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DATE: 15 Apr 2009

HISTORY OF THE 437 MILITARY AIRLIFT WING

Charleston Air Force Base, South Carolina

History.


1 January - 31 March 1978

RCS:HAF CHO (AR)7101

AFSHRC MAXWELL AFB AL 36112	V. 1	RETURN TO	2 JAN 1991
	K318.7-437 78/d1/dL-78/d3/31		

By
Kathryn M. Manning
Historian

APPROVED:


GEORGE B. POWERS, JR., Brigadier General, USAF
Commander

30 June 1978

TWENTY-FIRST AIR FORCE
MILITARY AIRLIFT COMMAND
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

1027065
1027084
(for Aug 2502)

Missions of Particular Importance

Morning Light¹⁷

Retrieval of COSMOS 954 Fragments

On January 22, 1978, the wing was directed to go to Washington, D. C., and there to pick up a computer to airlift to Canada. This mission was in response to a very "touchy" incident during which a Russian nuclear-powered Cosmos 954, survived re-entry, and was dispersed over a wide area of the frozen Tundra of the far north. The closest estimate of the site was in the area of Great Slave Lake. Both Canadian and U. S. scientists were joined with military experts to locate the debris to insure safety from radioactivity, and to determine, if possible, the exact power of the device. Governmental concern was with the hazards of runaway space vehicles.

The Charleston based C-141 traveled to Washington, loaded the equipment and then proceeded to Edmonton, in Canada. There the equipment was set up, and the grid pattern of search was instituted. During the search, the possibility of additional support computer became evident, and the C-141 was dispatched back to Andrews to airlift another computer to the search site.

The versatility of C-141 crews became evident at that time. Crewmembers, operating in -40^o temperatures wore cold weather gear. Not knowing the duration of their stay in the frigid climate, they had washed their under clothing when the call came to return to Andrews AFB. What to do with the wet "long johns"? The problem was quickly solved. A clothes line was strung from side to side in the cargo compartment of the plane, the underwear draped over the line and quickly dried on the trip to the District of Columbia. (See photograph)

After the return to Canada, the crew and aircraft stood by awaiting further developments. The satellite debris was located in the Thelon Game Sanctuary by two young American scientists who happened to be on a research dog-sled run through the sanctuary. They immediately notified the search teams, and work was begun to remove the parts that were within reach. It was not determined if parts were at greater depth in the ice--or if other pieces were in the area. By the closing of this history, no further action had been reported by any news service available within the Charleston area.

1Lt Thomas Carter, Co-pilot was interviewed on January 28th. The interview follows:

17. News clip, Time, February 13, 1978, "Hot Spots in the Land of Sticks", p. 23. Supporting Document #13, Volume 2.

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Morning Light Interview

1st Lt Thomas Carter, 20th MAS, January 28, 1978.

"Departed Charleston AFB, Sunday, January 22, 1978, with crew consisting of Major Charles Carter, Pilot, and Lt Col Larry Donoho, Navigator. Routing was Charleston AFB to Andrews AFB, and then as directed by the Department of Energy. The mission was assigned a 1-4A Presidential Priority.

In addition to the one C-141, S/N 4-0630 from Charleston, two aircraft from Norton AFB were utilized. These two staged out of Nellis AFB. The Charleston based airplane carried radio active detection equipment, a helicopter, 12 scientists, and General Gates (retired) and now Chief of the Department of Energy. These were airlifted from Andrews AFB to Namao Air Base, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, on Tuesday, 24 January. After landing, the crew was on alert for any further action. The Canadian's used C-130s and their own teams to conduct the search pattern to the north of Edmonton.

On Saturday, 28 January, the 437th men and plane returned to Andrews for additional computer equipment and a special van which contained radio active detection equipment. This was airlifted back to Namao.

The computer equipment delivered by the 437th, was used to make the final determination of the radio active danger of the debris from the Cosmos 954.

