

939 AIR REFUELING WING



MISSION

LINEAGE

939 Troop Carrier Group, Medium established and activated, 15 Jan 1963
Organized in the Reserve, 11 Feb 1963
Redesignated 939 Tactical Airlift Group, 1 Jul 1967
Redesignated 939 Military Airlift Group (Associate), 25 Jul 1968
Inactivated, 1 Jul 1973
Redesignated 939th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group, 8 Jan 1985
Activated in the Reserve, 1 Apr 1985
Redesignated 939th Air Rescue Wing, 1 Apr 1990
Redesignated 939th Rescue Wing, 1 Feb 1992
Redesignated 939th Air Refueling Wing, 1 Apr 2003
Inactivated on 30 June 2008

STATIONS

Portland Intl Aprt, OR, 11 Feb 1963
McChord AFB, WA, 25 Jul 1968-1 Jul 1973
Portland Intl Aprt (later, ANGB), OR, 1 Apr 1985

ASSIGNMENTS

349th Troop Carrier (later, 349th Military Airlift) Wing, 11 Feb 1963
452nd Military Airlift Wing, 26 Jan 1968
349th Military Airlift Wing, 15 Jun 1969-1 Jul 1973
403rd Rescue and Weather Reconnaissance Wing, 1 Apr 1985
Fourth Air Force, 1 Oct 1987
Tenth Air Force, 1 Oct 1993

WEAPON SYSTEMS

C-119, 1963-1968

C-141, 1968-1973

HH-1, 1985-1991

UH-1, 1985-1987

HC-130, 1985

HH-3, 1986-1992

CH-3, 1987-1992

MH-60, 1991-1992

UH-60, 1991-1993

HH-60, 1992

KC-135

COMMANDERS

Col Vernon E. Acker, 11 Feb 1963

Col Thomas G. Bowie, 25 Jul 1969

Col Ronald C. Dunn, 17 Jan 1972

Col Donald F. Beryl, 6 Apr 1972-1 Jul 1973

LTC Michael J. Peters, 1 Apr 1985

Col James E. Sehorn, 1 May 1986

LTC William E. Hewes, 16 Sep 1987

Col Terry G. Whitnell, 15 Nov 1987

LTC William E. Hewes, 23 Jan 1988

Col Neil H. Schultz, 10 Apr 1988

Col William E. Hewes, 1 Nov 1990

Col Anthony Tassone, Jr., 13 Jan 1991

Col Paul R. Davis, 1 Jun 1994

Col Gene E. Garton, 18 Jan 1998

Col Hanferd J. Moen, Jr., 15 Feb 1998

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards

23 Dec 1964-22 Jan 1965

1 Jul 1969-30 Jun 1970

1 Apr 1985-30 Jun 1986

1 Sep 1993-31 Aug 1995
1 Sep 1997-31 Aug 1999
1 Sep 1999-31 Aug 2001

Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm
25 Jul 1968-28 Jan 1973

EMBLEM



Approved, 5 Mar 1969

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Transported personnel and equipment in support of Air Force operations, including missions to Vietnam and numerous humanitarian missions primarily in the western United States, 1963-1973. From 1985, controlled rescue squadrons at widely separated locations: the collocated 304th Rescue Squadron; the 301st in Florida; and the 305th in Michigan until 1 Sep 1992 and in Arizona from 1 Oct 1993. Provided considerable assistance to Florida and the 301st Rescue Squadron following the devastation of Hurricane Andrew in Aug 1992. Deployed aircrews from each of the squadrons to provide search and rescue coverage worldwide, including to Keflavik, Iceland, during and after the Southwest Asia War and to provide combat SAR coverage in the Persian Gulf area, 1993.

In February and March 1973, the North Vietnamese released American aviators who had been shot down and taken prisoner during the war. In Operation homecoming, as the repatriation effort was called, the freed prisoners were airlifted to Clark AB in the Philippines before being returned to the United States for thorough medical examinations. The Air Force Reserve

contribution to HOMECOMING included aircrews, doctors, nurses, medical technicians, general casualty assistance, and intelligence personnel. Air Force Reserve C-141 associate crew member participated in five Operation homecoming flights.

