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Wing drops troops for 75th D-Day ceremony

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

NORMANDY, France — The Kentucky Air National Guard performed seven flyovers and helped airdrop nearly 1,000 U.S. and Allied paratroopers over hallowed ground here this week as part of the 75th anniversary of D-Day.

The historic invasion of Normandy in 1944 took the lives of 53,000 Allied service members but tuned the tide of war in the European Theater.

As part of this year's observance, the Kentucky Air Guard's 123rd Airlift Wing deployed two C-130 Hercules aircraft and more than 30 Airmen to participate in the fly-bys and reenactments from June 2 to 9. Those Airmen are expected to return home today.

The biggest event was held June 9, when two Kentucky Air Guard C-130s flew in a 17-aircraft formation from which almost 1,000 paratroopers were dropped at the Iron Mike drop zone in Sainte-Mère-Église, France.

The Kentucky C-130s led a nine-ship formation joined by aircraft from the U.S. Air Force Reserve, and C-130s from Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Romania. They met up with eight U.S. Air Force C-130s to fly in the large Commemorative Airborne Operations event.

Sainte-Mère-Église was one of the first towns to be liberated from Nazi Germany in the early morning hours of D-Day, June 6, 1944.

During one of the earlier flyovers this year, a Kentucky C-130 incurred a bird strike on one of its wings, said Capt. Nick Reinke, a 123rd Airlift Wing pilot and mission commander. The deployed group was able to contact U.S. Air Force maintainers at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, who delivered parts to repair the aircraft so it could fly again in commemoration events.

"This was the smoothest 17-aircraft formation we've ever flown in," Reinke said, calling it an honor to reenact the heroism of Allied forces 75 years ago.



Master Sgt. Phil Speck/KyANG

Paratroopers jump from a Kentucky Air National Guard C-130 Hercules over the Iron Mike drop zone in Sainte-Mère-Église, France, June 9 as part of the 75th-anniversary commemoration of D-Day. The Commemorative Airborne Operations event included nearly 1,000 paratroopers from Belgium, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Poland, Romania and the United Kingdom; and members of U.S. Special Operations Command Europe, United States Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command, 18th Airborne Corps, 75th Ranger Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, 173rd Airborne Brigade, 503rd Military Police Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, and U.S. Air Forces Europe.

Chief Master Sgt. Jeff Brown echoed those sentiments.

"This was an incredible opportunity," said Brown, loadmaster superintendent for Kentucky's 165th Airlift Squadron. "To be involved with something so significant — I never thought that in my career I would get to do something like this, especially as my career is coming to an end. We have some young guys with us, too, and it has been great for them to see what it takes to go into a large exercise like this."

In addition to air operations, many ground support elements participated in the observance, including the Kentucky Air Guard's 123rd Global Mobility Squadron.

"I was very pleased that we could take a small team of 12 members, making up a contingency response team led by a senior

noncommissioned officer, and for the first time in an overseas named exercise, provide superb support to U.S. and international aircraft. We hit a few snags, which they were able to overcome, and everything worked as planned."

Col. Robert Hamm, commander of the Kentucky Air Guard's 123rd Operations Group, agreed that the experience provided excellent training for large-scale interoperability.

"In addition to being able to take part of this momentous occasion, this was a great opportunity to train with the active duty Air Force, the Air Force Reserve and all the other countries that took part in the 75th anniversary of D-Day," he said.

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123rd supports interoperability in Italy

By Staff Sgt. Joshua Horton
123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

AVIANO AIR BASE, Italy — More than 90 Airmen and three C-130 Hercules aircraft from the Kentucky Air National Guard’s 123rd Airlift Wing participated here in Immediate Response 2019, a multinational exercise co-led by Croatian Armed Forces, Slovenian Armed Forces and U.S. Army Europe.

The purpose of the annual exercise, held this year from May 9 to 22, is to build multinational readiness, enhance military-to-military relationships and improve interoperability between land forces to provide mutual assurance, deter regional aggression, and support a balanced approach to security and stability in the Balkan region.

Maj. Trevor Sutherland, the 123rd’s air mission commander, said the exercise provided invaluable experience working with multiple partners.

“It validates all of our strategic plans,” said Sutherland, a pilot in the wing’s 165th Airlift Squadron. “You have our people interfacing with the Army and all these different agencies, and they were very impressed with the way our unit leaned forward.”

The exercise included approximately 6,000 participants from 15 nations including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Slovenia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

In addition to improving relationships and interoperability with allies and partners, the exercise also provided a good training opportunity for newer Airmen, said Master Sgt. Hunter Hurd, a flightline production controller for the 123rd Maintenance Group and production superintendent for the mission.



Staff Sgt. Joshua Horton/KyANG

Kentucky Air Guard C-130s conduct a nonstandard-load training flight in the airspace above Venice, Italy, May 20 while carrying equipment from U.S. Army Europe’s 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team as part of Immediate Response 2019. The exercise is designed to improve readiness and interoperability among participating allied and partner nations integrated into a multinational battalion. Combined training enables allies and partners to readily respond more effectively to regional crises and meet their own national defense goals.

“I think this was an excellent training experience; it really shows the younger folks why they went to school for as long as they did and why they worked those long hours,” Hurd said. “They can see the fruits of their labor in the sorties that the aircrews are flying.”

Airman Tanner D. Soward, a new aviation resource management Airman for the 123rd Operations Group, agreed.

“It was great being able to work with other units and countries,” Soward said. “I learned

a lot about doing my job without using the systems that we have back home.”

Immediate Response ’19 promotes regional stability and security, while strengthening partner capabilities and fostering trust, officials said. The combined training provides opportunities to improve interoperability among participating allies and regional partners.

To view more photos, visit 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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