



News Release

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Air Mobility Command answers call to Global War on Terrorism

NOTE TO NEWS MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES: Gen. John Handy, commander of U.S. Transportation Command and Air Mobility Command, will be the guest speaker at the Air Force Ball, Saturday, Sept. 7, North Charleston Convention Center. His remarks will focus on the contributions of Charleston AFB and reflect on the upcoming anniversary of 9/11. He will be available for media interviews immediately following his remarks. News media are asked to arrive at the North Charleston Convention Center by 8 p.m. The remarks and interviews will be concluded by 8:45 p.m. The article below should give you a rough outline of those remarks by General Handy. His comments will however, focus more on the contributions of Charleston AFB.

Americans have always enjoyed their freedoms. Especially their freedom to live in a safe world protected by borders once thought impassable by enemies from distant lands. As we approach Sept. 11, 2002, reflections of the past 12 months are appropriate. In the assessment of its leaders, Air Mobility Command accomplishments have been outstanding and continue unabated.

Not since the War of 1812 have Americans seen so lethal a strike on the U.S. mainland from a foreign foe. While older generations of Americans can remember the early morning radio reports on Dec. 7, 1942 of the air strikes by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor, then a U.S. territory, few could have imagined anything to compare to the horrific acts of suspected al Qaeda terrorists on Sept. 11, 2001. Until then, almost an entire nation lived with a false sense of security believing that U.S. soil was sacred and somehow untouchable.

All that changed when members of the international al Qaeda terrorist network hijacked four domestic American airliners and transformed them into weapons of mass destruction. The world watched in shock at live television reports of a crumbling World Trade Center in New York, and the murder of 2,819 people.

Military installations were preparing to go into full alert when a second group of terrorists crashed another airliner into the Pentagon, heavily damaging the west side of the building and killing 184 Department of Defense military and civilian employees.

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The carnage that day might have been even worse, if not for the courageous acts of passengers aboard Flight 93 over Pennsylvania. Todd Beamer and his fellow passengers summoned the courage to challenge the terrorists who had commandeered their plane. His final words before challenging the terrorist captors became a rallying cry for all of us: "Let's roll!"

"AMC immediately went into action supporting the defense of our homeland in Operation Noble Eagle," said Gen. John W. Handy, commander in chief of U.S. Transportation Command and commander of AMC, "launching aerial refueling aircraft in support of the fighters scrambled to intercept the captured airliners."

Before the day was done, tankers from AMC and its gained Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Command units were on alert and flying scheduled sorties to refuel fighters flying combat air patrols over Washington, New York and other strategic areas.

"Tankers and airlift aircraft play a critical role in the Homeland Security mission," Handy pointed out. "As with many flying operations requiring a sustained fighter presence, tanker aircraft are required to extend fighter aircraft capabilities. In the case of Homeland Defense, tankers are used to extend fighter's flight time during combat air patrols or increase its range of coverage."

Airlift aircraft were immediately tasked to carry people, equipment and other vital resources into areas near the sites of destruction and remained on alert to move military forces to flash points that might develop. "AMC's transport aircraft provide a crucial airlift capability, especially in the role of delivering emergency military support to civil authorities. Our aircraft were often used to move badly needed people and equipment to areas supporting Homeland Security missions - sometimes on very short notice."

Handy explained that the command played another key role following the attacks. "AMC was also providing secure transportation to our leaders and key emergency management officials as they reassembled in the nation's capital while President Bush returned to Washington on Air Force One," he said.

While simultaneously helping defend the nation and protect its leaders, the command facilitated disaster relief. Its aircraft transported blood and other medical supplies to the East Coast as well as airlifted search and rescue teams to aid recovery efforts in New York and Washington.

McGuire AFB, N.J., became the staging area for housing and feeding many of these teams. For a time, too, it established a 25-bed surgical unit. Staff members of the Charles C. Carson Center for Mortuary Affairs at Dover AFB, Del., fulfilled their somber duties of identifying the remains of 118 victims who perished at the Pentagon.

Soon after, AMC began its pivotal role in Operation Enduring Freedom, proving that air mobility was critical. As Secretary of the Air Force James Roche observed, the operation required the United States to fight for the first time in "a land-locked area where every single thing ... has gone by air - food, water, ammunition, troops."

Tanker Airlift Control Elements and smaller Mission Support Teams deployed to forward deployed locations to set up airfield operations for U.S. and allied air forces.

Over the course of the conflict, KC-10s and KC-135s deployed to 17 locations worldwide to refuel aircraft in support of both global power and humanitarian missions. Such efforts made it possible for B-2s, America's

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newest most advanced bomber, to drop ordnance in Afghanistan after flying nonstop from Whiteman AFB, Mo. Likewise, the C-17s airdropping humanitarian aid in Afghanistan were also refueled in mid air.

"AMC built two airlift bridges spanning the globe in the war against terrorism," said Handy. "An eastward flow from the United States operated on a hub and spoke concept. Our C-5 Galaxys flew missions to Europe, as C-17 Globemaster IIIs and C-130 Hercules transported the loads to Southwest Asia, to the 'Stans' of central Asia, and to Afghanistan. A westward airlift took people and materiel over the Pacific to the Indian Ocean and on to the eastern periphery of Afghanistan.

"Humanitarian airdrop missions of the C-17s over Afghanistan rendered assistance to beleaguered Afghans during the contingency and demonstrated that America's intent was to wage war against a hostile regime, not its people," he added.

To date, airlift operations into Afghanistan is the third largest effort of its kind, ranking behind Operation Vittles of the Berlin Airlift and Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm. AMC's C-17s are responsible for dropping nearly 2.5 million packets of humanitarian daily rations as well as more than 1 million pounds of flour, and other aid.

Handy believes AMC's future challenge is to prepare for the defense of our nation against the unknown, the uncertain and the unexpected.

"To win the war on terror and prepare for future threats, we must transform ourselves to becoming more lethal, agile and prepared for surprise," Handy said. "As we painfully learned on Sept. 11, the challenges of a new century are not nearly as predictable as they were during the Cold War. In the years ahead, it is likely that new adversaries who strike in unexpected ways will surprise us. We must be prepared for these new, asymmetric threats."

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