

A/TQ

AIRLIFT / TANKER QUARTERLY

SUMMER 2026

Volume	Number
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KC-135 70TH ANNIVERSARY NOSE ART COMPETITION

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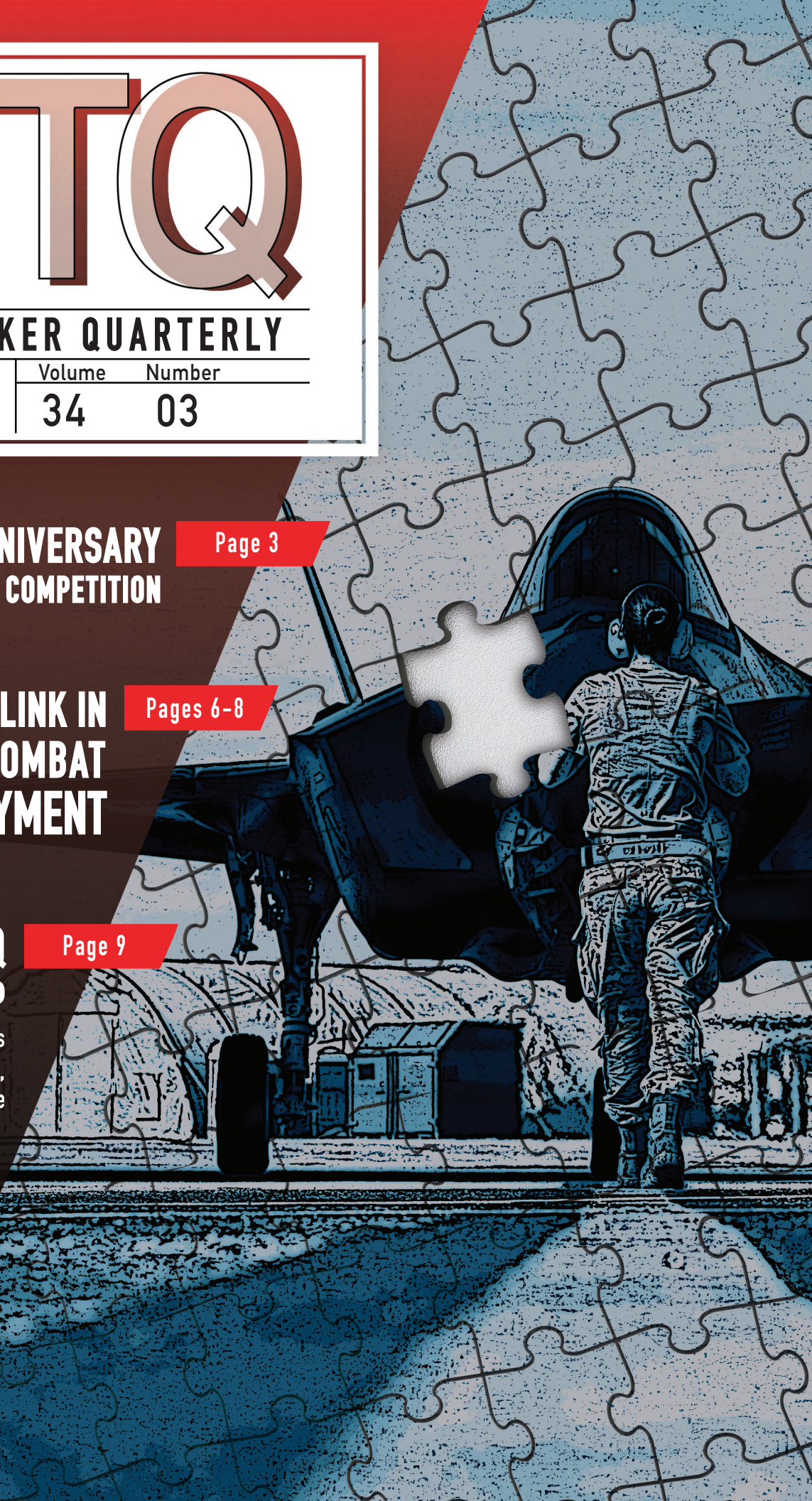
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A/TA-ProDIGIQ SCHOLARSHIP

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Tuesday, 1 September 2026,
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AIRLIFT/TANKER QUARTERLY

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On the Cover: U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Avianna Reed, tactical aircraft maintenance specialist with the Florida Air National Guard's 125th Maintenance Group, marshals a U.S. Air Force F-35A Lightning II aircraft assigned to the 125th Fighter Wing during Agile Combat Employment (ACE) training at Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida, Feb. 10, 2026. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Marissa Welker).



