

## 137 AEROMEDICAL EVACUATION SQUADRON



### MISSION

The mission of the 137 Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron (AES) is to airlift wartime casualties under medical supervision, from the forward airfields in the combat zone to points of definitive care within the theater of operations, and from one theater of operations to another, or to the United States. The 137 AES will expeditiously transport peacetime casualties under various contingencies to appropriate facilities.

### LINEAGE

137 Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron received federal Recognition, 1 Sep 1961

Inactivated 17 Aug 1973

137 Aeromedical Evacuation Flight activated, 1 Dec 1986

Redesignated 137 Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, 1 Oct 1991

### STATIONS

Will Rogers ANGB, Oklahoma City, OK

### ASSIGNMENTS

137 Operations Group

### COMMANDERS

Maj Bert Walkup

Cpt Henry H. Fullbright, Jr

LTC Janet I. Bailey

LTC James Mays

LTC Larita A. Aragon Mar 1996

LTC Susan Haight

## HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

## EMBLEM



Original 137<sup>th</sup> AES insignia. LTC Bert Walkup, Commanding Officer of the 137<sup>th</sup> AES, 9 Jan 1962, created it as the result of a request. For reasons unknown, it took until 4 Feb 1963 before LTC Doyle Hastie, Deputy Commander, OKANG endorsed it. Three days later, MG Roy W. Kenny, who was the AG at the time, added his endorsement and forwarded the design to NGB. On 22 Aug 1963, the USAF Personnel Center, Randolph AFB approved it. Because of a misspelled word in the description (the word 'litter' was typed 'letter') it was kicked back to us on 3 Sep 1963. The Chief, Office of Public Affairs, wanted to know if we wanted a litter or a letter depicted on the patch. We requested a litter and on 2 Oct 1963, we received the patches. When the unit was disbanded in Aug 1973, the insignia was discontinued (obviously). When the 'new' 137<sup>th</sup> Aeromed was created, the powers-to-be declined to reinstitute the original patch so a new one was designed and this version is now a collector's item.



When the unit was activated again in Dec 1986, the decision was made to forgo the old original 137<sup>th</sup> patch and design a new one. The word was put out that if someone had any ideas they should submit them preferably as a sketch or a complete drawing for consideration. The highly imaginative design submitted by Maj Alan Gagnon, was the winner. Alan is a full time Technician in our Civil Engineering Squadron and is an accomplished artist. Central to the insignia is the YIN and YANG (from the Mandarin Chinese dualistic philosophy of Yin the female cosmic element that is opposite but always complementary to Yang, the masculine cosmic principle). It also serves to denote the bonding of life. It also represents the union of East and West; North and South, illustrating the units world-wide operational capabilities. The new patch was approved on 14 Feb 1989.

#### **MOTTO**

#### **NICKNAME**

#### **OPERATIONS**

So that the cargo aircraft of Tulsa's 138th and Oklahoma City's 137th groups could be used to their maximum capabilities in wartime, aero-medical evacuation flights were assigned to both. These specially planned flights carried teams of flight nurses and aeromedical technicians, which gave the aircraft the ability to transport wounded. In case of an all-out war, the C-97s and the C-124s could carry cargo into a combat zone and on their return flights airlift either retrograde cargo or evacuate wounded troops.

We have all heard the saying "the operation was a success, but the patient died". Well, this pretty well describes the fate of the 137th AES. Just when the unit was at the peak of its moral and had a strength of 108 personnel, mostly flight crews with a few administrative types, the axe fell. It came in the form of an Oklahoma Military Department General Order (G.O. 108) dated 17 Aug 1973. It came right to the point in paragraph #1 where it stated, in part: "Under the provisions of ANGR 20-27 and the authority contained in letter, NGB/PRM, Subject:

Inactivation of AES Units, dated 2 August 1973, the 137th AES Oklahoma City, OK, is inactivated 30 Sep 1973..." Paragraph #2 noted that "Officer personnel will be reassigned by this department. Airmen personnel will be reassigned in accordance with current directives. Excess personnel may be retained."

It has been said that the deactivation of the AeroMed Squadron occurred because we would soon be swapping our C-124's for C-130's and there was, at that time, no evacuation role for guard C-130 units. This doesn't seem to be borne out by the time frame and the fact that no one here knew that more than one year would pass before they would discover that the C-124 would no longer be flyable. In any event there was a determined effort on the part of some people here to get the order reversed and one of the principal players was AeroMed nurse Alma Pauli. On 18 Mar 1975 she wrote to Miss Margaret F. Heyse, Dean, College of Nursing, University of North Dakota at Grand Forks and a member of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS). Cpt Pauli thanked her on behalf of all the flight nurses in the 137th for the interest she showed them. Alma reiterated the record of the 137th Evac in Vietnam and, along with other accomplishments, mentioned that the units deactivation was based in part on the fact that the Oklahoma Air Guard had been flying an obsolete aircraft "unsuitable for medical evacuation". She went on to add that the flight nurses had been carried on the unit temporarily because the Air Force was studying the possibility of adding air evac units in the future. But now, a decision had been made to the contrary and the nurses would be discharged on June 30th, 1975. The letter went on to say that in the meantime we had been reequipped with the C-130; an aircraft well suited to the air evac role and were in fact being used just that way. She pointed out that the Air Force was starting out new air evac units in the Air Force Reserve using C-130's while they were getting rid of their highly trained and highly motivated Oklahoma nurses. She referred to a new unit being formed in Ohio and a second one in Missouri that was being doubled in size. She also pointed out that another Air Force Reserve unit in New Jersey was flying into Oklahoma City from New Jersey, picking up Flight Nurses and taking them to New Jersey and then returning them to Oklahoma on the same weekend to attend drills there.