Also, one loadmaster and eighteen medical technicians of the 938th Military Airlift Group (Associate) at Travis AFB participated in twelve airlift missions with active duty crews, and thirty aeromedical personnel from the 939th Military Airlift Group (Associate) at McChord AFB, Washington, served on various homecoming legs with both reserve and active crews. Other aeromedical evacuation crew members, nurses and technicians, from the 68th (Norton), 40th (McChord), and 55th (Travis) Aeromedical Evacuation Squadrons as well as the 73d Aeromedical Airlift Squadron (Associate) at Scott AFB individually volunteered as crews on the homecoming flights. Twenty reserve physicians also voluntarily participated in the Prisoner of War/Missing in Action, Next of Kin Program developed by the Air Force Surgeon General to counsel families of the missing and imprisoned men.

7/14/2006 The first KC-135 from the 939th Air Refueling Wing departs Portland International Airport today, marking the beginning of a change in mission for the Air Force Reserve unit. Under the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure process, all eight of the refueling aircraft and 900 authorized positions will leave Oregon to realign the 939th ARW's mission. Members and equipment assigned to the operations and maintenance units will leave by Sept. 30, 2007. The executive staff and mission support group will remain until Sept. 30, 2010. Officials expect 75 full-time and 400 traditional reservist authorizations by October 2010 to support the Reserve's growing space program. The tentative plan is for the 939th ARW's new mission to be located at Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif. The Air Force Reserve will maintain a presence in Portland after the flying mission is gone. Along with the 939th ARW executive staff and mission support group, Portland International Airport remains home to the 304th Rescue Squadron. The 304th RQS, an organization of approximately 100 members, performs both civil and combat rescue operations by air, land and sea. During the ceremony, the 939th Operations Group, 939th Maintenance Group and the 83rd Aerial Port Squadron's flag were inactivated. In August 2006, the 939th ARW's final four KC-135 left Portland International Airport for their new home at March Air Reserve Base, Calif. The wing's four other KC-135s left Portland in July and settled in at Tinker AFB, Okla.

A second reduction in force at Portland International Airport, Ore., will accelerate the closure of the Air Force Reserve's 939th Air Refueling Wing. The RIF, which moves up the scheduled closure of the wing from September 2010 to June 2008, allows about 244 traditional Reservists, 47 air reserve technicians and 48 civilian employees to evaluate incentive benefits and use job placement support now. ARTs are civilian civil service employees who also serve in the Air Force Reserve as Reservists. "Our goal is to speed up this transition so we can take better care of our people," said Maj. Gen. Allan R. Poulin, AFRC vice commander, Robins Air Force Base, Ga. "We're working to help all our Reservists and civilians transition to new jobs as our Air Force is going through many significant changes in the next few years. The 939th Air Refueling Wing has an outstanding performance record but is being realigned so the Air Force can consolidate to be more efficient and effective." In 2006, the 939th relocated all eight of its KC-135 refueling

aircraft, sending four to March Air Reserve Base, Calif., and the other four to Tinker AFB, Okla. The move was directed by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission in November 2005. The Reserve will continue to operate the 304th Rescue Squadron at the Portland airport. The reduction of Reserve people at Portland is expected to be offset by growth in the Oregon Air National Guard mission. "Air Force Reservists and civilians assigned to the unit will be eligible for fulltime personnel benefits under civil service placement programs," said Steve Mann, AFRC director of manpower and personnel, Robins AFB. "2007

For the last 50 years, the Air Force has maintained a rescue presence in Portland, Ore. That streak was in serious jeopardy for members of the 304th Rescue Squadron during the most recent Base Realignment and Closure actions. The BRAC commission targeted the squadron's host unit, the 939th Air Refueling Wing, for closure. The 304th managed to survive. Over the next year or so, the Reserve's presence at Portland will dwindle from nearly 1,100 Airmen to about 100, all members of the rescue squadron. It appears that the 304th is destined to remain in Portland. The BRAC closure marked the second time in three years that the rescue Airmen had managed to survive a drastic change. In 2003, the 939th, then a rescue wing, converted to KC-135 tanker aircraft and became an air refueling wing. Though the wing changed missions, the 304th RQS remained in place, becoming a part of the 920th Rescue Wing at Patrick Air Force Base, Fla. "It's very much like a family, especially since rescue folks have been here since 1957," said Chief Master Sgt. Richard Konopka, 304th RQS chief enlisted manager. "So, the closure is very hard on everyone. All the people in finance, the military personnel flight and the clinic are the same friends we've always had, so it's very difficult losing them." Even positive events for the 304th RQS, like moving into a new building, come with negative consequences. "Coming here to our new building (a facility previously used for maintenance) was difficult. It's like we're vultures," said Master Sgt. Patrick Tillmann, NCO in charge of aircrew life support. "I told my guys to be very polite. They've been very supportive of us. "These people are our friends. They're going away, moving their families, and we're staying. We still have a mission and are busy while they're here without aircraft." Although the 939th ARW is going away, some members were able to secure positions within the 304th. "We've been able to pick up a few people from the support side of the house, and that's a good thing," Chief Konopka said. "It was like rescuing our own family from what was going on across the street." While the BRAC commission decided Portland could do without a refueling mission, the rescue mission was deemed more essential. The decision to keep this mission in Portland was based, in large part, on the unit's level of experienced pararescuemen, also known as PJs. The unit has approximately 50 pararescuemen, 11 combat rescue officers and 48 support people. "For the Air Force (as a whole) we provide the largest pool of seven-level trained PJs — period," Chief Konopka said. "This is a very good recruiting area for the type of people who are motivated to be in rescue. Currently, we have the highest percentage of new recruits in pararescue in Air Force Reserve Command." By the time a PJ gets through all the training to attain his three-level, Chief Konopka said, it takes an average of 30 months. In addition to being highly trained members of the 304th RQS have a lot of very important deployment experience, having spent time in Kosovo, the Horn of Africa, Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition, they deployed in support of relief efforts after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. "We have a tremendous amount of wartime,

