

144th AIRLIFT SQUADRON



LINEAGE

144th Fighter Bomber Squadron extended Federal recognition, 1 Jul 1953
Redesignated 144th Fighter Interceptor Squadron, 1 Jul 1955
Redesignated 144th Air Transport Squadron (Light), 1 Jul 1957
Redesignated 144th Air Transport Squadron (Medium), 1 Dec 1960
Redesignated 144th Tactical Airlift Squadron, 1 Apr 1969
Redesignated 144th Airlift Squadron, 15 Mar 1992 *1 June 1992*

STATIONS

Anchorage, AK
Elmendorf AFB, AK
Kulis ANGB, Anchorage, AK, 1955
Elmendorf AFB, AK

ASSIGNMENTS

WEAPON SYSTEMS

Mission Aircraft

F-80C, 1953
F-86E, 1955
C-47A, Oct 1957
C-123J, 1960
C-130E, Apr 1976
C-130H, 1985 *1983*

Support Aircraft

T-6G, 1953
T-33, 1953

ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT SERIAL NUMBERS

C-123

64396
64393
64395
64389

C-130
XX7863
XX7817
XX7770
XX7805
XX7852
XX7822

C-130Hs during FY85

82-0054
82-0055
82-0056
82-0057
82-0058
82-0059
82-0060
82-0061

C-47
224132

ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT TAIL/BASE CODES

UNIT COLORS

COMMANDERS

Maj Clyde E. Eaton, 1953
Col Lars L. Johnson, 1953
Maj Clyde E. Eaton, 1955
MG William S. Elmore, 1957
LTC Harold E. Wolverton, 1963
LTC Tom Lawrence

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The Alaska Air National Guard got its start on 15 Sep 1952, when the federal government authorized and recognized the 8144th Air Base Squadron. The guiding force behind the Organization was Colonel Lars Johnson, the Territorial Adjutant General, later the State Director of Aviation. All his spare time was spent in recruiting personnel, locating equipment and quarters for the squadron. At its creation, the 8144th included 11 enlisted men, five officers and no planes. Its headquarters was located in a small office above what was then the bus depot on Fourth Avenue in downtown Anchorage. Because the office was so small, the men convened for their first UTA in a nearby Quonset hut.

Their first aircraft, a T-6G arrived in Feb 1953. Soon, five more trainers arrived, operating out of Elmendorf. In keeping with the Air Guard's mission to provide national air defense, the pilots began training in earnest for their planned transition to jet fighters. As that training progressed, the unit was redesignated the 144th Fighter-Bomber Squadron in Jul 1953.

By this time few more T-6 were on the ramp and the flying schedules were increased to get everyone current for transitional training into jet aircraft. In 1953 a T-33A arrived followed by an F-80C. Field Training was scheduled for Nov 1953 with 15 Officers and 49 Enlisted men, and transition training began in earnest to qualify all pilots as jet qualified. By Nov 1954, assigned aircraft numbered 14 F-80, T-33A, 3 T-6, 2 T-6D and 1 C-47.

The unit was not expected to expand rapidly, as the 144th Squadron was the first squadron to be federally recognized without a population area of at least a 100,900. But Alaska being an area where everybody flies, rose to the challenge and by 1954 had grown to 23 Officers and 126 Airmen.

Soon five more trainers arrived, operating out of Elmendorf's Hanger #3. In keeping with the Air Guard's mission to provide national air defense, the pilots began training in earnest for their planned transition to jet fighters. With the unit's growth, the facilities assigned to the Squadron at Elmendorf became much too small and the search for larger quarters ended when the National Guard Bureau authorized construction of new quarters at the Anchorage International Airport.

By late Fall of 1954 the growing unit was fully equipped with 14 F-80s, two T-33s, three T-6Gs, two T-6s and a C-47A.

16 Nov 1954 was a dark day for the young organization. First, a T-33 on a training flight over Point McKenzie checked in with ground controllers, then simply vanished. Neither the plane nor

its occupants, Lt Roger Pendleton and Cpt Lionel Tietze, were ever seen or heard from again. Less than a half-hour later, a training flight of three F-80s led by 1LT Albert Kulis passed in formation over the Goose Bay area, on the west side of Knik Arm. Lt. Kulis' wing man watched as his fighter went into a steep, diving turn and vanished into a cloudbank. Two weeks later, wreckage belonging to Kulis' jet was found in the mud at Goose Bay, but the fighter sank before it could be recovered.