Chairman's Comments



Gen. Carlton Everhart,
USAF (retired)

As the United States celebrates its 250th birthday, Americans have an opportunity to reflect on the remarkable journey from a fledgling republic to a global leader whose influence extends across every continent. For those who serve in the mobility community, this milestone offers a unique perspective on how the nation's enduring commitment to freedom, innovation, and global engagement has shaped the world and how the mobility enterprise will continue to define America's future.

Throughout our nation's history, mobility forces have served as the connective tissue of American power. From the Berlin Airlift to humanitarian relief operations, from sustaining combat forces in distant theaters to evacuating civilians from danger, America's ability to project strength and compassion around the globe depended upon a robust and resilient mobility enterprise. Our nation's mobility capabilities have repeatedly demonstrated that military power is measured not only by what can be delivered, but by how rapidly and reliably it can arrive where it is needed.

Today's mobility Airmen operate in an increasingly complex and contested environment. Strategic competition, emerging technologies, and evolving global threats demand unprecedented agility and readiness. Yet the fundamental mission remains unchanged: to provide rapid global mobility that enables national objectives, reassures allies, deters

adversaries, and responds to crises whenever and wherever they arise.

As we look toward the next 250 years, the importance of global mobility will only increase. Future conflicts may unfold across vast distances, requiring the seamless integration of air, space, cyber, and joint capabilities. Humanitarian disasters will continue to require an immediate response. Alliances and partnerships will depend upon America's ability to move forces, equipment, and supplies at a moment's notice. In every scenario, mobility forces will remain the indispensable foundation of national power.

The Airlift/Tanker Association (A/TA) has played a vital role in advancing this mission for more than half a century. Established to support the mobility community and strengthen the bonds among military members, veterans, industry partners, and civic leaders, the Association embodies the spirit of collaboration that has long distinguished American airpower. Through professional development, education, advocacy, and scholarship programs, A/TA helps ensure that the next generation understands both the heritage and future of mobility operations.

Perhaps most importantly, A/TA serves as a bridge between generations. The experiences of veterans who participated in historic operations provide invaluable lessons for today's mobility professionals. Likewise, the insights of current Airmen help shape the capabilities and concepts that will define tomorrow's force. This exchange of knowledge preserves a culture of excellence while fostering innovation.

The Association's local chapters further strengthen this mission by building relationships within communities

across the nation. These chapters connect active-duty personnel, reservists, National Guard members, retirees, families, and industry representatives who share a commitment to supporting America's mobility mission. Their efforts help cultivate future leaders, recognize outstanding service, and reinforce the values that have sustained the air mobility enterprise for decades.

As America enters its 250th year, the mobility community stands at a pivotal moment. New aircraft, advanced logistics concepts, autonomous systems, and space-enabled technologies promise to transform how global mobility is executed. Yet technology alone will not determine success. The decisive advantage will remain the dedicated professionals who plan, operate, maintain, and support the world's most capable mobility force.

The celebration of America's semi quincentennial is more than a commemoration of the past; it is a call to prepare for the future. The same spirit of innovation, determination, and service that carried the nation through its first 250 years must guide the next generation of mobility leaders. Through organizations such as the Airlift/Tanker Association, the mobility community remains committed to preserving its proud heritage while embracing the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

America's first 250 years were built upon the ability to connect people, ideas, and resources across great distances. The next 250 years will demand the same. The dedicated professionals who make global mobility possible will continue to ensure that the United States remains ready, responsive, and capable of meeting the challenges of an ever-changing world.

