



# News Release

## UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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### **CHARLESTON CREW FLIES FOR BLACK HISTORY MONTH**

**CHARLESTON AIR FORCE BASE, S.C.** – In honor of Black History Month, an all African-American crew carried out a local training mission Feb. 23.

The C-17 left Charleston AFB at 8 a.m., and returned around 2 p.m. The crew, Maj. Terry Hunter, 17<sup>th</sup> Airlift Squadron, Maj. Keith Dulaney, 15<sup>th</sup> Airlift Squadron, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Adam Burks, 15 AS, and Staff Sgt. Kevin Simmons, 17 AS, flew to Pennsylvania, refueled with a KC-135 from the 171<sup>st</sup> Air Refueling Wing, Coraopolis, Pa., and returned to CAFB.

While the flight served as a training mission, the crew said it meant a whole lot more to them.

“We used to have a mission like this every February,” said Hunter. “I was stationed here in 1986 through 1989, and we took an all African-American crew to Africa on a C-141 every year. Although the mission may have been local, it meant a lot to us because it’s the first time we’ve done it in a long time, and it’s the first time an all African-American crew has flown a C-17.”

According to Hunter, there are only three African-American pilots currently flying at CAFB. The chance to fly with three black pilots and a black loadmaster is a rare experience.

The Air Force Personnel Center lists a total of 230 black pilots. Four of them are women. Those numbers constitute two percent of all Air Force pilots.

“This may have been a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” said Dulaney. “It’s rare to have a black pilot, let alone a whole black crew.”

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The mission fit right in with Air Mobility Command's Year of Retention and Recruiting theme. Burks said the flight served as a tool to inspire current Air Force members as well as help recruit new members.

"Since I've been a kid, I've wanted to fly," said Burks. "I hope a flight like this served as motivation to all youth. I've always known that I wanted to be a pilot, but hopefully I can help inspire kids who don't know what they want to be, to think about a military career."

Hunter said he's been able to use his status as an African-American pilot for recruiting purposes in the past.

"I flew our plane to the Seymour-Johnson (AFB, N.C.) airshow last year, and you wouldn't believe the number of people who came up to me and said, 'did you fly this thing,'" said Hunter. "People just don't expect to see an African-American pilot. I always get people coming up to me on the plane and mistaking me for the loadmaster until they see my rank. I want to do my part for recruiting more minority pilots so we can move away from people being shocked by it."

The low number of minority pilots could be a type of downward spiral, according to Dulaney.

"It's critical for society as a whole to see more minority pilots," said Dulaney. "This would not only increase exposure, but possibly spark an interest in aviation among more minority youth. If not, they might just start accepting that African-Americans can't be pilots because they don't see any. That's a perception we need to avoid if we ever expect to increase our numbers."

The Air Force has been full of opportunity, said Hunter. He has traveled to almost every continent, met some remarkable people and had a chance to give back to others. Dulaney echoed the same positive aspects of the Air Force.

"The total Air Force experience has been a blessing for me," said Dulaney. "The things I've gotten to do and the people I've had the opportunity to meet and work with have been great. To begin this assignment at CAFB with a historic flight with Terry (Hunter) before he PCSs adds to the many blessings I have received from the Lord, and I'm thankful."

Burks said he also gained valuable insight from the flight.

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“I’m happy I was part of this,” Burks said. “I was able to learn from the wealth of knowledge aboard the aircraft.”

Hunter, Dulaney and Burks all agreed the flight was a success and they hope to keep the tradition alive in the years to come.

“I’ll be in Air Education and Training Command next year,” said Hunter. “I’m going to pass the torch to Keith (Dulaney) on this mission. With a little earlier planning, maybe he’ll be able to plan this mission outside the United States.”

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*(Media interested in interviews can contact Staff Sgt. Pamela Smith 963-5589)*