United States Senator Dewey F. Bartlett was also trying to get air evac reestablished in the Oklahoma Air National Guard. He went straight to Paul K. Carlton, Commanding General Military Airlift Command. His answer came in exactly one week after Captain Pauli wrote her letter. On 25 Mar 1975 Gen Carlton wrote, among other things, that during the years 1971-73, programming decisions at HQ US AF caused the inactivation of 18 ANG and AFRES air evac units. One of these was the 137th and that action affected 28 officers and 50 enlisted at Will Rogers. It was stated that all but 11 of the flight nurses had been placed in other positions and retained. He continues that on 1 Dec 1974, MAC became the single manager for all DOD airlift services and in that expanding role, MAC became gaining command for nine additional ANG and 14 AFRES AeroMedical evacuation units. One of those was the 36th Aeromedical Evacuation Flight located at Richards-Gebaur. They were not a new unit but one that MAC received from Tactical Air Command and that there were no plans for additional AeroMedEvac units to be formed there. The last shot in the battle was fired a month later on 21 Apr 1975 by Senator Bartlett. He agreed in principle with what the General had written but

pointed out that of the additional spaces created in the AeroMedical Airlift field in recent months all had been assigned to the Air Force Reserve while those of the Air National Guard had been eliminated. He pointed out that while the Command Surgeons office undoubtedly had valid reason to do this it was hard to explain to an Okie why Oklahoma personnel are assigned to a unit in New Jersey when a unit could be available in Oklahoma City. The 3000 and some mile round trip aside, Senator Bartlett writes "If the citizens of New Jersey are unwilling to support you by serving in their local unit, perhaps it should be reassigned to an area which has demonstrated a willingness to serve the nation." It was a strong letter but a futile one. The decision had been made and for better or for worse Oklahoma was out of the AeroMedical Evacuation business for several years.

On 1 Dec, 1986 the 137th AEF was formed. One hundred twenty-one slots were authorized. SMS Fred Schmitt, the new units senior air technician said that 10 officer and 22 enlisted positions were filled within 60 days. Its commander was LTC Janet I. Bailey. Chief Nurse was LTC Joann Still, both previous members of the deactivated 137th AES. Full time technicians were SRA Theresa P. Benedetti and MSG Fred Schmitt. Maj James H. Mays took over command in 1988. Maj Patricia Hefton (Reed) was Chief Flight Nurse.

The 137th AES also supported the drug interdiction as well as other activities. One of the most significant actions was the unit's key role in planning and executing an aeromedical evacuation tasking for Steel Cure II in Oct 1992. This was a National Disaster Management System (NDMS) exercise simulating an earthquake near Cape Girardeau, MO that received national attention due to the scope of operation. Over 300 AES personnel, including members from three other ANG units, were involved in Steel Cure II. The 137th AES Commander, LTC James Mays, functioned both as the Vice Commander of the exercise as well as the director of Aeromedical Evacuation Operations. Steel Cure II was important in that it integrated both military and civilian components in response to a national disaster which resulted in the successful aeromedical evacuation of over 300 casualties, the largest number of personnel moved within the shortest time period to any exercise ever accomplished.

At the same time the 137th AES was tasked during Operation Restore Hope with supporting the 1610<sup>th</sup> Mobile Aeromedical Staging Facility (MASF) in Somalia.

The AES also responded to the care of Aermicqan, Pakistani, Moroccan, Swedish, and Norwegian soldiers.

Multiple flood relief missions were accomplished by the 137th AW in the Midwestern states including the devastation of the 139th Airlift Group facilities, in St. Joseph, MO.

Twenty-three AES personnel became an integral part of Operation Patriot Medstar, an exercise held at Niagara Falls, NY, Schenectady, NY and Westover ARB, MA. This nine day tour provided excellent training for the people. For many this was their first aeromedical exercise. They received training as members of liaison teams and the Mobile Aeromedical Staging Facility (MASF) and then the KC-135.

In late Jul and early Aug 1995, other members of the AES trained in Operation Arch Angel which was held in St. Louis, Missouri. These personnel set up and operated a MASF during a mock natural disaster in the Saint Louis Area. Patients were brought into the MASF, categorized, treated and prepared for aeromedical evacuation to facilities capable of handling the overflow from the St. Louis area. The AES personnel transported patients by C-130 and C-26 to hospitals in Missouri, Illinois, and Tennessee.

During 20-22 Mar, 1995, personnel from the 137th AES flew a real world Aeromedical evacuation mission from Oklahoma City to Kelly AFB, Texas where patients were picked up for return to Howard Air base, Canal Zone. On the return flight from Howard patients were flown to Kelly AFB.

Mar 1994 Col Reed retired and was greatly missed. The next appointment was Steven Flowers to Chief Nurse. TSG Micky Kriegh took over SSG Benedettis' position when she resigned in Jan 1989. 1Lt Delia Denison came on board as the full time officer in Oct 1991. She was replaced by 1Lt Terry Reams in 1995 when she was transferred to the Executive Support Officer position in Headquarters. LTC Larita A. Aragon was appointed Commander in Mar 1996. LTC Siebert was appointed Chief Executive Nurse in Jun 1996, and is presently our Chief Nurse.

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USAF Unit Histories  
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Sources  
Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.