

143 AIRLIFT SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

143 Air Resupply Squadron extended federal recognition, 19 Nov 1955
Redesignated 143 Troop Carrier Squadron (Medium), 10 Oct 1958
Redesignated 143 Air Commando Squadron, 1 Jul 1963
Redesignated 143 Special Operations Squadron, 19 Aug 1968
Redesignated 143 Tactical Airlift Squadron, 4 Oct 1975
Redesignated 143 Airlift Squadron, 15 Mar 1992

STATIONS

Warwick, RI
Quonset ANGB, North Kingstown, RI

ASSIGNMENTS

143 Operations Group

WEAPON SYSTEMS

Mission Aircraft

C-46
SA-16
HU-16, 1963
U-10, 1963
U-6, 1965
U-10, 1967
C-119, 1971
C-130, 1975
C-130, 1990

Support Aircraft

COMMANDERS

LTC John Sullivan

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM



MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The mission of the 143d Airlift Wing is to provide worldwide combat airlift and combat support forces to the nation, and to provide resources to protect life, property and public safety for Rhode Island and the local community. 143d Airlift Wing leadership is recognized as amongst the most aggressive, demanding and the best in the C-130 community. To remain viable for the present and relevant in the future the Wing has aggressively pursued three avenues: base infrastructure and modernization, C-130J-30 advancement and becoming the C-130 “airbridge” for the Air Force.

When the Rhode Island Air National Guard (RIANG) activated the 143d ARG, it truly took a step into the unknown. Prior to the activation, the state’s flying experience had been limited to its 152d Fighter Squadron, which, as events were shortly to prove, provided the bulk of the manpower for the new ARG. The new group consisted of a group headquarters, as well as the airborne materials assembly and air resupply squadrons. Within the first year, another reorganization would occur that would streamline the group functions into a single air resupply squadron.

A change of this nature in the nation’s smallest state could hardly go unnoticed, and indeed local newspaper articles of the day provided considerable coverage of the new unit. Feeder stories from the RIANG Public Affairs Office describe the air resupply mission simply as considerable but not totally accurate in terms of “providing air transportation for airborne forces” and “long-range movement of personnel.” In contrast to the public posture, an undated 143d ARG briefing of this early period, given to Rhode Island’s adjutant general, tersely notes, “The mission of this unit is classified and will be explained in detail at a later time.”

The mission was, of course, identical to that of the active duty ARGs the guardsmen were replacing—unconventional and psychological warfare. With the organization established and the aircraft coming in, the most pressing question quickly turned to the subject of training. Single-ship, lowlevel flying in and out of remote airstrips both day and night, not to mention water operations, were a long stretch for a group of fighter pilots used to high-altitude, daytime formation flying. There was, an agency that could provide the necessary training for unconventional air warfare training at a place called simply “The Farm.” Shortly after the 143d came together, an operations officer from the group staff, as well as the flying squadron’s commander, operations officer, and intelligence officer, received orders to report to a USI training facility in Virginia, about an hour’s flying time south of Washington, D.C. For the next two weeks they underwent an intensive training course in the skills necessary to fly and survive behind enemy lines. Having completed the training, this cadre returned to Rhode Island to pass on their knowledge to their aircrews. In the ensuing years, the guardsmen would learn that

while their mission would remain essentially unchanged, little else would remain static in their organizations. The C-46s were largely phased out by 1958, the same year in which units from the four states underwent name changes that converted the air resupply units to troop carrier groups. In 1963, all units were designated Air Commando Groups, following the revival of the active duty Air Commando force at Hurlburt Field, Florida. Five years later, in still another name change, both active and Guard units became special operations squadrons/groups/wings.

Initially designated the 143d Troop Carrier Squadron (Medium), the 143d grew to group status by 1962. The following year, it was redesignated yet again as the 143d Air Commando Squadron/Group.

If organizational titles were fluid, the arrival of additional types of aircraft also added versatility to the Air Guard's special operations capabilities. All units began picking up the new U-10 Helio Courier, a single-engined, short takeoff and landing (STOL) liaison-type aircraft ideally suited for remote area operations. Both the California and West Virginia units received the big C-119 Flying Boxcars to replace their C-46s. In the absence of active duty special operations forces in the late 1950s, all USAF expertise in this field clearly belonged to the Guard. It was a reality that provided the West Virginia's 130th an unusual opportunity throughout 1960–61.

