

# Team Charleston honors Norris at retirement ceremony

By Lt. Col. Ed Memi  
437 AW Public Affairs

Team Charleston said farewell to Col. Jim and Opal Norris during a farewell dinner Feb. 17 and retirement ceremony Feb. 18 at the Charleston Club.

Maj. Brian Blankenship, 437<sup>th</sup> Services Squadron served as the master of ceremonies Feb. 17 for an evening of farewells and good-byes from many groups and agencies during a packed farewell event in the club.

Retired Brig Gen. Steven Roser, former 437<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing commander, presided over the retirement ceremony. Roser was instrumental in bringing Col. Norris to Charleston in the summer of 1997.

During the retirement ceremony, Brig. Gen. Robert D. Bishop Jr., 437 AW commander, presented the Legion of Merit to Norris for his many years of faithful service and accomplishments as the wing's vice commander. Bishop also presented a shadow box on behalf of the wing with a flag and all of his medals and badges.

"I have had 10 or 12 people come up to me and said what a fantastic job Team Charleston has done," Bishop said. It just wasn't folks over in the European Theater, but the folks back home that made the difference, he said.

He remarked about the pride Air Force people have in wearing the uniform. "Of the things we've accomplished, I think one of the big reasons is the opportunity to serve with great, great people like yourself."

Norris was commissioned in 1970 and spent the early part of his career flying the C-141 transport aircraft for the Military Airlift Command. He's participated in many of the major deployments to "hot spots" around the world. He has served in key operational and staff positions at squadron, wing, air division, MAJCOM and Air

Staff levels.

"It is a tremendous honor to come back to Team Charleston and the busiest wing in the Air Force," said Roser. "We are going to retire Col. Jim Norris after 30 years. When you think about it, only a handful of people get to retire after 30 years."

"In 1975, with only four years in the Air Force, he completed Air Command and Staff College. I've sat on lieutenant colonel boards and there are people with 16 years in the service who haven't completed Air Command and Staff College," Roser said.

Norris first joined Charleston in 1978 as a member of the 41<sup>st</sup> Airlift Squadron. He came back for a second assignment to Charleston as the chief of the command post, an operations officer and finally a squadron commander of the 41<sup>st</sup> AS.

"Two big challenges he faced as a commander here...one was Hurricane Hugo. He had to keep the squadron operating and take care of families while everything was devastated," Roser said. "But even more importantly, he had to do the airdrop in Panama (Operation Just Cause). Very few people can say they led a combat formation of C-141s into harms way."

Norris began another career as a base civil engineer when he was assigned to McGuire AFB, N.J. Roser

said he was having leadership problems with his base civil engineer while the commander at Bolling AFB, Md., and was able to get Norris reassigned to work for him.

Jim Norris turned everything around and solved our union problems, human relations problems and

a decaying base infrastructure for a base considerably older than Charleston, Roser said. "He did the job extremely well."

"When I got here (as commander of Charleston), I needed a

new vice commander ... I used all my green stamps to get him here," Roser said.

Norris offered some observations in his farewell remarks.

"The day I came on active duty, we had several hundred thousand troops in Southeast Asia and had been there for more than five years and had more than five to go before they got out. In 1973, the Israelis had another war and the tanks and bullets we brought were there in five hours," he said in describing a number of contingencies. "In Grenada, I'll never forget launching 31 C-141s at 30 second intervals and how maintenance had tweaked them. It was amazing to see the ramp go from full to empty in such a short period of time," he reminisced.

"There are two things that have

remained constant throughout my career. One requires no thought at all and that is people. The other is operations tempo," he said. "It seems like we're all very fortunate that the nation continues to produce such fine citizens and the Air Force seems to get its fair share of them. We are never going to replace great commanders, first sergeants and supervisors trying and inspiring others to do their best."

"Operations tempo...my definition is working very hard, with little visibility about tomorrow or even next week. It is hard to maintain that for a long time. I reached the conclusion that high operations tempo has always been there and unfortunately will always be there," Norris said.

Norris said the hardest thing he ever did was leaving for a remote assignment to Alaska.

"The best of times was getting back together (with my family) after the remote," Norris said.

"I was at a radar site 40 miles north of Fairbanks. When it came time to leave, Opal flew up and we drove back. I have a picture of me by a sign that says rough road ahead for the next 1,000 miles. We crossed the Yukon River and eventually made our way to Charleston. I am now a little more philosophical about the experience since then and more at ease with myself," he said.

"We have not been sitting on the sidelines and have been in many world events. We have been making things happen, each in our own way. My real memories will involve adventures, people and family. I don't remember any one particular day in the office and don't remember many of the issues, and as time passed, the issues seemed to get less and less important. But it is the people and the adventures that I will look back on."



Senior Airman Corey Clements  
Col. James Norris, 437<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing vice commander, retires the colors one last time during his retirement ceremony Feb. 18.



Tech. Sgt. Mark Voorhis

Senior Airmen Pat Schaberg, left, and Shawn Chenault spray fire-retardant foam under a fuel truck that spilled an estimated 1,000 gallons of jet fuel at the Charleston International Airport Feb. 17. Schaberg and Chenault were part of a team of 25 Charleston AFB fire department personnel that assisted with cleaning up the fuel spill.

## Teamwork, fast action clean up fuel spill

By Staff Sgt. Mark Voorhis  
437 AW Public Affairs

Members of Team Charleston's 437<sup>th</sup> Civil Engineering Squadron, Fire Protection Flight, were called upon to assist in cleaning up a fuel spill at Charleston International Airport Feb. 17.

A commercial aircraft fuel truck capable of carrying 8,000 gallons of jet fuel, stuck a post, causing a gash that leaked an estimated 1,000 gallons of fuel. The fuel soaked into soil and a nearby water drainage ditch. There were no injuries, and there was no disruption in air service.

The base fire department sent 25 personnel and several vehicles to assist with containing the spill.

Officials from North Charleston Fire department and the base fire department contained the fuel spill with hay bales, earth berms and absorbent materials.

"We worked hand-in-hand with North Charleston officials," said Roger Swartz, Assistant Chief of Operations at Charleston AFB. "Our constant training paid off. We know how the North Charleston fire department works, they know how we work, and that makes this type of emergency easy to get through."