent on the combined unit inspection culminating in winning another award, the AFRC Readiness Award. “I have a great staff. Chaplain Danford, Chaplain Scott, TSgt. King and SrA Gnann all really were outstanding making my job and ministry a lot easier.”

There’s a difference in leading a flock in the military versus the civilian world.

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By definition, the mission of the 908th Airlift Wing is “to recruit, organize and train Air Force Reservists to provide unrivaled theater airlift and flexible combat support across the spectrum of military operations.”

That mission has been forged through 50 years of the sacrifices and labors of thousands of Alabama’s Citizen Airmen, who have taken time from their honorable “double lives,” balancing military duty, civilian employment and responsibilities to family.

Thoughout the half century of the wing’s existence, that devotion has been a constant. The unit itself has undergone changes in location, mission, makeup and personnel. Its pilots and maintainers have flown and serviced five varieties of aircraft, from bulky to near-ballistic and back again.

Its medics have seen changes in life-saving techniques and great advances in technology, as have members of the communication, personnel and support communities.

The maxim stating “the more things change, the more they stay the same” seems tailor made for the 908th.

The 908th Airlift Wing was first established as the 908th Troop Carrier Group, Medium on Jan. 15, 1963, under the Continental Air Command (primarily responsible for the nation’s air defense mission until January, 1951, when it was tasked with administering the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve).

The group was stood up Feb. 11 at Bates Field, Ala. (now Mobile Regional Airport), located in Mobile and commanded by the 533d Army Air Base Unit. The group incorporated the 357th Troop Carrier Squadron, which was already located there, having replaced the 78th TCS, which had been moved to Barksdale AFB, La. in 1961.

Chief Master Sgt. Charles W. Hesse, who retired in 1994 after 30 years, joined in 1962. “Back then we were called the 78th Troop Carrier Squadron,” he said. “We were out of Bates Field in Mobile, flying the C-119 - the loudest airplane you ever rode in. Every bolt in that plane rattled when it flew.”

The 357th already had a distinguished history of its own. It had been activated in early 1942 as a B-24 Liberator training unit, been redesignated as a B-29 Superfortress heavy bomber squadron and taken part in the strategic bombing of the Japanese home islands and the mainland. Its last mission was a flyover of the Japanese surrender aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay.

The squadron was inactivated, but the personnel were retrained for airlift and troop carrier missions from 1949 throughout the ‘50s. Before becoming part of the 908th, the squadron airlifted troops and equipment during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.

At his disposal, group commander Lt. Col. William A. Willis had 130 officers and 626 Airmen. The Reservists came from more towns, further distant from Mobile. Originally, reservists came from approximately 30 towns within a 100
mshed fortune - earned it the name of
ce and troops by parachute.

mechanized equipment, and to drop
cargo, personnel, litter patients,

C-119s, a twin-engine, military

flew 500 miles in his own plane from

in a radius of 250 miles. One officer
members hailed from 70 towns with-

Original Leadership

Commander: Lt. Col. William A. Willis
Executive Officer: Mr. Thomas L. Coker
Operations & Training Officer: Maj. Harold D. Weekley
Maintenance Officer: Maj. John P. Cranford
Civil Engineer: Mr. William G. Howard
Civilian Personnel Officer: Mrs. Bettye W. Sims
Procurement Officer: Mr. William H. Evers
Accounting & Finance Officer: Miss Vivian Lewis
Commercial Transportation Officer: Mr. Jay Spafford
TAC Advisor: Maj. Harry M. Nash

The group's initial mission was
“to provide air transportation for
airborne forces, their equipment and
supplies, including air evacuation
within the theatre of operations;
and to organize, recruit, attain and
maintain standards of proficiency which will
enable the (455th) Troop Carrier Wing to perform
its assigned mission.”

The unit reached a milestone on Oct. 22,
1963, when its 500th re-
servist was sworn in over
Mobile television station
WALA on a noon local
news show.

The changes began almost imme-
diately. The 908th received notice
on May 12, 1964 that it would
be moved from Bates to the larger
Brookley Air Force Base, located
near downtown Mobile, in October
1964 due to budget restraints.
The task was accomplished by Nov. 15.
The group received a reputation
for humanitarian airlift, such as the
delivery of emergency supplies to
New Orleans to aid victims of Hur-
ricane Betsy, provided support and
assistance in the insta-lation of the
U.S.S. Alabama in its state shrine,

and took care of regular cargo and
mail missions to free Military Airlift
Command aircraft committed to Southeast Asia.
The unit closed out 1965 with
participation in Operation Christ-
mas Star, airlifting Christmas pack-
ages for the troops stationed in
Vietnam.
The year 1966 began on a high
note, as Governor George Wallace,
stating that “whereas, all patriotic
Alabama citizens are
proud of the selfless
dedication displayed by
the men and
women of the 908th
Troop Carrier Group,
Alabama’s only Air
Force Reserve Flying
Unit, for their ever re-
Maind alert,” signed
a proclamation naming the third
week of February as 908th Troop
Carrier Group Week.

