65th AEROMEDICAL EVACUATION SQUADRON

MISSION

LINEAGE
65th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron

STATIONS
Hamilton AFB, CA
Travis AFB, CA, 1 Nov 1970

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS
Service Streamers
Campaign Streamers
Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers
Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO
NICKNAME

OPERATIONS
Since 1970, the Reserve forces at Travis have also included an important aeromedical evacuation component, namely, the 65th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron of the 349th Military Airlift Wing. This squadron was composed of medical technicians and nurses who cared for the patients airlifted on MAC aeromedical flights. It was originally activated at Hamilton on 1 June 1967. While there, its members flew aboard the C-124s of the 349th, especially during the grim days of 1968, when so many medical evacuation flights brought wounded Americans back from Vietnam. On 1 November 1970, this squadron was reorganized at Travis with elements of the 31st Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron to form the 65th.

Squadron members flew an average of about 50 "live" evacuation missions per year. Many missions that were originally planned for training were diverted while in the Pacific and became real-life, medical evacuation flights.

Lengthy negotiations in Paris between the United States and North Vietnam, spurred by massive B-52 raids over Hanoi in December 1972, eventually resulted in a cease-fire agreement that was signed on 27 January 1973. Among the key provisions of this agreement were the phased withdrawal of all American forces from that region and the speedy return of American prisoners of war from North Vietnam.

MAC designated the 22nd Air Force as the controlling air force for the return of the prisoners. Within a few days of the peace accord, Major General John F. Gonge, the Commander of the 22nd Air Force, and his staff made detailed plans for a massive aeromedical airlift from Hanoi to the continental United States via Clark Air Base in the Philippines. A special control center for Operation HOMECOMING was activated in the Command Post of the Headquarters of the 22nd Air Force at Travis. Manned 24 hours a day during the entire operation, it maintained direct contact with all incoming flights. The first three C-141s in Operation HOMECOMING touched down at Gia Lam Airport in Hanoi on 12 February 1973. Within two hours, they departed North Vietnam with the first 116 prisoners of war. After stopping at Clark in order to give the prisoners a quick medical checkup and a short rest, the C-141s proceeded across the Pacific toward home. A crew from the 7th Military Airlift Squadron of the 60th Military Airlift Wing brought the first twenty returnees to Travis. At 4:30 PM on Wednesday 14 February, Valentine's Day, 1973, they landed at the base. As the first man, Navy Captain Jeremiah H. Denton, strode down the ramp, he was greeted by a spontaneous round of cheers and applause from a crowd of more than 400 family members, friends, and off-duty base personnel.

In 1975 squadron members again distinguished themselves during Operation Babylift. This involved the aeromedical airlift and evacuation of children from South Vietnam, through the Philippine Islands and Guam to Travis Air Force Base. Forty of their flight nurses and 61 medical technicians flew as medical crew members. When the first C-5A baby lift flight from Saigon crashed on takeoff on 4 Apr 1975, SSgt. James A. Hadley, one of the 65th's medical technicians,
although injured himself, stayed with the wreckage and administered oxygen to the surviving orphans.

During Operation Desert Shield, aeromedical evacuation crews were among the first reservists to be recalled to active duty. Personnel from the 65th AES were involved in early Persian Gulf operations on a volunteer basis and were instrumental in establishing and operating patient airlift centers in Saudi Arabia, Germany, and the United Kingdom. During Operation Desert Storm, the unit activated and deployed 211 personnel, comprising 35 aeromedical evacuation crews, and air-evac operations components based between Saudi Arabia, Ramstein Air Base, Germany, and RAF Waddington, United Kingdom. In addition, the squadron established and managed the Aeromedical Evacuation Control Element at RAF Mildenhall, United Kingdom.

In the early 1990s, the squadron had crews staged in Cairo, Egypt, flying both scheduled and urgent patient airlift missions in support of US and United Nations troops in Somalia.

Sources