

# THE CARGO COURIER

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## Wing earns 18th Outstanding Unit Award

By Lt. Col. Dale Greer  
123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

The Kentucky Air National Guard's 123rd Airlift Wing has earned its 18th Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, a nearly unprecedented achievement that continues the wing's record as the most decorated airlift unit in the Air National Guard and one of the most decorated wings in Air Force history.

"This most recent award reflects a tremendous amount of hard work and dedication by the 1,200 men and women who serve in the 123rd Airlift Wing," said Brig. Gen. Warren Hurst, Kentucky's assistant adjutant general for Air, who presented the honor during a ceremony March 10 at the Kentucky Air National Guard Base here.

"Their record of accomplishment continues a culture of excellence that can be traced to the wing's founding in 1947 and builds on a legacy that is truly second to none. From global deployments in support of the war effort to extensive rescue and recovery operations following hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, the 123rd Airlift Wing continues to set the standard of performance at home and abroad."

The 123rd Airlift Wing distinguished itself by exceptionally meritorious service from Oct. 1, 2015 to Sept. 30, 2017, according to the award citation. The wing engaged in a full spectrum of missions during this period, mobilizing 679 Airmen to 38 locations in eight countries. Among those operations, the wing deployed 78 Airmen to Iraq to open a mission-critical air base, and it fielded numerous other Airmen to five different theaters in direct support of combat operations, controlling more than 900 combat sorties responsible for 300 enemy casualties.

Back home, the wing's medical personnel executed a month-long training exercise in Western Kentucky that delivered no-cost medical care to thousands of underserved residents, performing 13,000 procedures and delivering 20,000 prescription eyeglasses with a market value of more than \$1.5 million. When hurricane season hit with unexpected force the following year, the wing provided unprecedented disaster response over a continuous three-month period, deploying more than 180 personnel to Texas, Florida and the Caribbean in the wake of hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria. Airmen from the wing's 123rd Special Tactics Squadron rescued 336 civilians stranded by flood waters in Texas and controlled



Staff Sgt. Joshua Horton/KyANG

**Col. David Mounkes (right), commander of the 123rd Airlift Wing, pins a streamer to the unit colors during a ceremony here March 10. The streamer signifies the unit's selection for its 18th Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, continuing its legacy as one of the most decorated organizations in U.S. Air Force History.**

636 military aircraft in the Virgin Islands, facilitating the evacuation of 1,286 U.S. citizens.

Meanwhile, the wing's 123rd Contingency Response Group established an aeromedical evacuation hub in Texas and an Intermediate Staging Base in Puerto Rico that supported 268 aircraft, processed 3,887 passengers and distributed more than 7 million pounds of food, water and humanitarian aid. The wing's aircrews also were heavily engaged in relief operations, airlifting hundreds of evacuees from St. Maarten and flying 152 sorties to transport humanitarian aid from Georgia to the Caribbean.

The fact that all these operations were accomplished while the wing also supported numerous training exercises in Canada, the Pacific, Africa and Europe — and passed a Unit Compliance Inspection with "flying colors" — is "simply remarkable," said Col. David Mounkes, commander

of the 123rd Airlift Wing.

"The Guard has changed over the last 20 years — we're not the stay-at-home-and-only-use-in-emergency force we might have once been," Mounkes told the audience. "We are blessed to be able to serve our nation in such an important job. We're the defenders of our country, willing to do what it takes so that our citizens can remain free and live in safety."

"I can truly say to you that you are one of the best wings in the Air Force. No other unit comes close to what we do, day in and day out. So let's celebrate this well-earned award, realize how good we are, and — going in eyes wide open — fully understand how much work it takes to accomplish and take care of our folks like the family that we are. You're part of a great airlift wing, one of the absolute best in the United States Air Force."

# P-51 returns home to wing after 60 years

By Master Sgt. Phil Speck  
123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

A P-51 Mustang arrived back on the flight line of the Kentucky Air National Guard Base here April 12, more than six decades after departing.

The Mustang, serial number of 44-74202, was once assigned to the unit as a military fighter aircraft from 1953 to 1956. Now, it was returning home as a fully restored civilian warbird to fly in the 2019 Thunder Over Louisville air show.

The P-51's new owners, R.T. Dickson Jr. and his father, R.T. Dickson Sr., purchased the Mustang in 2012 after more than 50 years of storage and restoration.

The younger Dickson has been flying aircraft since the age of 3, when his father let him take the stick of a Globe Swift. He's piloted a multitude of aircraft ever since, but the South Carolina resident said he was especially pleased to be flying the Mustang in Thunder.

"I'm very excited about it," Dickson said on the tarmac of the Kentucky Air Guard Base, recalling how his appearance in the show came to be.

He met the Kentucky Air Guard's Maj. Josh Ketterer, a C-130 Hercules pilot, in December 2018 during an air show planning conference that Ketterer was attending as a Thunder coordinator. Dickson noticed the Kentucky patch on Ketterer's flight suit, and the two struck up a conversation.

Dickson told Ketterer how his restored Mustang, now known as "Swamp Fox," had once belonged to the Kentucky Air Guard.

"We started talking about the airframe, and Josh said, 'You should come up for Thunder,'" Dickson recalled.

They both loved the idea of giving the aircraft a "homecoming," and Ketterer talked to wing leadership about bringing this piece of aviation history back to Kentucky.

Tail no. 44-74202 was manufactured by North American Aviation and delivered to the U.S. Army Air Force on May 7, 1945. It was first assigned to 445th Fighter Squadron at Bakersfield Army Air Field, California, before being transferred to more than a half-dozen units in



Staff Sgt. Joshua Horton/KyANG

**Robert "R.T." Dickson Jr. poses with "Swamp Fox," his restored P-51 Mustang aircraft, on the flight line of the Kentucky Air National Guard Base April 11. This exact aircraft was once assigned to the Kentucky Air Guard when the Mustang served as the unit's primary airframe from 1947 to 1953.**

California, Colorado, Nebraska, New Mexico and Texas. It arrived at the Kentucky Air Guard in July 1953 and remained here until October 1956, when it was moved to McClellan Air Force Base, California. The following year, it was declared surplus property.

The aircraft was purchased at auction by a private individual in 1957 but was damaged a few years later in a landing accident, according to an article in Warbird Digest. For the next 50 years, the plane changed hands several times, although it remained unflyable until a major restoration project returned it to the air in 2012 as the Dicksons' Swamp Fox, painted in honor of

World War II pilot Will Foard, who was a member of the 357th Fighter Group.

The 357th scored more combat air-to-air victories than any other P-51 Group in the Eighth Air Force during World War II.

Dickson has now traveled around the nation with Swamp Fox, which has given him an opportunity to learn more about the history of the P-51. While in Louisville, he stopped by the Kentucky Air Guard's "Heritage Hall" and saw photos of his aircraft when it was assigned here.

*To read the rest of this article and view more photos, visit [www.123aw.ang.af.mil/News](http://www.123aw.ang.af.mil/News)*

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We welcome your feedback. Please contact the Public Affairs Office directly if you have suggestions for articles or photography. Our office is located in Room 1160 of the Wing Headquarters Building, 1101 Grade Lane, Louisville, KY 40213.

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