

COMMENTARY

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AIRLIFT
Dispatch

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437 AW commander

As we enter the critical 101 days of summer (through Sept. 4), now is the time to be especially careful as the potential for an accident is greatly increased. Danger lurks around the corner as the highways quickly fill with cars with vacationing families.

The great weather, coupled with people taking leave and longer daylight hours, beckons people to become more active outdoors, to include boating and water sports in the Lowcountry. Summers are for having fun and I want everyone to have fun and enjoy these activities, but I need your help to prevent a careless lapse in judgement that could cause a serious injury or even death.

At Charleston, we've always had a great safety record. However, we cannot assume past success will guarantee future success unless we are diligent. So, let's be safe out there and apply the concepts of Operational Risk Management to every task that we do, whether that means safety "pre-flighting" your car before a long trip or remembering to always fasten your seat belt. Past experience has also shown that when mixing alcohol with outdoor activities or driving, a dangerous situation often develops. All squadron activities readily make designated drivers available, so please use one if you have too much to drink. If you drink alcohol, be sensible about it and do not allow it to cloud your otherwise good judgement. Our most precious resource is the men and women of Team Charleston.

If you were one of the folks who attended the 437th Services Squadron events planned as part of Armed Forces Week, then you know about some of the good times that were had by all who attended. Kicking off the activities was the free "Star Spangled Salute to Volunteers, Veterans and Friends" held in the Charleston Aero Club on Friday, followed by a "Moonlite Hangar Dance" later that evening. About 150 people attended the Hangar Dance and the evening featured the truly talented Andrew Thielen Big Band group, who impressed everyone. A special thanks to everyone in the 437th Services Squadron, especially to Wendy Varhegyi and John Hattel, who helped with the logistics of these outstanding events.

I also had the honor of attending the third annual "Moon Over Charleston" Armed Forces Week event on the USS Yorktown last Saturday with many community leaders. The event also featured the Andrew Thielen Big Band and was sponsored by News Talk 1250 WTMA radio and the Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce.

The event, designed to honor military members, also raises funds for the Homebound Veterans of the Lowcountry, a Veterans Administration home-based primary care program that was established in 1972 to provide eligible veterans with needed medical, nursing, social, dietetic and rehabilitative care. I had the opportunity to meet their honored guest, retired Army Gen. William Westmoreland, who commanded our forces during the Vietnam conflict. I also interacted with many of the base supporters, to include popular morning talk show host, Dan Moon from WTMA. I hope that they will hold next year's event on Charleston AFB in our world class club.

If you have used our collocated club, youth programs or fitness and sports center, then you already know what Air Mobility Command recently announced—that they are the best in the command. The Services awards recognized our programs as the best in AMC for customer service, quality, and dedicated leadership. Our Fitness and Sports programs, youth programs and collocated club will represent AMC at the Air Force-level competition. We wish them best of luck and congrats for a job well done.

Also receiving AMC honors as the best Combat Tactician Airlift Officer of the Year was Maj. Christopher L. Birge, 437th Operations Support Squadron. Major Birge initiated and led efforts which reduced airdrop malfunctions from 17

Memorial Day pays tribute to our fallen heroes

percent to less than 1 percent, fielded a new computer mission-planning system, the Portable Flight Planning System (PFPS), and refined C-17A dirt field landing procedures.

On Tuesday, I received an orientation to many more of our 437th Services Squadron facilities. At the Child Development Center, Feleen Haynie, Kristina

Rose and Mary Sloan gave me a tour of their classrooms and I learned more about the systems they use to assess children's specialties and skills. At the Youth Activities Center, I also visited the school age classrooms, open recreation areas, learning center for youth ages 5-17 and was truly impressed with their affiliation with the Boys and Girls Club of America.

I was similarly impressed by my tours of the bowling center, library, Skills Development Center and Inflight Kitchen. At the Inflight kitchen, I was met by Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Cureton and Airman 1st Class Kevin Goggins. I realize that they are down to only one person per shift and they need more storage space, but despite those challenges, they still get the job done in an outstanding manner. It is easy to see why the command selected them as the best; they all run a first-class operation!

As Memorial Day approaches this weekend, I was thinking back to last year and thumbing through some papers I'd filed away. I came upon this article that I wrote while deployed as the 92nd Air Expeditionary Wing commander in charge of tanker support for the air war over Serbia. I thought it was worth repeating here since I think it applies to all of us in the 437th Airlift Wing as it applied to all the members of the wing I was leading then. Here it is:

I am writing this article on Memorial Day, the day our nation sets aside to recognize and honor the many veterans who have so proudly served over the years to preserve the freedoms we stand for and enjoy as citizens of the United States of America.

Here on the southern plains of Spain and throughout our other 92 AEW locations, I daresay that the day will pass with some quiet reflection by some on its importance. However, the pace and level of war-fighting activity will likely occupy the thoughts and actions of most of our dedicated team, therefore shrouding the significance of the day. The all-too-familiar refrain of "Groundhog Day" will ring true.

Generations before us—those veterans we honor today—had similar Memorial Days. I would bet their service in far-away lands and in just wars like the one we are involved in at present, certainly make Memorial Day just like any other day in the conflict for them too.

But as with the new group of proud American "veterans" we have created right here in Spain and throughout the 92 AEW, a proud and grateful nation did not, and will never, forget the sacrifice and dedication our military forces demonstrate.

Memorial Day in the year 2000 will honor and recognize a whole new set of combat proven veterans who's dedication and sacrifice prevailed in making the world a safer and better place for the USA, Europe and in particular the people of Kosovo.

Every member of the 92 AEW should stand proud for the magnificent job you are doing each and every day. Your hard work and sacrifice is making a big difference in moving this conflict toward a correct resolution. As your commander, I cannot thank you enough for all you do everyday.

As our country's newest crop of veterans, you enter an elite and cherished status in our country. It is my wish that one year from today many of us can gather together with our loved ones as our fellow countrymen recognize and honor your noble service in this war and make Memorial Day 2000 one to remember.

Enjoy a safe and fun Memorial Day weekend ... you deserve it! It's great to be a member of the premier airlift wing on the face of the planet.