That spring, the Alaska Air National Guard moved out of Elmendorf and onto its new base near Anchorage International Airport. After an informal vote, the base was dedicated in honor of Lt. Kulis. With the completion of facilities at International Airport in Feb 1955, and the announcement of conversion to F-86s, the Squadron moved to its new quarters.

On 1 Jul 1955, the 144th Fighter Bomber Squadron was redesignated the 144th Fighter Interceptor Squadron and had received nine of its F-86, and had transferred eight of its F-80Cs to the Wyoming ANG, Fifteen F-86s was the final compliment of the Squadron and interceptor training and joint exercises with the Alaskan Air Command were begun and completed in record time.

In Oct 1955, a T-6 crash near Eagle River killed 1LT Clermont O'Born and an Army Guard observer, SFC Norman Henry. Six months later, Capt. Blinn Webster died following a mid-air collision with an Air Force trainer. In February 1957, Cpt Richard Otto was killed in a crash while participating in an Army National Guard training exercise north of Anchorage.

The lowest point came in November of that same year. Four Alaska National Guardsmen Cpt Robert Kafader, 1LT Dennis Stamey, SSgt. David Dial and SSgt. Floyd Porter died when their transport plane crashed near Gustavus in Southeast Alaska.

Training was continued until the spring of 1957, when the Squadron was notified that it would become an Air Transport Unit. Many long faces were noticed during this period of time; with the struggle to get organization, training, and all the things that go with such units, the Squadron had learned some valuable lessons and was determined to make the best of what was thought of as a bad thing. A decision was made at the national level to shift the Air Guard's emphasis from air combat to airlift, and the newly rechristened 144th Transportation Squadron (Light) turned in its Sabres for C-47 in 1957. In the end, the new mission proved to be a perfect marriage with the needs of the soon-to-be-recognized state of Alaska. The C-47s may have been old and slow, but they were strong, versatile and capable of taking an enormous amount of abuse. Alaska's rugged geography and unpredictable weather would put those qualities to the test.

On 1 Jul 1957 the Squadron was redesignated as the 144th Air Transport Squadron Light and assigned six C-47's as Transport Aircraft. The old Gooney Bird was a familiar sight around Alaska, and the Squadron realizing that they would have to prove capable of the assignment.

There had been one C-47 assigned to the 144th Fighter Interceptor Squadron. It had been used as an instrument trainer and light transport. Now the squadron had the distinction of being the only unit in the Air National Guard equipped entirely with C-47s. The conversion to the C-47 coincided with AAC's reduction of its fighter interceptor force. The transport was needed to support the radar sites. It proved ideal for this mission. It could get into and, more importantly,

get out of the small landing strips which were common in Alaska. It was strong, and it could endure the abuses of the northern territory like no other aircraft. It could land on a snow-covered stretch of terrain, a frozen lake, or a sloping runway with vertical drops at each end. It could perform numerous mercy missions that required certain abilities not possessed by the larger C-119s and C-124s, which were present in the state. It was slow, old, and lacked many of the refinements and improvements possessed by the newer aircraft.

During Feb 1958 squadron air dropped supplies to St. Mary's mission school.

The year 1959 began with an airlift of 54 sick children from St Lawrence island to the Alaska Native Hospital in Anchorage.

In May 1960 the C-123J arrived and with that aircraft the squadron flew equipment and supplies to scientists on a floating ice island some 600 miles from the North Pole.

On 1 Jul 1960 the Squadron was redesignated the 144th Air Transport Squadron Medium, and transitional training began. By the end of the summer transition had been completed and an expanded mission developed with the Alaskan Air Command. Any mission was acceptable to the 144th, and soon they were flying moose calves for the Federal Wildlife People to restock barren areas, hauling men and equipment to fight fires. Parachutes were made to firefighters, resupplying remote early warning sights for the AAC, and the Army called on to support combat Patrols and paratroop drops.

