

One last look as an e

Charleston bids a solemn farewell to the C-141, 16 AS



By Staff Sgt. Pamela Smith
437 AW Public Affairs

A simple, yet solemn ceremony marked the end of an era at Charleston Saturday as the base bid farewell to the C-141 Starlifter and the 16th Airlift Squadron.

"I've always been told good things come to an end," said Lt. Col. J.J. Wendling, 16 AS commander, during his farewell speech at the unit's deactivation ceremony. "I admit I've been dreading this day because it's been one helluva ride."

Wendling spoke to more than 400 people, as did Col. Rusty Findley, 437th Airlift Wing commander, and Col. Robert Allardice, 437th Operations Group commander, about the accomplishments and the triumphs of the aircraft that has become known as the "Workhorse of Air Mobility Command."

Wendling credited his troops for making his job an enjoyable and easy one.

"I've been fortunate to command the greatest people in the world today," he said. "Real people who took their jobs to another level."

The ceremony marked the end of an era that began at Charleston in 1965. The C-141 has been a major player in a variety of contingencies over the past 30 years, to include Vietnam, Grenada and Operation Desert Shield/Storm.

C-141 aircrew members, both past and present, were on hand to say good-bye to the only aircraft to ever accomplish 919,000 mishap-free flying hours.

"This is the best airplane ever flown," said retired Senior Master Sgt. Bill McCabe, a 28-year Air Force veteran and former C-141 flight engineer. "I always had faith in the C-141 that it would bring me home."

Staff Sgt. Michael Harter, a C-141 flight engineer with 3,000 hours, said the sound of the bagpipes made the end all too real for him. He will PCS to Robins AFB, Ga., and begin flying on the Joint Strategic Attack Radar System mission.

"Seeing the squadron guidon all rolled up and hearing Amazing Grace choked me up," he said. "I realized it was time for closure."

Lt. Col. J.J. Wendling presides over his last retreat as commander of the 16th Airlift Squadron, July 14, before PCSing to the Air Force Personnel Center, Randolph AFB, Texas.

photos by Staff Sgt. Corey Clements

(Right) Lt. Col. Jim Kirby rolls up the 16th Airlift Squadron flag as Master Sgt. Darl Tremain, 16 AS first sergeant, holds onto the guidon. Once the flag was rolled up, it was encased, officially marking the end of the 16 AS.



(Below) Retired Senior Master Sgt. Bill McCabe, a former flight engineer, signs the C-141 headed for Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz., as his grandchildren, Zachary McCabe, 6, and Erin Fickle, 9 months, look on.



Future Air Force general Connor Fardell, 4, catches a quick nap following the 16th Airlift Squadron and C-141 deactivation ceremony Saturday. Connor is the son of Capt. Chris Fardell, a C-141 pilot assigned to the 16 AS, and his wife, Sharon.