Most Respectfully,
Gen Carlton D. Everhart II, USAF,
(Ret) Chairman

KC-135 70th Anniversary Nose Art Competition

By Sondra Hart, A/TA Administrator

The mighty KC-135 "Stratotanker" first flew on August 31, 1956. The Airlift/Tanker Association is helping to mark this with a celebration commemorating the KC-135's 70 years of flight. As part of the celebration, the Altus AFB leadership has authorized "Nose Art" for one of its aircraft to highlight this huge milestone.

The Airlift/Tanker Association Heritage committee is proud to sponsor a competition for that nose art design allowing the lucky winner to become a proud part of air mobility heritage and see their vision displayed on venerable KC-135. If you want the opportunity to participate in celebrating air mobility heritage, here's what you need to know...

All submissions must be received by **July 31, 2026**. Designs will become the property of the Airlift/Tanker Association. Artwork will be judged on aesthetics, historical significance, and symbolism. Submissions must include a short biography of the artist, explaining their connection to the KC-135 and a narrative explaining significance of design choices and symbols, like official unit emblems managed by the Air Force Historian.

The winning design will be unveiled as part of the KC-135 70th Anniversary celebration at Altus AFB, Oklahoma in August 2026. Submissions will be subject to final approval by the 97th Air Mobility Wing Commander. Submit your entry to KC-135_70th@atalink.org, artwork must be high resolution, in pdf or jpeg format. Narrative should be sent as a word or pages document. ■



**Registration
will open mid July
for the 2026
Airlift/Tanker Association
Symposium & Technology
Exhibition at the Gaylord Palms
Resort and Convention Center
in Kissimmee, Florida.**

**Sign up at
www.atalink.org**

Hall of Fame nominations for A/TA Symposium

This year A/TA will not be accepting Hall of Fame nominations for 2026. Because the 2025 convention was cancelled due to the government shutdown, we will be celebrating the 2025 inductee at the 2026 convention.

For additional questions, please contact Ms. Patti Cost at programsvp@atalink.org. We look forward to seeing you this year. ■



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Thank you

**FOR SUPPORTING THE FUTURE OF
A/TA SCHOLARSHIP AWARDEES!**

A/TA Mourns the Loss of Our Longtime A/TQ Magazine Editor

By Sondra Hart Airlift/Tanker Association Administrator

It is with great sadness that the Airlift/Tanker Association shares the passing of Robert “Bob” Fehringer, Jr., our Airlift/Tanker Quarterly magazine’s editor of 7 years.

Throughout his impressive career, Bob shared his talent for photojournalism with both the Air Force and our Association. He will be greatly missed.

A Life Behind the Lens: Robert “Bob” Fehringer, Jr., 1950–2026

Robert “Bob” Fehringer, Jr., age 76, TSgt, USAF (Retired), passed away April 24, 2026 at Memorial Hospital, Belleville, Illinois.

Bob was born January 8, 1950, and raised on Chicago’s South Side. He married his high school sweetheart, Patricia, on April 18, 1970, at St. Rita of Cascia Catholic Church in Chicago.

Bob enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1969 and pursued his passion for photojournalism. Over a 22-year career, he documented military history, people, and events across the globe, including coverage of the Saigon Baby Airlift and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam. He served as a motion picture cameraman, newspaper photographer, and photo editor, and was recognized among the best in his field, earning multiple Air Force Pictures of the Year awards, a Joint Service Commendation Medal, an Antarctic Expedition Medal, a Vietnam Service Medal, and numerous other military honors. He retired from the Air Force in 1991.

Retirement did not slow him down. Bob continued his career as a contract photojournalist for the Scott Air Force Base Command Post newspaper, and served as a contractor in the Public Affairs office of U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM). He also worked as a freelance photographer for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the Belleville News-Democrat, the Scott Flier, and other outlets. He was deeply respected by colleagues and took pride in mentoring young photographers.