Assignment of the airplanes was slow at first; the first of six C-47s to be assigned to the squadron began arriving in late 1957 from Air Guard units in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Texas, and New York. After three years in the C-47, the 144th again was redesignated from a "light" to a "medium" air transport squadron, and it was given new C-123Js. The Provider was not new to Alaska. The Alaskan Air Command had been flying the C-123B model since 1957. The "B" model was considered somewhat underpowered for certain Alaska missions. The C-123Js that were assigned to the Alaska Air National Guard were equipped with wing-tip mounted J-44 jets to augment the reliable Pratt & Whitney R-2800-99-W engines. This gave the J model some 4,600 horsepower and 2,000 pounds of additional thrust, which helped offset the drag and the additional weight of the airplane's most significant modification-skis. The ten C-123Js assigned to the 144th Air Transport Squadron had been modified for ski-wheel operation. This allowed them to be operated off of regular runways and frozen surfaces. The ten C-123Js were used by SAC's 4083rd Strategic Wing, Harmon AB, Newfoundland, before they were sent to Alaska. They were far superior to the C-47s they replaced.

The Provider's ski-wheel landing gear made it flexible enough to be operated, quite literally, anywhere in the state. Numerous open snow landings on glaciers and lakes were accomplished as a matter of course, and, for years, the 144th directly supported Harvard University's glaciology experiments on the Taku Glacier near Juneau. The ski-birds were also a key part in the supporting network for the International Geophysical Year experiments, which were conducted in Alaska and the Yukon Territories of Canada.

By the spring of 1960s, the Air Guard was chasing at the bit for larger aircraft, and in May 1960

the National Guard Bureau announced that we had been assigned ten C-123Js.

In 1961; Jan flew TNT used to shatter an ice jam; Feb an iron lung was ferried to Nome in response to a polio outbreak; Mar, flew heavy equipment is landed on the Yukon River for the Corps of Engineers.

Missions accomplished by the Air Guard in Alaska: Support of Flethchers "Ice Island" T-3 some 400 miles out in the Arctic ocean Support of geological research of Taku Glacier Landings and takeoff from the Glacier with supplies and personnel from the Arctic Research Lab and University of Michigan. Rescue of 15 downed scientists from the Arctic Ocean, whose aircraft was downed and time was of the essence Countless trips to remote sites all over Alaska from Point Barrow to Barter Island, Fort Yukon to Whitehorse, Yukon Territory; Sitka, Ketchiken, Juneau to Cordova, Anchorage to Kodiak, Points on the Aleutian Chain to Cape Newnham, Nunivak Island to St. Lawrence Island, Wales to Point Hope, Cape Lisburne to Wainrights Kozebue to Nome, Bethel to Fairbanks, Points all along the Tukon River and to countless other places. Transportation of Buffalos, Raindeer, Moose and Caribou from one area heavy stocked to other areas barren for the Wildlife. Landings and takeoffs from remote unnamed lakes in support of Army maneuvers, paradrops on resupply missions to isolated communities is now commonplace with the Alaska Air Guard. The Corps of Engineers required our help in hauling core drilling machines into the Rampart Dam area on the Yukon River. Military maneuvers such as Dimond Lil, Great Bear, Timber Line, Polar Seige, Polar Strike, require day and night paradrop missions. Cargo and troop airlifts, landings on remote and mountainous terrain in some of the world's roughest weather, extreme zero temperatures, ice fog, and snow covered lakes and rivers are just a few of the difficulties we face. As an example of this type of flying, during "Operation Polar Seigs," the following items are worth mentioning: 382 sorties scheduled, 650 hours flown, 2,937 Passengers airlifted, 417.3 cargo tons airlifted, incommission rate 83%, which consisted of 6 aborts, 3 weather and 3 maintenance.

On the domestic front, Alaskans became more aware of the direct benefits of having a well-trained National Guard. During the Carroll years, the National Guard performed search and rescue missions, was there for flood and fire relief and even provided avalanche control along the highways of South Central Alaska. The Air Guard supported the Rampart Dam Engineering Team studies, landed scientific study teams on Taku Glacier, flew wildlife transplant stock to remote sites and landed on a floating ice island in the Arctic Ocean to rescue a stranded scientific team. The Air Guard began flying its annual Operation Santa Claus trips to bring Christmas gifts to remote native villages. The Army Guard created good will in numerous towns and villages by being there whenever the citizens needed help. This was never more true than in Mar 1964.