On July 16, a 908th C-119
crashed near Jacksonville, Fla., after
losing an engine in a fire. The four
crewmen and all 30 Florida National
Guard members on board bailed out
safely, thanks to the pilot, Maj. Rob-
ert C. Coyle of Biloxi, Miss. Before
ditching the aircraft, Coyle saw to
it that every passenger and his three
crewmen had jumped.

For his heroism, Coyle was
awarded the Distinguished Flying
Cross and the Florida Cross.

In July of 1967, the unit, now
assigned to the 446th Troop Carrier
Wing based at Ellington Air Force
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In February 1969, another move
was announced. The 908th would
move to Maxwell Air Force Base,
Montgomery, Ala., the following
spring, change its mission and fly
another type of aircraft.

From the front page of The Car-
rrier, the 908th’s newspaper dated
March 1969:

GETTIN’ WET: Early water survival
training.

“...Our unit will move to Maxwell
AFB, Ala., and convert from C-119
Flying Boxcar transports to an interim
aircraft, the twin-engine U-3. The unit will be redesignated the
908th Tactical Support Group.
Manning will be based on the 24
aircraft authorized the group, which
is slated to receive such FAC aircraft
as the O-4 or O-2 light reconnaissance
aircraft at a later date.

Our unit will be reassigned from the 433rd Tactical Airlift Wing, Kelly
AFB, Texas, to the Third Air Force

GOOD TO GO: Members of the
908th ready to deploy.

“A BRIEF FLIRTATION: The 908th moved into the
FAC business with the Cessna U-3 ‘Blue canoe.’

award the Distinguished Flying
Cross and the Florida Cross.

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From the front page of The Car-
rrier, the 908th’s newspaper dated
March 1969:
The 908th Tactical Air Support Group, assigned at Maxwell, is the first Reserve Unit in history to receive aircraft directly from the factory. The O-2s didn’t last long either. It wasn’t long before the unit was up and running with its new aircraft. As though making up for lost time, the 908th declared itself combat ready in February 1973 – the first C-7 unit in the Reserve to achieve this milestone. As though making up for lost time, the 908th declared itself combat ready in February 1973 – the first C-7 unit in the Reserve to achieve this milestone. The 908th returned to its original mission with the acquisition of the C-7 Caribou.

The 908th Tactical Airlift Group made good use of the “Caribou,” and kept in service for more than a decade, but while the mission and aircraft of the group had changed, the superior performance of its members had not. It wasn’t long before the unit was up and running with its new aircraft. As though making up for lost time, the 908th declared itself combat ready in February 1973 – the first C-7 unit in the Reserve to achieve thestatus – such as reported in the following story from 1974:

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Outstanding Achievement

The Air Force Outstanding Unit Award is presented to numbered units that have distinguished themselves by exceptionally meritorious service or outstanding achievement that clearly sets the unit above and apart from similar units.

The services include: performance of exceptionally meritorious service, accomplishment of a specific outstanding achievement of national or international significance, combat operations against an armed enemy of the United States, or military operations involving conflict with or exposure to hostile action by an opposing foreign force.

The 908th Airlift Wing has been honored with this award seven times in its history, for the following time periods:
1 Jul 1972 - 15 Mar 1974
1 Jan 1976 - 30 Nov 1977
1 Feb 1980 - 31 Jan 1982
1 Sep 1986 - 31 Aug 1988
1 Sep 1991 - 31 Aug 1993
1 Oct 2003 - 30 Sep 2005
1 July 2008 - 31 May 2010

908th Tactical Airlift Group (Air Force Reserve), Maxwell AFB, has been confirmed by a Tactical Air Command inspection team from HQ, 9th Air Force, Shaw AFB, S.C.

According to Lt. Col. Jonathan Gardner, 908th commander, the purpose of the inspection was to evaluate the organization, management and mission capability of the Reserve Group and subordinate units.

Highly professional standards are required of all personnel in performing air drops of troops, assault landings, tactical medical evacuations, as well as unit personnel and equipment mobility exercises.

Colonel Gardner praised all the members of the Group saying, “It took a great team effort to achieve these outstanding results. Every man knew his job and performed it well.”

The TAC inspectors commended the outstanding manner, attitudes and courtesy of all members of the 908th. They said these were indicative of the high esprit de corps of the unit and a direct reflection on the commander’s influence throughout the chain of command.

Besides its airlift, medical evac and troop carrier missions, the group, at this time manned by nearly 600 reservists, occasionally got an unusual tasking, such as releasing sterile male screw worm flies over Puerto Rico during Operation Coronet Roundup.

Back at Maxwell, 908th members were accomplishing more firsts for the unit. One member became the first non-ART Reservist to graduate from the Air Force Senior NCO Academy while ten others became the first group of Reservists to be certified as Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT), tested and certified by the State of Alabama Health Department.

Aircrews were also being recognized.

In 1979, a C-7 crew directed aerial search and rescue operations for downed crewmen of a B-52 which crashed near Augusta, Ga., Sept. 3.

