

123 SPECIAL TACTICS SQUADRON



MISSION

Provides combat controllers and pararescuemen for worldwide operational needs.

LINEAGE

123 Special Tactics Flight
123 Special Tactics Squadron

STATIONS

Louisville, KY

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

Major Jeremy C. Shoop

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

On a disc Azure, between two wings conjoined in base Argent (Silver Gray), a life buoy White, banded and garnished with a rope Or, issuant therefrom the head of a Pegasus of the second

detailed Sable, eyed Vert, teeth of the third, in front of a ram-air parachute in chief of the second, detailed of the fifth, all within a narrow border Silver Gray. Attached above the disc, a Blue scroll edged with a narrow Silver Gray border and inscribed "INGENIUM SUPERAT VIRES" in Silver Gray letters. Attached below the disc, a Blue scroll edged with a narrow Silver Gray border and inscribed "123D SPECIAL TACTICS SQ" in Silver Gray 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 parachute is significant to the unit as a primary means of worldwide deployment, indicating that all Special Tactics Squadron operators are airborne qualified. The Pegasus symbolizes genius and inspiration and also represents the unit's amalgamation of the ground and air elements, which is key to the mission of the unit.

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

As part of Enduring Freedom, in March 2002 a joint military operation named "Anaconda" was mounted in Paktia province to surround and defeat Taliban forces hiding in the area. On the third day of Operation Anaconda an Army MH-47E Chinook helicopter was fired upon as it attempted to land on a ridge on Takur Ghar mountain. Taking heavy fire, the helicopter lurched and attempted to take-off to extricate itself from the field of fire. When the Chinook lurched, one of the Navy SEALs on board, Petty Officer First Class Neil C. Roberts, fell from the rear ramp. Too damaged to return for Petty Officer Roberts, the Chinook landed further down the mountain. A second MH-47E attempted to land and rescue Roberts, but it too was fired upon and forced to leave the immediate area.

The third MH-47E to attempt a landing on what became known as Roberts' Ridge was hit with automatic weapons fire and rocket-propelled grenades while still 20 feet in the air. The helicopter, containing an Army Ranger Team and Technical Sergeant Keary Miller, a Combat Search and Rescue Team Leader from the 123d Special Tactics Squadron, Kentucky Air National Guard, hit the ground hard. Within seconds, one helicopter crewman, the right door gunner, was killed, as were three Army Rangers.

The 17-hour ordeal that followed would result in the loss of seven American lives, including Petty Officer Roberts." Technical Sergeant Miller not only managed to drag the wounded helicopter pilot to safety, but also orchestrated the establishment of multiple casualty collection points. In between treating the wounded, Miller set up the distribution of ammunition for the Army Rangers who were taking the fight to the enemy. For his extraordinary life-saving efforts while putting himself in extreme danger under enemy fire, Technical Sergeant Miller was awarded the Silver Star by the U.S. Navy, one of the few members of the Air National Guard to be so honored.

On 29 August 2005, Hurricane Katrina swept through Louisiana and Mississippi, leaving a wide swath of destruction. That same afternoon, two Kentucky Air National Guard aircrews scheduled to fly routine local training sorties were tasked to fly the first hurricane relief

sorties into Navy New Orleans airfield and by 31 August the 123d Special Tactics Squadron was conducting search and rescue and helicopter evacuation operations in New Orleans with seven pararescue personnel, six FAA-certified combat/air traffic controllers and four Zodiac rescue boats. By the end of September, Kentucky Air Guard personnel had reinforced the unit's reputation as a world-class organization with an outstanding record of support to Katrina victims.

Twenty-four members of the 123d STS took control of Air National Guard rescue operations from 31 Aug-8 Sep, managing additional STS personnel from the Alaska, California, New York and Oregon Air National Guard, establishing temporary control of the Navy New Orleans airport tower, and operating round-the-clock rescue and evacuation operations. They evacuated 10,635 people by helicopter, 1,206 by boat and 86 by motor vehicle. Additionally, on 23 September 15 members of the 123d STS deployed to Meridian, Miss, to await the landfall of the hurricane season's second Category Five hurricane, Rita, in Texas. Rita made landfall on 24 Sep but did not pack the destructive force of Katrina, so the STS personnel were released to return home and prepare for the 123d STS' first quarter 05 deployment to Afghanistan.