On 27 Mar 1964, the most violent earthquake in the recorded history of North America struck South central Alaska. Tsunamis devastated Valdez, Seward and Kodiak. Gaping fissures, crumbled buildings and burst pipes dotted Anchorage. The words devastating, catastrophic, colossal and gigantic magnitude had little meaning for most Alaskans until 5:27 P.M., March 27, 1964. It was at this moment animals seemed to sense some impending disaster and a jarring alerted many to a far-off roar like a distant freight train approaching. The underground thunder raced and built up power and volume as it spread out in a huge arc-like pattern nearly 500 miles towards Anchorage, Valdez, Seward and west to Kodiak from the point deep below Prince

William Sound near College Glacier where the continental plates had shifted. The earthquake was the most powerful ever recorded in North America. It unleashed a force equal to 12,000 Hiroshima-sized atomic bombs. The twisting, wave-like motion travelled at more than one hundred miles-per-hour to bring death and destruction to Alaska's south central district. There had been more destructive earthquakes. The great San Francisco earthquake and the fires that followed had taken many more lives as had earthquakes in Portugal, India and Japan. The Alaska earthquake took place in an area of a relatively small spread out population at the close of the business day when school was not in session and many people were headed home after work. The unseasonably warm weather averted additional suffering. The earthquake affected communities differently. Portions of Anchorage were hit hard while other sections escaped major damage. A section of downtown Fourth Avenue dropped 30 feet and whole blocks of commercial buildings were nearly destroyed. Portions of the exclusive Turnigan Arm subdivision slid off towards Cook Inlet and expensive homes were destroyed. More than 150 commercial buildings were damaged, including the almost new J.C. Penney store where some people were killed. The control tower at Anchorage International Airport fell and the airport was closed to traffic for a time. An Air National Guard C-123 became an air traffic control center and broadcast to the world news of the disaster.

The "Big Shake" of 1964 exemplifies the spirit of the Alaska ANG. Thirty minutes after the quake 2 aircraft were ready with crews. Within two hours four aircraft with crews were standing by and crews were available for six aircraft four hours after the quake. Air Guardsmen came without call, knowing they would be needed. They took care of emergency Base requirements, readied emergency shelter for 100 people, volunteered aid to civil defense and disaster office, and were the first aircraft into Seward, Valdez, Kodiak and Cordova with emergency supplies, personnel, and news of other areas. For 60 days after the quake, air guard crews flew constantly, resupplying other communities hard hit by the quake. Countless volunteer hours were spent by the Air Guard in assistance to the communities needing aid. In all this confusion Easter Sunday stands out as does the Unit, the Alaska Air Guard. With some 40 kids staying in the Air Guard emergency shelter, it looked pretty bleak for the Easter Bunny to visit the kids. Undaunted, the Air Guardsmen rushed to the community department stores telling of the plights, and were loaded down with goodies for the kids. Staying up most of the evening, they boiled and colored eggs and hid the goodies, with names yet, for the kids peacefully sleeping in the warehouse. The shouts of joy almost set off another earthquake as the kids found out that the Easter Bunny could find them wherever they were.

In the immediate aftermath, Maj. James Rowe arrived at Kulis from the airport, reporting that its control tower had been demolished. Two Air Guard members sped over with a wrecking truck, which they used to free three men trapped in the rubble. Rowe, meanwhile, fired up a C-123 and went aloft, serving as an emergency control tower and relaying what he could see to the rest of the world.

MG Thomas Carroll, the Alaska National Guard's adjutant general, immediately directed Maj John Podraza to assume command at Kulis and activate the Guard. Downed phone lines made communication difficult, but that didn't matter—within 20 minutes after the quake ended, the Anchorage Times reported, Guard members began streaming into Kulis without being called. Most phone lines were down, and for a time the areas's only reliable communication with the

outside world was through the powerful radios on board Maj. Rowe's C-123.

Every resource at the Guard's disposal was brought to bear in the disaster response effort. Personnel from the Motor Vehicle Section supplied electricity using emergency power units. Maintenance Squadron members took emergency steps to bring heat to strategic buildings, and the dispensary was prepared by medical technicians. A warehouse on base was converted to a shelter for civilians rendered homeless by the quake, with a makeshift dining hall and over 100 beds. By midnight, 97 of those beds were occupied. Over the next few weeks the 144th would fly 131,000 pounds of cargo and 201 passengers in support of earthquake relief efforts. It was, by all accounts, one of the Alaska Air National Guard's finest hours, and its performance earned the 12-year-old organization the Air Force's Outstanding Unit Award.