During these two years, the West Virginians were tasked through Tactical Air Command to assist in the training of USAF's highly classified Jungle Jim program, the active duty precursor to the 1st Air Commando Wing and Special Air Warfare Center (SAWC) at Eglin AFB, Florida. It was quite a turnaround for the Guard, which normally found itself downstream of Air Force priorities for equipment and training.

In the spring of 1964, all four Air Commando Groups came together for a rare opportunity to train during Operation Sidewinder. The training site itself was appropriate in that Marana Air Park, located 20 miles northwest of Tucson, Arizona, was home to a number of USI proprietary airlines, as well as other unrelated federal departments. While little was said directly to the guardsmen, the presence of civilian strangers observing their mission briefings and flight performance made it clear their proficiency was being monitored. It was also at Marana that the Guard was introduced to the latest evolution in air-to-ground recovery systems, a weird-looking setup patriotically called the "All-American System."

In the 1960s, South and Central America beckoned, and Panama in particular provided an excellent training site. Unconventional warfare training, psychological warfare leaflet drops, and even jungle-survival school were on the curriculum for the guardsmen operating in the Canal Zone. In addition, numerous humanitarian missions were conducted by the guardsmen using their amphibian and STOL aircraft to reach remote villages and coastal towns. The Rhode Island special operators even took two SA-16s and a support aircraft to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1970 to conduct underwater seismic testing for the US Navy in Lake Tanganyika. In June 1971, Maryland's 135th Special Operations Group (SOG) was redesignated a tactical air support group, with the Tactical Air Command becoming the gaining command. Its HU-16s and U-10s were phased out to be replaced by the O-2A Skymaster. Four years later, California's

129th SOG became the 129th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group, part of the Military Airlift Command. During that same year, both Rhode Island and West Virginia SOGs were equipped with the C-130 transport and were redesignated tactical airlift groups.

West Virginia's C-130s were seen years later at Hurlburt Field, Florida, home of the Air Force Special Operations Command. And the Pennsylvania Air Guard's 193d Special Operations Wing, the only Air Guard unit assigned to AFSOC, still makes a unique, lowprofile contribution to AFSOC with its six specially equipped EC-130E Commando Solo aircraft. The 193d is the only USAF unit capable of providing airborne radio and television broadcasts. When not supporting AFSOC missions, the 193d provides specialized support to the Air Force Intelligence Agency as its secondary mission. Clearly the sensitive files for Air Guard special operations duties must still be marked

The 143rd Air Resupply Squadron was formed at Rhode Island's T.F. Green airport in Nov. 1955. The unit flew C-46s and SA-16As until 1958 when the C-46 was phased out. Also that year the squadron was redesignated the 143rd Troop Carrier Squadron. In 1963 they became the 143rd Air Commando Squadron and in 1968 Special Operations Squadron. 1971 would bring the replacement of the HU-16s by C-119s.

The 143rd Air Resupply Squadron received federal recognition in November of 1955. The National Guard flying program was once again alive and well in the State of Rhode Island. The unit was assigned the SA-16A, C-47. There were several minor mission designation changes, and the C-47 was eventually replaced by the C-46.

In 1963 the first major mission change for the 143rd since the days of the fighters occurred. Situations around the world produced a need for specialized units which could insert a small group of trained combat troops on land or sea anywhere at a moments notice. The 143rd was tasked as one of the representatives of the National Guard in the Air Force's Air Commando Group structure. The C-46 was replaced with U-10A and U-10D. During a three-year period starting in 1965, the U-10s belonging to the 143rd and other Air National Guard units were transferred back to the Air Force for use in Vietnam, during which the was replaced by U-6.

In 1968 the U-10s returned from their tour of duty in Vietnam, and at this time the unit was redesignated the 143rd Special Operations Group. The SA-16 flown by 143rd pilots since 1955 was replaced in 1968 with an updated version of the HU-16. With twice the cargo capability and range, the HU-16 opened up new avenues of opportunity as was demonstrated in 1970. Flight and Ground crews of the 143rd assisted scientists and engineers of the Naval Underwater Systems Center, conducting studies of undersea acoustics, at Lake Tanganyika in Africa during April and again in August at Hudson Bay, Canada.