deployment, and civilian search and rescue experience,” said Capt. Chris Bernard, 304th RQS combat rescue officer. In addition to a valuable pool of trained resources and a good recruiting base, another advantage of maintaining a rescue presence in Portland is the availability of various training environments within a few hours of the base. “The area here is conducive to training,” Captain Bernard said. “All major environments are represented here in Oregon. Within two hours you can be at the ocean, major rivers, forests, mountains, glaciers or the desert. You have any environment you want in which to train.” With the upcoming departure of the 939th ARW, finding a way to continue supporting the 304th is a priority. “As the 939th goes away, our concern is that the Reservists who stay get the adequate support they need,” said Lt. Col. Paul Dechirico, performance manager with the 920th RQW at Patrick AFB. “The good news is that we have some breathing room because the 939th is not leaving right away.” Colonel Dechirico was part of a site activation task force that studied the future manpower needs required for the 304th RQS. He said AFRC is working closely with the host Air National Guard unit at Portland to provide many of the support requirements. “As things begin to go away, such as support functions, it just gets a little bit more difficult, but it’s not insurmountable by any stretch of the imagination. It’s just the new reality,” Chief Konopka said. “We have good relationships with other assets, both locally and regionally.” “We have no problem getting Air Force Reserve or Guard aircraft in here,” Captain Bernard said. “They like to come up and train here. We also train with the Army and Coast Guard. By doing so, they get to sign off on some of their training. This (the BRAC closure) has actually forced us to become more focused on joint operations. “One of the advantages working with our sister agencies is taking some of the good things they have to offer and implementing them to what we do,” the captain said. “I know working with the Coast Guard, those guys are the experts at water rescue. So we’ve definitely learned some good things from them and adapted them to our training.” While current members of the squadron are going to have to adapt to being the Reserve’s lone presence at Portland, this situation is really nothing new in the big scheme of things. “We were a geographically separated unit from 1957 until 1985,” Chief Konopka said. “So, in a sense, we are going back to our roots.” 2007

Commander Inactivates Three Portland Units More than 500 people attended a formal ceremony in Portland, Ore., May 6 during which three of the 939th Air Refueling Wing’s subordinate units were inactivated. The 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission mandated the drawdown. During the ceremony, wing Reservists, distinguished guests from Oregon and Washington, veterans, and family members witnessed the encasing of the 939th Operations Group, 939th Maintenance Group and 83rd Aerial Port Squadron’s flags and guidons. The act symbolized the closure of the units and the end of 45 years of service in the Pacific Northwest. “It’s a tough thing to do — to close a wing — and we’re doing it in several places,” said Lt. Gen. John Bradley, commander of Air Force Reserve Command and the presiding officer for the ceremony. “We’ve been here as the 939th for more than 45 years and had Reservists operating out of Portland for 50 years. It’s a very hard thing for us to have to move out.” The general explained the cost savings realized through base realignment and closure actions does stand to benefit the service in the long term. However, the downside, he said, comes in the form of Reservists being moved out of a number of communities across