On 25 Apr 1964, the State of Alaska suffered a second blow. A C-123 Air Guard plane piloted by LTC Tom Norris flew Governor Egan and his party of 12 officials and newsmen into Valdez. The plane had come in under low clouds only a few hundred feet over the water. Upon arrival, one engine kept running while the Governor's party and his vehicle were unloaded. The weather was squally and the Governor advised General Carroll he should consider remaining in Valdez until Sunday because of bad flying weather. Governor Egan was visiting his hometown to evaluate earthquake damage. A charity steak dinner had been scheduled to raise money for earthquake victims. The General was invited but felt he had to get back to Anchorage and remarked he had not brought a fork for the steak feed. As the Governor's party was taken into town, Colonel Norris taxied the C-123 onto the runway for takeoff. The Governor said he did not hear, "the slightest bark or cough, to indicate there was any engine trouble." A Fort Wainwright soldier was standing at the remnants of the Valdez dock on guard duty. He watched the plane lift off and fly low over the water. Then it suddenly glided with fully running engines at an angle into the water. The Governor's party turned into the dock about the time the plane hit the water and sped to the boat landing where a couple of skiffs and a large fishing boat were getting underway. The Governor saw the plane was still floating and remarked, "Thank goodness, they'll have a chance to get into a raft." But there was no time. The plane floated for 3 or 4 minutes then disappeared into about 600 feet of water. The pilot, LTC Tom Norris, was a highly decorated World War Two flyer. He had often been picked to fly the Governor around the State. The Governor's other personal pilot, Colonel Dean Stringer, was not scheduled for the Valdez mission. Colonel William Elmore, back in Anchorage, stated the crew had called in and expressed fear that if they stayed overnight in Valdez, the plane would become covered with frost and would be unable to return to Anchorage with the Governor and his party. General Carroll, Lt. Colonel Tom Norris, Major James Rowe, co-pilot and Technical Sergeant Ken Ayers went down with the plane. Only a flight book, an Air Force parka, a briefcase, a wing tank, a packaged life raft and part of the plane's hydraulic system were recovered. The Governor returned on another C-123 the following day in clear and beautiful weather. As he flew over the Valdez Arm he could see the U.S. Coast Guard and Geodetic ship Survey anchored near the oil slick that marked the final resting place of four National Guardsmen. A nine-man Air Force investigating team came to the conclusion the pilot may have lost the horizon momentarily because of low visibility. The smooth glassy water plus the low ceiling added to a darkening sky and falling snow, all made for a situation of extremely poor visibility.

Early 1964 found the 144th participating in Polar Seige, the largest training exercise ever

conducted in Alaska. No one could have known that much greater test waited.

A little over a year-and-a-half later, tragedy struck again, as an Air Guard C-123 went down near Cape Romanzof on the Bering Sea Coast. Killed were LTC John Podraza, Maj Herb Bedrow, TSgts. Oscar Holland and Freddie Spradlin, and SSgt Lewis Harris.

Swollen by rainfall three times heavier than normal, the Chena river suddenly burst its banks in Aug 1967, flooding much of the Fairbanks area. One woman whose home was flooded reported that her family didn't even have time to put on their shoes as the waters rushed in. Within five hours of the first call for assistance, the first of many C-123 flights began carrying supplies into Fairbanks and evacuating area residents. The homeless were flown to Anchorage, where they were offered shelter, food and medical attention, either at Kulis or the Alaska National Guard's newly-named Camp Carroll on Fort Richardson. During a non-stop nine-day period, the 144th accumulated 223 flying hours using its C-123s and one C-54 to fly 138 sorties. At the end of that period, the unit had ferried 2,371 people and more than 300,000 pounds of supplies. Less than three years after being presented its first Outstanding Unit Award, the 144th would win its second.