Beyond his camera, Bob was a man of many talents and wide-ranging interests. He grew prized home-grown tomatoes, threw legendary Fourth of July fireworks parties, and played drums in several local bands — earning the nickname “Boom Boom.” He had a great sense of humor and a generous spirit.

Bob was preceded in death by his parents, Robert Fehringer, Sr., and Violet (nee Mucenski) Fehringer.



Bob Fehringer in the public affairs office at U.S. Transportation Command. (Courtesy photo).

He is survived by his wife, Patricia L. Fehringer of Fairview Heights, Illinois; his daughter, Jessica A. Fehringer, and granddaughter, Andrea L. Fehringer-Waters, of Carrboro, North Carolina; and his sister, Carrie, and brother, Mark, of Chicago, Illinois.

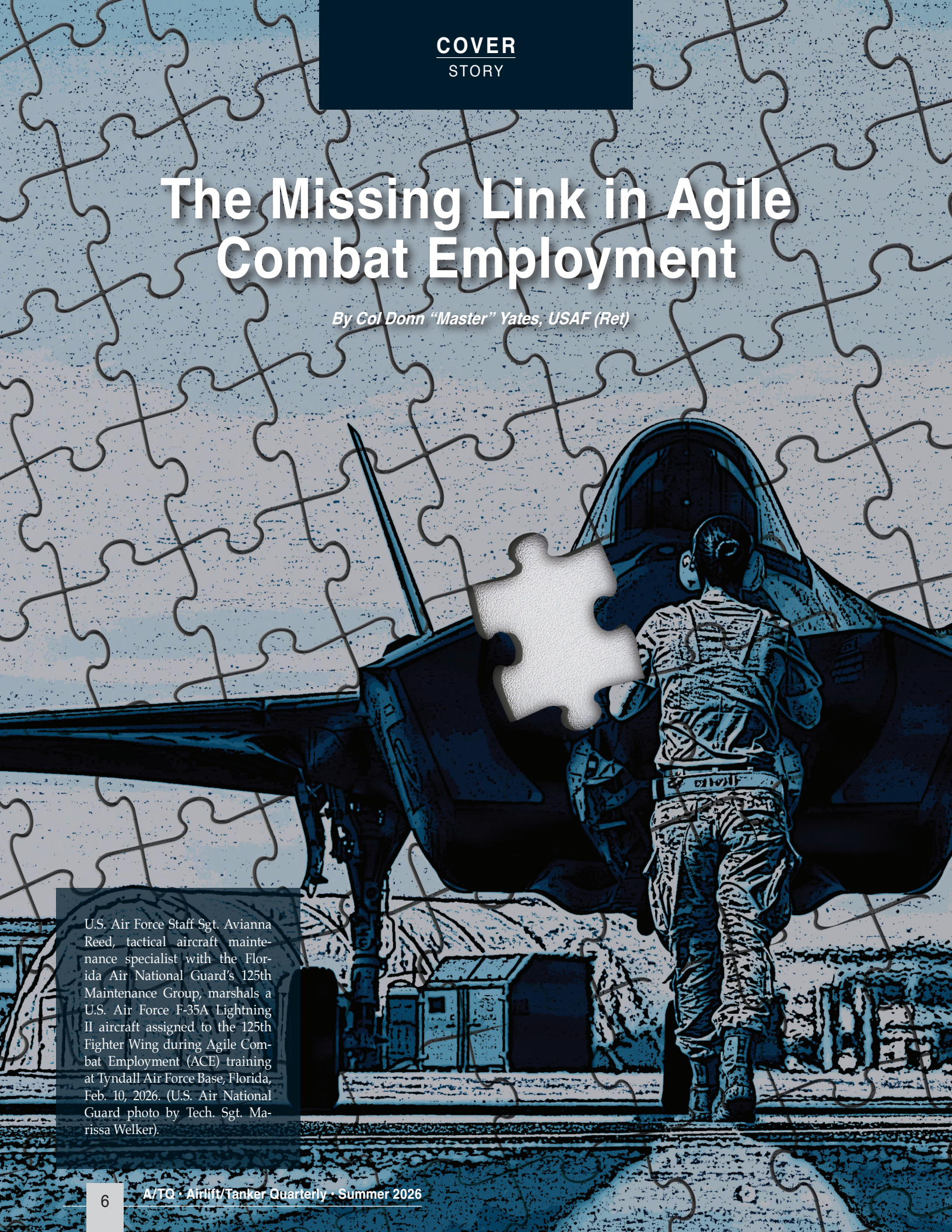
Services were held on Friday, May 15, 2026, at St. Clare Church, 1411 Cross St., Shiloh, Illinois. Visitation was from 1:30 to 3:00 p.m., followed by a prayer service and military salute at 3:00 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations in Bob’s name are suggested to the Tunnel to Towers Foundation at www.t2t.org. Memories may be shared with the family at www.wfh-ofallon.com ■



