

53 AERIAL PORT SQUADRON



MISSION

The 53 Aerial Port Squadron's mission is to provide responsive global cargo and passenger movement operations while cultivating combat-ready airman. Its functions include processing Airmen and cargo, rigging for airdrops, packing parachutes, loading equipment, preparing air cargo and load plans, loading and securing aircraft, ejecting cargo for in-flight delivery, and supervising units engaged in aircraft loading and unloading operations.

LINEAGE

53 Aerial Port Squadron constituted, 29 Jan 1973
Activated in the Air Force Reserve, 1 Jul 1973
Redesignated 53 Mobile Aerial Port Squadron, 1 Jan 1978
Redesignated 53 Aerial Port Squadron, 1 Mar 1994

STATIONS

McChord AFB, WA, 1 Jul 1973-1 Jan 1978
Pope AFB, NC, 1 Jan 1978

ASSIGNMENTS

Western Air Force Reserve Region, 1 Jul 1973
446 Military Airlift Wing (Associate), 1 Aug 1973
315 Military Airlift Wing (Associate), 1 Jan 1978
512 Military Airlift Wing (Associate), 1 Oct 1992
622 Regional Support Group, 1 Jan 1995

COMMANDERS

Maj P. Riley
Maj Kenneth A. Byrd
Lt Col Robert W. Braden
Lt Col Ronald D. Powell
Lt Col Stephen M. Higgins, 2011
Lt Col Jack Gibson

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

53 Mobile Aerial Port Squadron emblem: On a sky-blue disk, bordered in black, a stylized brown camel in profile stands atop the earth in its standard colors with green indicating the land and deep blue representing the ocean. All details are edged in black with a horizontal bar trailing an aircraft encircling the globe in a northerly direction, indication of this unit's worldwide mission capability. MOTTO: On a yellow base, Performance with Pride. Edged and inscribed in black TOP SCROLL: In yellow, edged and inscribed in black will be used for the unit designation: 53RD MAPS. **SIGNIFICANCE:** The primary color of the emblem, dark blue repeats one of the main colors of the American flag. It symbolizes the patriotic spirit and devotion to duty of transportation squadron personnel as well as their constant loyalty to the United States Air Force. The camel represents the main function of the Transportation mission, movement of equipment and personnel during peacetime and combat support operations. Additionally, the camel is symbolic of the spirit of the professional transporter - determined, durable and strong. The pallet affixed to the camel's back is the 463L platform commonly used by the Transporters to airlift cargo and equipment. The brown color represents the earth which is symbolic of the Transporter's worldwide mission readiness posture. The Transporter is prepared to travel anywhere in the world in support of national defense objectives. The yellow symbolizes the personal excellence and loyalty of all Transporters, a commitment to the highest degree by all members of the Military Airlift Command and the Air Force Reserve. The ultramarine blue color represents the sky, the primary theater of the Air Force operations. Finally, the color green represents the adaptability of Transporters to perform under the most adverse conditions in any region of the world. The aircraft flying over the globe signifies the importance of the Transporter's worldwide mission, traveling to the remote regions of the earth in order to get the job done. The motto Performance with Pride reflects the squadron's commitment to 3 exemplary attributes of the superior Transporter; Performa getting the job done right the first time, Pride, the sense of fulfillment of doing one's best and Professionalism, the unyielding commitment to excellence in all aspects of one's duty and service to the Air Force.



53 Aerial Port Squadron Emblem

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

In August of 1990, the 53 reservists replaced 3rd MAPS reservists deploying to Southwest Asia at the onset of Operation Desert Shield. In a two-week period, this group handled more than 460 aircraft, averaging one aircraft every 45 minutes.

The unit received presidential orders for partial mobilization in 2003, to support Operation Iraqi Freedom. During the two-phased mobilization, 84 reservists were moved from civilian status to active duty for the first time in unit history. 53 Reservists have since served in the Czech Republic, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Iraq, Qatar, Oman, Germany, and at Pope AFB, N.C. Today, members of the 53 APS continue to serve overseas in Kuwait and Turkey.

The squadron has been involved with and participated in a number of Joint Chiefs of Staff directed exercises such as Gallant Knight, Phoenix Bravery, Provide Promise, Proud Return and Urgent Fury. Additionally, the squadron participated in Air Force Reserve Command exercises Patriot Port, Patriot Tiger, Volant Rodeo, Restore Hope, Phoenix Pace and Patriot Partner.

For years, active duty Airmen at Pope Air Force Base, N.C., knew the “red hats” as the men and women from the 53 Aerial Port Squadron. But the Airmen wearing the red hats carried another unique distinction – they were Reservists belonging to the only Reserve unit on base.

That trait has now gone by the wayside with the arrival of the 440th Airlift Wing, the new Reserve unit that relocated from Milwaukee to Pope AFB in June. On Saturday of the October UTA, the wing welcomed the red hats as its newest unit during a flag transfer ceremony in front of more than 200 people in Nose Dock 4. Becoming part of the 440th family is seen as a positive to Lt. Col. Jack Gibson, 53 APS commander.

Since the 53 APS was the only Reserve unit assigned to Pope AFB, its headquarters unit was with the 622nd Regional Support Group located at Dobbins Air Reserve Base, Ga., which meant a sort of long-distance relationship to work command and control issues. Additionally, the 53

APS also received logistical and administrative support from the 315th Airlift Wing at Charleston Air Force Base, S.C. Taking care of ongoing training to stay mission ready such as fulfilling physicals and military personnel flight-related items often required a trip to Dobbins AFB or Charleston AFB. “We’ve been a geographically separated unit for a number of years, and that’s been a challenge at times,” Colonel Gibson said. “Now everything will be right here for us at Pope, and that will be great.”

Lt. Col. Ronald Powell, who served as the squadron’s commander from 1999 until he retired in December 2005, said he has mixed feelings about the transfer. Being the only Reserve unit at Pope AFB brought with it a special identity that no one else on base had. “Since 1978 people identified us with the red hats, and now there’s going to be other reservists here, and they’re not going to be wearing the red hats,” Colonel Powell said. “But I think that’s going to be OK. In the past we’ve had three masters to serve: our active duty hosts, and the wings at Dobbins and Charleston. Now we’re just going to have one, and that’s a good thing for everyone.”

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORIES

Created: 19 Feb 2025

Updated:

Sources

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

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, Virginia.