



# News Release

## UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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### Aerial porters work long hours while deployed to Bagram

CHARLESTON AIR FORCE BASE, S.C.-- More than 20 members of Charleston AFB's 437<sup>th</sup> Aerial Port Squadron are directly supporting Operation Enduring Freedom overseas, working for the 455<sup>th</sup> Expeditionary Operation Group, Bagram AB, Afghanistan.

These frontline aerial porters arrived at Bagram AB at the end of August, and are expected to stay in the "less than perfect" conditions for at least 90 days.

The group hit the ground running, according to Master Sgt. Gary Wilson, 437 APS and deployed 455 EOG Air Terminal Operations Center chief.

In three days, and in true Team Charleston fashion, the team meshed and took over the entire ATOC function.

In the 39 days the team has been at Bagram AB, they've loaded and unloaded more than 560 pallets, 120 pieces of rolling stock and 3,000 passengers for a total weight of more than 1,960 tons.

Wilson said his best guesswork is that the deployed team is moving more cargo each day at Bagram AB than they would in a week at CAFB.

The fact that many of the team members are working outside their specific specialties hasn't been any kind of a hindrance.

"Everybody does a specific job at (CAFB)," said Wilson. "Here, we work as a team to do whatever needs done. Cargo, ramp, whatever your job, you work towards one goal here."

The CAFB crew is split into two shifts, each working from noon to midnight or vice versa.

Although the schedule is set up for 12-hour shifts, Wilson said many times it doesn't work out that way. Depending on the airflow, a shift can last in excess of 15 or 16 hours.

"A lot of people are saying it's like 'Groundhog Day,'" said Staff Sgt. Ricky Nedrow, 437 APS member deployed with the 455 EOG. "You work, you shower, you sleep, and the next day, the same thing."

There's really no time for the group to think about redundancy in their work because by the time they get a moment to reflect, they're doing the same things all over again.

Wilson said his unit has a goal of off- and on-loading each aircraft in one hour and 15 minutes to one hour and 30 minutes.

Charleston AFB's aerial porters have been able to meet that goal about 70 percent of the time.

"When the plane hits the ground, (the aerial porters) are there," said Wilson. "I just try to help out, and I let (members of the flight) take the lead."

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"I didn't realize we hadn't tapped all the talents of the team members sent with us at first," Wilson continued. "About a week and a half into the deployment, we realized we had some real 'get the job done' people. That works out well, because over here, there's no room for anything less."

Even with the busy work schedule and difficult living conditions, there are no sounds of grumbling coming from the makeshift ATOC office. The CAFB aerial porters know why they're at Bagram AB.

"Some days I process 500 or more passengers," said Staff Sgt. Brian Abraham, 437 APS member deployed with the 455 EOG.

"It's constantly busy, but I'm happy to be a part of the mission. I'll be glad when it's over," Abraham said smiling, "but you couldn't ask for a better crew to handle this workload."

Members of the 437 APS still at CAFB haven't forgotten about their deployed counterparts. Lt. Col. Kevin Brewer, 437 APS commander, said he's kept in contact with his deployed people through e-mail.

"They keep me up to speed about the workload and how they're being treated," said Brewer. "I can't believe they're able to get that much done with so few people."

"The people here are working hard too," Brewer continued, "but the conditions (at Bagram AB) make it a lot worse."

Brewer said every time he gets a chance to speak at a staff meeting or similar event, he tells everyone about the mission his folks are completing down range, and how proud he is to have them as members of the 437 APS.

He also said he didn't expect anything less from the group that deployed.

"Aerial Porters are among the first to go in," said Brewer. "They don't need a base, just a runway." (Story and Photo by Staff Sgt. Jason Smith)

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