The unit would work in the Special Operations field for seven more years, during which the HU-16 were eventually retired in 1972 and replaced with C-119G/L an aircraft which the 143rd would fly for only three years. In 1975 as part of a general program to upgrade the countries Air

National Guard units the 143rd was redesignated as a Tactical Airlift Group and assigned C-130A.

Always pressed for room at TF Green Airport the "new" C-130s, twice the size of anything the unit had previously flown, created quite the concern for the 143rd TAG Commanders, Flight Crews and especially the Crew Chiefs and maintenance folks of the 143rd Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron. Relief would arrive in 1977 when the United States Navy, who had abandoned the facilities at the Quonset Naval Air Station, finally returned the land and facilities to the State. For the first time since 1915, when Guard pilots flew the Curtis Flying Boats from the old National Guard Training Camp at Quonset, the Rhode Island Air National Guard flying unit was to have a home to call its own, (coincidentally the site currently occupied by the 143rd Airlift Group is in approximately the same location as the facilities used in 1915).

In 1980 after three years of negotiations and construction the 143rd TAG moved into its new home at Quonset Air National Guard Base. The new facilities provided the room desperately needed to grow and expand the C-130 program. Over the next seven years the men and women of the 143rd trained with the aging "A" model C-130s. Rhode Island "Herks" could be found in all parts of the United States, Europe, Africa, and especially South America and the Caribbean. The 143rd TAG has consistently participated in deployments such as: Volant Oak, Volant Pine, Red Flag, Dragon Hammer, Volant Rodeo competition and humanitarian efforts such as "Operation Toy Lift" which provided toys to the children of Granada after the US intervention there in 1986.

In 1989, after years of getting the job done with the C-130As, the 143rd TAG was finally selected for conversion to the C-130E model "Hercules" of 1990 when volunteers answered the call to provide support during Operation Desert Shield. The 143rd TAG was among the first of the National Guard units to provide Flight Crews and Maintenance personnel needed by the USAF when additional trained manpower was needed. The first volunteers, in September of 1990, flew out of Rhein Mein Air Base, Germany and provided backfill support for active duty personnel transferred into Turkey and Saudi Arabia in response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The second group of volunteers departed in January of 1991 and were stationed at RAF Mildenhall in the United Kingdom. Again, flying backfill operation, this crew had the distinction of being in the "Theater of Operation" when Operation Desert Shield turned into Operation Desert Storm, the Gulf War. This second group of volunteers returned home in February after completing a one month rotation at Mildenhall ready to return to civilian life and jobs. However, about one week after their return these civilian soldiers were again asked to answer the call to duty, this time by the President of the United States. With the defeat of the Iraqi forces and the end of the Gulf War, members returned home in June 1991 and were released from active duty.

In 1992 the unit was redesignated the 143rd Airlift Group in response to Air Force wide restructuring and assigned to Air Combat Command. Volunteers from the 143rd have participated in many United Nations sponsored relief missions during the last three years; Somalia in 1992 and in late 1992 and much of 1993 "Operation Provide Promise" where Rhode

Island Air Guardsmen and women flew daylight airland missions into Sarajevo Airport and night airdrops over remote areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

An uncompromising program of base infrastructure modernization and construction began in 2001 with the acquisition of adjacent land bringing Quonset to 100 acres. A six-year, \$65 million base modernization and construction program included the installation of new fiber-optic, communication and electrical power infrastructure to support future base wide construction; the completion of a new Life Support Building; the complete reconstruction of the Motor Pool roof; construction of a new Aircraft Maintenance and Hangar facility to accommodate the ongoing conversion to the C-130J-30; the total renovation and addition to the Operations Building.

In its 2005 BRAC Recommendations, DoD would realign Martin State Air Guard Station (AGS), MD. DoD recommended to distribute the eight C-130J aircraft of the 175th Wing (ANG) to the 146th Airlift Wing (ANG), Channel Islands AGS, CA (four aircraft), and 143d Airlift Wing (ANG), Quonset State Airport AGS, RI (four aircraft). As a result of this recommendation, the 143th Airlift Wing would retire two C-130E aircraft. This recommendation would move C-130Js to Channel Islands AGS (96), and Quonset State (125), both of which ranked higher in military value and already operate the J-model C-130--avoiding conversion training costs.

C-130Js of the 143rd deployed to Ysterplaat AB, near Cape Town, South Africa for the biennial Africa Aerospace and Defense exposition held 21-25 Sept 2010.

USAF Unit Histories
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Sources
Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.