

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ORDERS OF BATTLE EXPEDITIONARY DEPOT MAINTENANCE

8/6/2009 - ROBINS AIR FORCE BASE, Ga. -- Starting with Vietnam and ending with Iraq and Afghanistan, the White Knights of the 653rd Combat Logistics Support Squadron have traveled the globe to repair major damage on aircraft in combat zones. But their storied 42-year history came to an end Wednesday with an inactivation ceremony. Originally called the 2955th CLSS, the unit became the 653rd CLSS in 1992 as part of an Air Force-wide reorganization. It was slated for inactivation two years ago as part of a move to shift from large CLSS squadrons to smaller flights that do the same job. Once it had over 300 people, but now 56 White Knights will form the Expeditionary Depot Maintenance Flight in the 402nd Aircraft Maintenance Group. "This is a historic and emotional day for our Air Force," said Col. John Bukowinski, commander of the 402nd AMXG. "CLSSs have played a key expeditionary role in our Air Force over the last 42 years, specializing in providing aircraft repair in a combat environment." The ceremony included several past commanders of the squadron and other alumni. Maj. Joseph Giuliani, the commander of the group since January, 2008, noted that despite the pending inactivation, members of the group have continued to do their job around the world. In the past year, he said, White Knights have performed 100 TDY taskings with 30,000 labor hours, saving the Air Force \$4 million. "Today's inactivation is bitter-sweet because we are all sad to see the doors closed on such a historic squadron, but at the same time this occasion gives us an opportunity to see the faces of former CLSS members, many of whom traveled great distances to be here today." An alumni dinner was also held at the Museum of Aviation on Wednesday night. Members of the squadron were called the White Knights because the chess knight was the unit emblem. The knight represented the unit's mobility and unique capability. At one time there were five combat logistics support squadrons, with each air logistics center having one to support the aircraft assigned to that center. After the 653rd inactivates, the only CLSS left will be at Hill Air Force Base in Utah. That one is scheduled for inactivation in October. Colonel Bukowinski said closing the CLSSs is an unfortunate result of the Air Force's budget conditions, but he emphasized that the mission of performing major field repairs will continue. "The Air Force is not eliminating its capability to provide required expeditionary support to the warfighter," Colonel Bukowinski said. "The capability that CLSS brought to the fight has long existed. We are just simply changing the delivery method of our depot maintenance support capability. We will continue to provide the expeditionary aircraft battle damage repair. Here, they will simply wear a different hat and come under a different name."