The Missing Link in Agile Combat Employment

By Col Donn "Master" Yates, USAF (Ret)



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Avianna Reed, tactical aircraft maintenance specialist with the Florida Air National Guard's 125th Maintenance Group, marshals a U.S. Air Force F-35A Lightning II aircraft assigned to the 125th Fighter Wing during Agile Combat Employment (ACE) training at Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida, Feb. 10, 2026. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Marissa Welker).

The proliferation of overhead surveillance combined with low-cost, lethal drones is threatening U.S. military forces and infrastructure in ways over which the U.S. had previously held a monopoly since 1991's Operation DESERT STORM. While each service is undergoing their own transformations in response to the shifting threat landscape, the wider impacts on the U.S. logistics and sustainment enterprise – one that wasn't designed for theater-wide dispersion as a means of survival – are not yet clear. In the U.S. Air Force, Agile Combat Employment (ACE) has become the linchpin concept on which the Joint Force's ability to generate maneuver and fires in the Pacific now rests. The Navy's Distributed Maritime Operations, the Marine Corps' Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations, and the Army's Multi-Domain Operations concepts all assume that U.S. and allied airpower can survive the opening salvos of a peer conflict and continue to generate sorties from dispersed locations. Every other service's operational concept requires ACE to be not only executable, but sustainable in a protracted conflict.

In a Pacific war scenario, combat forces will be under persistent threat of bombardment by an adversary with sufficient range, magazine depth, and the means of production

to sustain their targeting cycle for longer than the U.S. can generate and reconstitute forces. The Air Force's mobility and logistics role in ACE is indispensable for enabling the rest of the joint force in terms of resupplying parts, people, and provisions in the theater only navigable by long-range airlift and sealift. Simply put – without ACE, the joint kill chain breaks. Maritime strike loses overhead surveillance and its tanker bridge. Integrated air and missile defense loses the forward sensors and interceptor resupply on which it depends. Ground maneuver loses its close air support and aerial resupply. And once the shooting starts, dispersion and maneuver requirements will be compounded by casualty evacuations, non-combatant outflows, and other priority emerging missions. One of the primary constraints is the existing tactical airlift fleet – centrally commanded and controlled C-130s operating from fixed airfields – which will be insufficiently flexible, capable, or capacious to meet the demand.

The Air Force Research Lab (AFRL) seemed genuinely focused on this problem in mid-2024, when it issued a Next-Generation Intratheater Airlift (NGIA) request for information (RFI) to industry, seeking information

Cover Story continued on page 8



POWERING THE FIRST AND THE FUTURE

From powering the legacy C-130s for over 70 years with the T56, to powering the C-130J with the AE 2100, Rolls-Royce is proud to support the USAF mobility fleet. Today, our advanced technologies, reliable engines, and ability to adapt to future needs, position us to provide survival propulsion solutions for Next Generation Airlift and Air Refueling platforms. Rolls-Royce is powering the future for the Air Force.

