



News Release

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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'BLIZZARD' OF CARGO CRASHES DOWN ON AERIAL PORT SQUADRON

CHARLESTON AIR FORCE BASE, S.C. -- The workload of the 437th Aerial Port Squadron increased an estimated 250 percent after two APS buildings at Dover AFB, Del., collapsed under pressure from the Blizzard of '03.

Air Mobility Command decided to send a portion of Dover's cargo to Charleston AFB, increasing the average of five to seven trucks coming through APS here each day to more than 70, according to Maj. John Pepin, 437 APS operations officer.

"There's more cargo coming in than going out," said Pepin. "Dover lost two bays, each the size of our one, which means we have three times the amount of cargo that has to be unloaded, palletized and shipped. We simply don't have enough space for that kind of volume. What used to be parking lots are now pallet yards."

Because of the additional cargo, APS is now the point of departure for five additional channel missions – routine missions flown on a set schedule between a stateside base and a forward operating location. With more than 150 people from the squadron already deployed, Pepin said they needed outside aid. More than 90 active-duty and Reserve servicemembers from all over the country responded to APS's cry for help.

"Everyone is very focused," said Senior Airman Bruce Gannon, 30th Aerial Port Squadron, Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, N.Y. "We're very busy, but we're having a good time and wouldn't have it any other way."

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CARGO BLIZZARD 2/2/2

When the APS roof crashed at Dover, it took a couple of days for the cargo to be rerouted here, said Pepin. As the trucks began rolling in Feb. 21, the cargo began piling up.

“We couldn’t build up the cargo as fast as it was coming in,” said Staff Sgt. James Donaldson, 437 APS cargo processing shift supervisor. “Without all the augmentees, we wouldn’t be able to get the job done.”

The increase in cargo coming to the base affects more than just aerial porters, according to Pepin. The 437th Logistics Readiness Squadron works non-stop to unload the trucks as fast as they come to the truck dock, and with that many trucks coming through the gates, the 437th Security Forces Squadron “stepped up” to provide increased truck searches, while the 437th Transportation Squadron is doing their part to keep all the forklifts and material-handling equipment at APS on the move, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

“This is one of the biggest operations I’ve seen,” said Staff Sgt. Keble Passley, 653rd Combat Logistics Support Squadron, Warner Robbins AFB, Ga. “It’s hectic and fast paced, but we’re all working well together.”

Looking down on the squadron, forklifts travel through the cargo like mice through a maze. Every available forklift, including those rented from off-base businesses, is in motion, according to Pepin, and what doesn’t ship out on planes piles up in corridors along the flightline.

It will only be a matter of days before the cargo starts leaving the base in commercial aircraft headed for their destinations downrange, said Pepin. Once the cargo starts leaving the base at a steady rate, APS will become a “smooth operation” again.

“In order to make this successful, it’s going to take a lot of hard work,” said Pepin. “We have to stay focused on the fact that many people are relying on us to get the ‘stuff’ to the fight.

“We’ve got a good system and good people on board,” he continued. “I see this as temporary now, but we’re ready for the long haul.”

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STORY BY AIRMAN STEPHANIE HAMMER, 437 AW PUBLIC AFFAIRS. FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT STAFF SGT. MELANIE STREETER AT 963-5589.