“T he 908th aircraft was between Augusta and Columbia, S.C. enroute to Shaw AFB, S.C. Sixty miles west of Columbia, the C-7 crew picked up a rescue beeper signal. The C-7 crew began a methodical search.

It was flown in and taxied up to the reviewing stand (with Cong. Dickinson on board) by a crew of mostly Army helicopter, which had just arrived, to the downed airmen.

In 1978, aircrew members of the 908th took 45 flight examiner, instructor, and basic aircrew examination for the Aircrew Standardization Evaluation Team from 14th Air Force and passed them all.

It was the unit second such award in a row.

“An excellent rating is difficult to come by,” said Maj. Gen. Edward Dillon, commander of 14th Air Force (Reserve). “Two in succession is a ‘first’ and requires the positive efforts of each and every member of the unit team.”

Most important, however, was the unit’s outstanding safety record. To date, the unit has accumulated more than 83,000 accident-free flying hours at Maxwell.

However, another change was coming. In October 1983, the 908th converted to the C-130E Hercules. The Ex arrival was wemonstrated by longtime member, Carl Poteat, former 908th executive officer: “I believe it was in August of 1983 when we got E models from the Alaska Guard and phased out the C-7. It was hot. It was my first major event. ‘The City of Montgomery’ was our very first C-130 we ever got. We didn’t have a crew of our own trained to fly it yet.

It was flown in and taxied uptown to the reviewing stand (with Cong. Dickinson on board) by a crew of mostly MAC advisors with the exception of navigator Dick Gilchrist who had just transferred from the 187th but was checked out in the C-130E.

We had another welcome ceremony in 1986 when we got the new H models.”

The C-130 gave the 908th a much-needed lift, accommodating a wide variety of oversized cargo, including everything from utility helicopters and six-wheeled armored vehicles to the hood of a C-7 Caribou. The HERD ON LINE: Thirteen C-7 Caribous rest on the Maxwell flightline.
THAT NEW PLANE SMELL: The 908th’s new C-130H2 aircraft underwent final touches on the factory floor.

NEW DIGS: Congressional, municipal, AFRC and 908th leaders dig the first shovelfuls of dirt for the wing’s new hangars in 2003.


FIRST HERC: 908th commander Col. Robert Martin and guests await the arrival of ‘City of Montgomery I.’

FOR after nearly a year and a half wartime to provide eight C-130Es, the 908th was leading the pack in mobility capability, and was selected by Headquarters, Military Airlift Command, to serve as the pilot unit for all organizations tasked in support of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. The late ’80s saw three deployments to Panama, the busy learning period in the new aircraft culminated in May 1987 at the international Airlift Rodeo competition at Pope Air Force Base, N.C., where the 908th placed as first overall C-130 unit in the world, and fourth place overall among all aircraft competing.

The ’90s was a decade of activity for the group. Redesignated as the 908th Airlift Group, it supplied a number of members in support of Desert Storm. In 1992, more than 30 Reservists were extras for “Body Snatchers,” and Capt. Judy Hughes, intelligence officer, was a body double for star Gabrielle Anwar. In late ’80s, the unit was active in real-world operations. The late ’80s saw three deployments to Panama. The busy learning period in the new aircraft culminated in May 1987 at the international Airlift Rodeo competition at Pope Air Force Base, N.C., where the 908th placed as first overall C-130 unit in the world, and fourth place overall among all aircraft competing.

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* Upon request, input PIN number, then 

#. PIN is assigned during Newcomers.

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* Upon request, input arrival date followed by departure date, then type (ADT, IDT, or both) (ADT=Annual Tour, IDT=Special Tour) (IDT=UAF, AFTP, RMP, Make-up UTA). UTA is (IDT) > AOT only? Call Lodging.

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* If a scheduled UTA weekend, system will tell you where you will be staying.

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* Questions?

Douglas Bowers

Olivia Edwards

Devince M. Bryant

Edward L. Buchanan

Jerrel C. Craig

Kaila K. Fernandez

Shannon N. Jones

Raven H. Levy

Jyliaan McCoy

Laticria P. Parks

Shamar C. Willerson

Alycia Baldwin

Lashanta Buchanon

Ashley Clark

Christian Granger

Ariel King

Matthew Lee

Kandace Moore

Kevin Rodriguez

Calie Sautter

Alesix Seymore

Ehren Smith

### Preparing to Disembark

Lt. Col. Noreen A. Burke, ASTS

Lt. Col. Kevin D. Fuqua, CES

Lt. Col. Billy R. Tabor Jr., 357 AS

Srgt. Shelia K. Mitchell, ASTS

Master Sgt. Kenneth L. Bailey, OG

Master Sgt. Marcus A. Fuller, 25 APS

Master Sgt. Michael Talley, SFS

Staff Sgt. David G. Powell, ASTS

* The next Reserve Retirement Briefing will take place Aug. 3 at 9 a.m. at Building 903, MSG Conference Room.

### FY12-13

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**Note**: This schedule is subject to change. For the most current information, please visit the UTA Lodging website.
To the Family of:

Ready...

Always!