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on platforms that could “enhance existing airlift capability and capacity” in supporting the ACE concept by providing personnel and cargo lift between and within dispersed operating locations, or “clusters.” The RFI articulated the need to operate from unimproved surfaces and damaged runways as a desired attribute, implying short and/or vertical takeoff and landing requirements capable of carrying relevant payloads over Pacific distances. It further specified the NGIA would augment but not replace the C-130, implying intratheater airlift would remain the domain of the C-130 well into the 2040s, albeit “augmented” by other platforms. But no further details have been released (at least publicly) in the two years. Therefore, NGIA appears either stalled or now lumped into the service’s larger Next Generation Air Lift (NGAL) analysis of alternatives effort. Either way, five years after ACE’s official entrance into U.S. Air Force doctrine, the concept lacks an effective tool to address the tactical logistics and sustainment gap.

Col (ret) Robert C. Owen’s work in this forum and elsewhere meticulously documents previous attempts to field runway-independent, super-short takeoff and landing (super-STOL) tactical airlift platforms (see his seven-part “The Link in the Middle” series, A/TQ 2023-24). Owen’s work points out the real challenges to fielding such capabilities are as much about the doctrinal clash and priority mismatch between Army and Air Force requirements as they are technological. Anachronisms like the Key West (1948), Pace-Finletter (1952), and other agreements still shape codified roles and missions and service force design concepts for reasons that no longer make doctrinal sense. This dynamic has driven the Army to seek faster, marginally larger, and increasingly complex tiltrotor aircraft like the MV-75 currently being fielded. And the Air Force appears on track be relying on the C-130 concept for the foreseeable future – well into what will be its ninth decade.

Meanwhile, the burgeoning Advanced Air Mobility industry – loosely defined as those companies building the means to bypass traditional airports and runways – are developing new alternatives. While the industry’s approaches and air vehicle configurations vary widely, converging trends in electric motor advancements, battery power density, hybrid electric-turbine concepts, and autonomy are fundamentally changing the cost and performance parameters in aviation. In a perfect world, these companies will be American, and eager to partner with defense to design and field larger and more capable systems. But the reality is that the U.S. does not hold a monopoly on the technologies underpinning them.

Like many commercial technological innovations, such systems also do not yet meet the needed range, payload, or survivability standards for military operations. Many are one-off experiments, sponsored by service innovation hubs and supported by limited budgets. They are easy to dismiss in their current form but can solve real operational problems, and at lower cost than existing platforms. They could eventually form an integral distribution network to help solve the “last tactical mile” problem in logistics. In the ACE context, that’s a little like building an Amazon Prime option for spokes, clusters, forward operating bases, and other dispersed locations.

While autonomous intelligence and strike platforms currently attract attention, the logistics enterprise is in far greater need of a directed experimentation effort. The Department of War and the commercial sector would both be well-served by directing a large-scale experiment that brings in commercial platforms – crewed, uncrewed, or optionally-crewed – that can be adapted for military sustainment activities. Think of it as a “Drone Dominance” competition, but in an operationally representative environment like a major Pacific theater exercise. Done right, it will not only test novel hybrid-electric and other systems for their ability to reduce the local demand for tactical airlift, but it will also evaluate these systems for their intrinsic advantages, such as ease of operation, lower operating costs, and simplified maintenance. It will also reduce the timeline for promising new technology to achieve militarily significant distances, payloads, speeds, and survivability but communicating a clear demand to industry. The end result will be a set of flexible, responsive assets, controlled by local commanders responsible for generating and recovering combat sorties, enabling mission command in communications-contested environments.

In the long run, directed experimentation and investment in the Advanced Air Mobility industry may lead to a feasible runway-independent intra-theater tactical airlift platform – one the services can actually afford to acquire and operate in large numbers – which could ultimately solve the Air Force-Army requirements mismatch. The alternative is, as always, sticking with what we have until industry comes up with something revolutionary on its own. Since ACE and dispersion tactics do not have commercial analogs, commercial substitutes for military problem sets are unlikely to materialize quickly without a department-led initiative. The Air Force should strongly consider giving the industry a demand signal rather than waiting for a crisis to spur innovation. Given the department’s budgetary trajectory, buying down the risk associated with the ACE concept is well worth the cost. ■