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From 29 August through 30 September, Kentucky Air National Guard aircrews flew 91 Hurricane Katrina relief sorties for 166.3 flight hours, carrying 414 military and 414 civilian passengers and 321.2 tons of cargo. The 123d Operations Group kept aircraft and crews on alert for hurricane relief operations throughout the month of September. Lieutenant Colonel Ronald Whelan of the 123d Operations Group served as Air Liaison Officer to the Louisiana Air

National Guard in Baton Rouge from 22-29 Sep. The 123d Contingency Response Group (CRG, consisting 15 members of the 123d Aerial Port Squadron and nine members of the 123d Tanker Airlift Control Element [TALCE], under the command of Maj. Kevin Morris) handled airfield operations at the main Hurricane Katrina airfield hub of Belle Chase, Louisiana from 1 to 24 Sep and in Alexandria, Louisiana from 26 Sep into October.

Seven members of the 123d Services Squadron deployed on 6 September to Gulfport, Miss. CRTC to provide dining facility services to deployed servicemen and remained in place through 30 Sep. The 123d Medical Group deployed detachments of nine personnel under Col. Richard Kimbler to Baton Rouge from 6 to 24 Sep, three personnel to Camp Shelby, Miss. from 5 Sep to 15 Oct and two personnel to Belle Chase from 20 Sep to 4 Oct. The Medical Group assigned 10 staff members to work with the Veterans Administration and local volunteers to train them to handle litters and other details for patients expected to arrive in Louisville through the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS).

Seventy-five patients arrived at the base by C-130 airlift shortly after midnight the morning of 24 Sep, were processed in at the main maintenance hangar and transported to various local hospitals. Wing Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) Thomas Curry led a two-person Religious Support Team to Natchez, Miss. from 6-18 Sep 05 to assist both soldiers and civilians.

Airmen from the 123rd Airlift Wing loaded equipment and vehicles onto a C-130 Hercules at the Kentucky Air National Guard Base in Louisville, Ky., Sept. 20, 2017. The cargo will be used by members of the 123rd Special Tactics Squadron, who deployed to the Caribbean on Sept. 20, to conduct relief operations in the wake of Hurricane Maria. 2017

Airmen from the 123rd Airlift Wing palletize inflatable motorboats to be loaded onto a C-130 Hercules aircraft at the Kentucky Air National Guard Base in Louisville, Ky., Sept. 20, 2017. The boats will be used by members of the 123rd Special Tactics Squadron, who deployed to the Caribbean on Sept. 20 to conduct relief operations in the wake of Hurricane Maria. 2017

Seven Special Tactics Airmen from the Kentucky Air National Guard departed the Kentucky ANG base, Louisville, Sept. 20, 2017, for the Caribbean where they will open airfields for humanitarian aid deliveries and resident evacuations in the wake of Hurricane Maria, the third major hurricane to hit the region in the past month.

A four-man team from the 123rd Special Tactics Squadron arrived in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, Sept. 21, while a three-man team from the same unit is scheduled to arrive in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, the same day, said Chief Master Sgt. Aaron May, the squadron's enlisted manager for combat control.

The mission of both teams is the same: clear the airfields of debris, open runways and taxiways and establish air traffic control so military airlift can begin. The teams are prepared, if necessary, to parachute into the fields with chainsaws so they can remove fallen trees and other obstacles, allowing the C-130 Hercules that brought them to land safely and begin offloading rescue gear. The Airmen also deployed with trucks, motorcycles and inflatable motorboats to assist with rescue operations, May said.

"(This) deployment marks the third time in the past month that Kentucky Air National Guardsmen have mobilized in support of hurricane rescue operations in the Caribbean," said

Col. David Mounkes, 123rd Airlift Wing commander, parent unit to the 123rd STS. “Our Airmen stand ready at all times to answer the call for help, and we are tremendously grateful to be able to provide this assistance again. Our thoughts and prayers are with the residents of these islands as they continue to weather an unprecedented hurricane season.”

The Kentucky ANG deployed more than 80 Airmen to Texas for Hurricane Harvey, establishing an aeromedical evacuation hub and saving 333 residents stranded by floodwaters in the Houston area. The unit later deployed 24 Airmen for rescue operations following Hurricane Irma, helping evacuate more than 1,000 U.S. citizens from the Dutch Caribbean Island of St. Maarten.

USAF Unit Histories

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.