America, thus diminishing the ties Citizen Airmen have with those they serve and protect. "You've got a great history here that spans many years and many kinds of air—"It's a hard thing to let go. This is a unit of dedicated professional and highly trained Airmen. You've flown thousands of sorties and offloaded millions of gallons of jet fuel to refuel airplanes that are defending America and helping those forces in combat." General Bradley issued a personal thanks to the 939th members for "every single day spent away from jobs and families." He concluded his remarks by saying, "I understand the pain of leaving a great unit. ... leaving a great community. We've done it in a lot of places recently, and I can't think of anything I like doing less. I want you to know your leadership appreciates you and what you do. My prayers are with you." In a final show of recognition, General Bradley presented the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award streamer to Col. William N. Flanigan, commander of the 939th ARW, who, in turn, placed it on the wing's flag. "This ceremony marks the closure of a chapter in the long and storied history of the Reserve here at Portland," Colonel Flanigan said. The Air Force Reserve assigned the mission of global air refueling to the 939th in April 2003. At the same time, it designated the 304th Rescue Squadron (also at Portland) a geographically separated unit responsible for combat search and rescue. The 304th RQS is scheduled to continue operating after the closure of the wing. The remaining units of the 939th will close in June 2008. 2007

In August 2006, the 939th ARW's final four KC-135 aircraft left Portland International Airport for their new home at March Air Reserve Base, Calif. The wing's four other KC-135s left Portland in July and settled in at Tinker AFB, Okla. "The departure of these aircraft signifies a major milestone in the transformation of our wing," said Col. William N Flanigan, 939th commander. "Since becoming an air refueling wing three years ago, members of the 939th have been steadfast in the face of tremendous adversity." Before the 939th received KC-135s and converted to an air refueling wing, it performed a search and rescue mission. Although there won't be any aircraft left, the Reserve will maintain a presence in Portland once the 939th is deactivated as the 304th Rescue Squadron will continue to employ approximately 100 people at the Portland International Airport. The 304th RS performs both civil and combat rescue operations by air, land and sea. Meanwhile, the 440th AW sent 13 people to Pope AFB, N.C., in August to begin setting up operations in preparation for the rest of the wing moving. The BRAC recommendations call for Pope AFB to convert to Pope Army Airfield. The main body of the wing, which includes about 200 fulltime flying operations and aircraft maintenance specialists, is scheduled to be at Pope by May 1, 2007, with the command element making the transition between May and July 2007. All eight of the unit's C-130 Hercules aircraft will move to Pope in August 2007. General Mitchell is scheduled to close by February 2008. At Luke AFB, the first of the 944th FW's 17 F-16s left for Hill AFB, Utah, in mid-August, where it will undergo Falcon Star, a life-extending set of upgrades. After the program is completed, the aircraft will make its new home at Nellis AFB, Nev. The wing's remaining 16 aircraft will begin leaving Luke in March 2007 bound for various locations including the Tucson Air National Guard headquarters; Edwards AFB, Calif.; and the California ANG in Fresno. Luke's historic 302nd Fighter Squadron, which traces its lineage back to the Tuskegee Airmen, will find a new home at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska.

The 302nd will join two active-duty squadrons as a Reserve associate unit flying the Air Force's next-generation fighter aircraft, the F-22 Raptor. "It's a little sad taking the first jet off the ramp," said Maj. Scott Crogg, 302nd FS pilot. "Since the 1950s, the Air Force has been right-sizing. We do what we can and look to the future." 2006

In February and March 1973, the North Vietnamese released American aviators who had been shot down and taken prisoner during the war. In Operation Homecoming, as the repatriation effort was called, the freed prisoners were airlifted to Clark AB in the Philippines before being returned to the United States for thorough medical examinations. The Air Force Reserve contribution to HOMECOMING included aircrews, doctors, nurses, medical technicians, general casualty assistance, and intelligence personnel.⁵³ Air Force Reserve C-141 associate crew member participated in five Operation Homecoming flights. Also, one loadmaster and eighteen medical technicians of the 938th Military Airlift Group (Associate) at Travis AFB participated in twelve airlift missions with active duty crews, and thirty aeromedical personnel from the 939th Military Airlift Group (Associate) at McChord AFB, Washington, served on various Homecoming legs with both Reserve and active crews. Other aeromedical evacuation crew members, nurses and technicians, from the 68th (Norton), 40th (McChord), and 55th (Travis) Aeromedical Evacuation Squadrons as well as the 73d Aeromedical Airlift Squadron (Associate) at Scott AFB individually volunteered as crews on the Homecoming flights. Twenty Reserve physicians also voluntarily participated in the Prisoner of War/Missing in Action, Next of Kin Program developed by the Air Force Surgeon General to counsel families of the missing and imprisoned men.

Air Force Lineage and Honors

Created: 29 Jul 2020

Updated:

Sources

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