A few red faces but no injuries in a February 1967 crash as one of our C-123s breaks through the ice runway on Lake Nuyakuk north of Dillingham. Later, the plane is retrieved. The squadron flew 138 sorties, 223 hours, ferrying 2371 people and 300,000 pounds of supplies during a frantic nine-day period in August in response to devastating Fairbanks floods. The base again houses evacuees during the emergency period. Later that year, Alaska Air Guardsmen ferry planes to the very hot war in Vietnam.

In 1968, the squadron resumed fish and game duties, this time Sifting 15 musk oxen from Nunivak to Nelson island for the state. Next its bison, from Delta to Farewell, That fall, the squadron received the second Outstanding Unit Award, this time for our Fairbanks Flood activities.

By this time, it was becoming obvious that the Alaska Air National Guard was outgrowing its single-squadron status. Laying the groundwork for future expansion, the organization was officially designated the 176th Tactical Airlift Group in 1969. The Group retained the 144th Tactical Airlift Squadron as its flying unit.

The 144th Tactical Airlift Squadron's mission was changed to worldwide airlift in 1976, and it was assigned to the Military Airlift Command as the gaining command in the event it was federalized for active duty. A mechanical upgrade was in order, and after 16 years of service the unit's C-123s were replaced with C-130Es, boasting increased speed, range and carrying capacity. The C-123s were returned to the Air Force, which was then to give them to the South Korean Air Force. Getting them to Korea posed an unforeseen problem: the planes were so old no one in the USAF had any experience flying them. The problem was solved when one pilot and one mechanic from the Group flew to Arizona - together with a load of out-of-print repair manuals and no-longer-manufactured parts - to teach their USAF counterparts how to fly and maintain the old birds.

With its new C-130s, the 176th Group began participating in the Total Force almost immediately, flying to Panama, Germany, Korea and elsewhere to support U.S. military and humanitarian missions. It also began taking on greater responsibilities in the annual Brim Frost joint force exercises, and took part in the "Red Flag" wargames program in Nevada.

1980 Operation VOLANT OAK MG Robert B. Tanguy, Commander of the U. S. Southern Air Division, presented an award to LTC Willard E Stockwell, Commander of the Alaska Air Guard's 144th Tactical Airlift Squadron for their support during Operation VOLANT OAK in Panama. Ninety three Alaskan Air Guardsmen spent four weeks providing airlift support for the mission, which included combined military training, search and rescue operations, and medical evacuation of injured and sick personnel. To meet these requirements the Alaska Guardsmen flew their own aircraft, aircrews, maintenance and support personnel to Panama. Leaving Alaska at 40° and arriving in Panama at 90° was quite a change in temperature, but the "Cool Crews" sweat it out, and according to General Tanguy.

The Alaska National Guard made many significant gains under the leadership of General Pagano. In July 1983 the squadron received factory-new C-130Hs. The first new plane was flown back to Alaska by the Group Commander, Colonel Paul Lindemuth. "They smell just like a new car," commented the veteran pilot who had flown nearly every type of airplane the Air Force possessed. With the new long-range aircraft came an increase of world-wide missions and more frequent VOLANT OAK missions in Panama. Aircraft with Alaska Guard markings would show up in Europe, Korea, Japan, the Philippines and lesser-known corners of the world in coming years.

BRIM FROST 83 had several objectives. It would be a joint/combined operation for air and ground forces to test the ground and air defenses of Alaska against both conventional and nonconventional forces. The Commander, Brigadier General Nathan Vail, U.S. Army, would use elements of the Alaska National Guard for his combined forces defense of Alaska. The Guardsmen of the 207th Infantry Group, the 5th Squadron, 297th Cavalry, the Eskimo Scouts, the 1898th Aviation Detachment with 14 UH-1 helicopters and the Alaska Air Guard's 144th Airlift Squadron would play a prominent role in the successful winter exercise. The area of operations would be Interior Alaska in the Tanana River/ Delta River area near Forts Wainwright and Greely. The 207th Group Commander, Colonel John V. Hoyt would direct the Guardsmen and some regular army units. The Eskimo Scouts of the Third Battalion, 297th Infantry were primarily subsistence hunters and fishermen. An Air Guard C-130 aircraft flew from village to village to collect the Scouts. From their staging area in Kotzebue, they deployed to the Blair Lakes area and began their mission of intelligence gathering and surveillance. They had not been in the field long before they discovered the enemy's headquarters and several of its units and relayed the valuable information to the U.S. Forces Headquarters.