The Charleston based crew took off without winter gear, having no idea that the mission would end in an area of 0°F. The runways were icy, but were kept reasonably clear. The weather was clear during the time of this mission. The men were loaned cold weather gear by the Canadians."

Lebanon/Israel Require Peacekeeping by UN¹⁸

In March, 1978 the tension between opposing factions in Lebanon reached a breaking point, foray's were made into each of the countries shells were exchanged, and again the United Nations had to step into the situation.

The UN Peacekeeping forces, headed by Major General Emanuel Erskine of the Republic of Ghana, involved six nations. These were: France, Iran, Sweden, Norway, Nepal and Senegal. The French Air Force airlifted French troops. Iran and Sweden transferred 200 troops each from the Golan Heights area.

MAC operated SAAM 6000 series for the missions the command was responsible for. This began, for the 437th on March 26, 1978.

18. Files of 437th Current Operations, January-March 1978.

(U) Connection to the FORSCOM WES provided Headquarters MAC with the capability to secure responsive communication with its airlift control elements operating at Army WES locations, receive the FORSCOM computerized movement planning and status system (COMPASS) data base to determine actual requirements, rapidly transfer its flow plans to any of the 16 Army WES locations, and exchange information during development of plans. Previously, the primary communication link between Headquarters MAC and FORSCOM had been secure telephonic contact, backed up by hard copy message, a system which was comparatively slow and thus delayed planning.⁵⁰

(U) Also, following Snow Blow operations, Headquarters MAC Operations and Air Transportation experts prepared possible contingency SAAM's for disaster relief-type operations in an effort to significantly reduce the initial reaction time required to deploy the relief force. As Army executive agent, the FORSCOM Emergency Operations Center would activate the programmed SAAM's, which would provide for an advanced party load as well as the main body.⁵¹

Operation Morning Light

(U) At the request of the Department of Energy (DOE), MAC aircraft flew four C-141 missions in late January to Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, in support of efforts to locate possible radioactive remains of the Russian satellite, Cosmos 954, which had reentered the earth's atmosphere and disintegrated over the Canadian wilderness 24 January 1978. The 437th Military Airlift Wing, Charleston AFB, South Carolina, operated two missions from Andrews AFB, Maryland, while the 63d Military Airlift Wing flew two missions from McCarran International Airport, Nevada. The missions carried a total of 55 DOE personnel and 40 tons of equipment.⁵²

Sudan Flood Relief

(U) As part of international relief efforts to flood-ravaged Sudan, a 438th Military Airlift Wing C-141, diverted from another mission in Europe at the request of the U.S. Department of State, airlifted four sets of R-14 forward area aircraft refueling equipment and six U.S. Army operating technicians from Rhein-Main AB, Germany, to Khartoum, Sudan, on 2 August. The refueling systems consisted of 16 850-pound collapsible fuel bladders and support equipment.⁵³

50. See note above.

51. Ltr (U), MAC DCS/Air Trnsp to MAC/HO, subj: Review of CY 1978 MAC History, Chapter III, 15 Jun 79.

52. MAC News Digest (U), MAC Ofc of Info, subj: MAC Aids Search for Crashed Satellite, Vol II, No 3, Mar 78, pp 1-2; and hist rpt (U), MAC DCS/Ops, Dir of Alft Ops, 6 Apr 78.

53. Msg (U), CJCS to CINCMAC, et al, subj: Disaster Relief Assistance for Sudan, 312246Z Jul 78; msg (U), USCINCEUR to MAC DCS/Ops, et al, same subj, 011030Z Aug 78; msg (U), USCINCEUR to JCS/J3/J4, subj: Sudan Disaster Relief Sitrep, 021135Z Aug 78, all in Sup Doc II-31; msg (U), USDAO Khartoum to 21AF DCS/Ops, et al, subj: Disaster Relief For Sudan, 020907Z Aug 78; News Release, MAC Ofc of Info, subj: MAC Flies Flood Relief Supplies to Sudan, 8 Aug 78; and hist rpt (U), MAC DCS/Ops, Dir of Alft Ops, 10 Oct 78.