In 1985, the National Guard began looking into the possibility of bringing a second flying unit to Alaska. Senator Ted Stevens had backed the idea of a refueling squadron of KC-135E to be positioned at Eielson Air Force Base near Fairbanks to supplement the Air Force Tanker Task Force. The 144th Tactical Airlift Squadron of the Alaska Air National Guard supported the Bering Bridge Crossing when the long trip came to the international border. At first, it was planned that the C-130 carrying the Governor of Alaska, the Adjutant General and other

dignitaries might land on the ice of the Bering Sea; but the expedition was delayed as the result of bad weather. As the continuing bad weather added days, then weeks to the rendezvous, concern grew about the thickness of the ice and the weight of the aircraft. By the time the event took place, it was decided to haul the passengers to Tin City, then to use Army Guard helicopters to shuttle the passengers on to Little Diomed Island.

In 1985, an explosion at the village oil storage tank in Gambell destroyed not only their heating oil, but their primary fuel for power generation. The 144th brought the remote village a state emergency response team, along with portable generators to restore power.

The next year, heavy rains in Cordova broke through a reinforced dike. The small town required a forty-foot section of large-diameter culvert pipe to divert the flood waters away from the town's hospital. Kulis quickly generated an aircraft and crew to supply the equipment, helping avert extensive property damage and evacuation of the hospital.

In the days after the March 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, the 144th flew many sorties delivering oil containment booms, supplies and emergency personnel to Valdez. Air Guard members remained in place in various support roles even after the actual airlift was handed over to civilian contractors. In particular, firefighters from the 176 CES provided crash response and fire protection for the Valdez airport, where traffic had increased from 14 or so flights per day to well over 400.

On a somewhat lighter note came the effort to save a handful of gray whales trapped in the ice near Point Barrow. Their plight captured the attention of the national media, and the 176th Group was asked to provide logistical support for the rescue attempt. The episode ended, the Airlift reported, with the whales "last seen headed south to vacation in the sun."

Two aircraft and aircrews from the 144th also flew numerous sorties in support of Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, airlifting cargo and personnel being staged for deployment in the Gulf. And, among other deployments, members of the 176 Clinic went to Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina to backfill for personnel assigned to the Mideast.

Volunteers began flying missions in support of Operation Desert Shield. Aug 1990

In Aug 2003, more than 150 personnel from the wing deployed to Ramstein Air Base, Germany in support of the 144th Airlift Squadron's contributions to Operation Joint Forge, where they provided airlift and logistical support involving military personnel and cargo in the European Theater. The Operation Joint Forge mission continues to help provide a NATO Stabilization Force in the Bosnia area.

As part of BRAC 2005, the 176th Wing is relocating from Kulis ANG Base to nearby Elmendorf. Both installations are in the Anchorage area. The Guard wing is bringing the C-130s of its 144th Airlift Squadron with it.

1 Jan 2006 the 144th Airlift Squadron is activated for one year in support of Operation Enduring Freedom

The Air Force activated the 537th Airlift Squadron at JB Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska. The active duty unit will partner with the Alaska Air National Guard's 144 AS to operate the Air Guard-owned C-130 there under an active association. Members of the 144 AS arrived at Elmendorf-Richardson for beddown just a few months ago, along with their eight C-130s, from nearby Kulis ANG Base under changes resulting from BRAC 2005. The 144th is expected to grow by another four aircraft in the coming months. LTC Thomas McGee, 537th AS commander, said the association "is a perfect example of Total Force integration, where active duty personnel and Guard personnel work together seamlessly." His unit traces its heritage to the 537th Tactical Airlift Squadron that flew C-7 out of Phu Cat AB, South Vietnam, before its inactivation in the early 1970s. 2011

Approximately 125 Alaska Guardsmen from the 176th Wing's 144th Airlift Squadron, 176th Maintenance Squadron and 176th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron were deployed to Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, for 90 days in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Operating C-130 tactical airlift airplanes, these men and women supported U.S. efforts throughout the region with intratheater airlift and airdrops of men, supplies and equipment. Working in austere environments, these Alaska Guardsmen helped save lives by delivering the necessary resources and equipment to our Soldiers on the ground. 2011



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Sources