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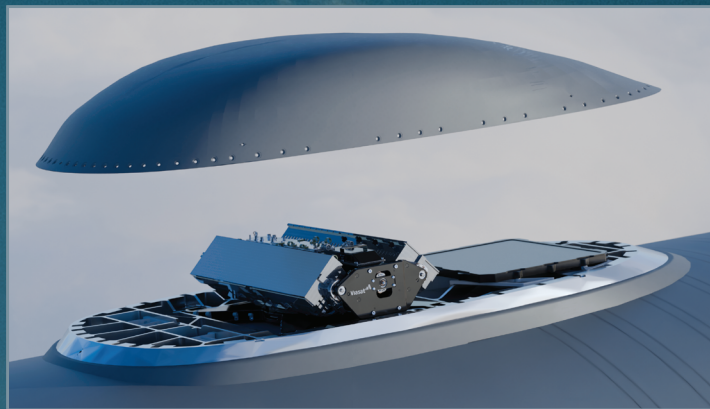


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AMC command chief retires after 31 years of service

By Capt. Christian Little, Air Mobility Command

Airmen, family and friends gathered from around the country to bid farewell to Chief Master Sgt. Jamie Newman, Air Mobility Command command chief, during his retirement ceremony, at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, May 22, 2026.

As AMC's command chief, Newman delivered and executed the AMC commander's intent, built high-functioning, resilient teams of professional warfighters and developed mission ready Airmen prepared to execute the mobility mission in complex and degraded environments.

"[AMC Airmen] do everything across the globe for everyone, we deliver hope in a time and fashion and at a pace and scale that no one else can deliver," Newman said.



Rhonda Newman pins the retirement pin on U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Jamie Newman, Air Mobility Command command chief, during his retirement ceremony at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, May 22, 2026. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Dalton Williams).

"For that, I thank you, it's because of you that we can make those things true for everyone around the world."

Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force Gen. Johnny Lamontagne



U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Jamie Newman, Air Mobility Command command chief, addresses Airmen, family and friends during his retirement ceremony at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, May 22, 2026. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Dalton Williams)



Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force David Wolfe, left, presents a certificate to Chief Master Sgt. Jamie Newman, Air Mobility Command command chief, during his retirement ceremony at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, May 22, 2026. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Dalton Williams).

presided over the ceremony and provided one final farewell to Newman, who served as his command chief during Lamontagne's time assigned to AMC.

"While it's a sad day for our Air Force to lose an amazing leader, an incredible professional who's got talent for days,



Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force Gen. Johnny Lamontagne speaks during a retirement ceremony for Chief Master Sgt. Jamie Newman, Air Mobility Command command chief, at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, May 22, 2026. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Dalton Williams).

there's going to be bright days ahead for the Newman family," Lamontagne said. "Thank you for everything you've done for Air Mobility Command and our Air Force, you're a great friend. I could not be more proud and honored to share this stage with you."

Throughout Newman's 31-year career and multiple deployments, he served as a Phoenix Raven, squad leader, Ranger instructor, superintendent, senior enlisted leader and culminated with his assignment as AMC's command chief.

"It's no surprise that you stand here at the very top of Air Mobility Command, a command of great importance," said Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force David Wolfe. "You've just been such a great friend and such an amazing Airman. You may be retiring, but your legacy is going to be felt for a very long time."

Although he has retired from active-duty service, Newman aims to continue his personal mission of serving Airmen.

"I look forward to seeing you guys out there as I travel around and hopefully get to continue to support the United States Air Force in a different capacity," Newman said. "As I set off to retirement, just know it has been an honor and a privilege to be your command chief for the last three years."

Air Mobility News & Views continues >>>

Scott AFB unveils new Joint Operations & Mission Planning Center

By Karen Pettitt, 375th Air Mobility Wing Public Affairs

A new chapter in global mobility launched today with the official opening of the Joint Operations and Mission Planning Center, a facility designed to centralize the military's most critical transportation and flight planning operations under one roof.

Completed after five years of construction at a cost of \$110 million, the JOMPC consolidates nearly 1,000 personnel into a high-tech nerve center. The two-story, four-acre building streamlines the complex coordination required to move troops, fuel, and patients across the globe by co-housing U.S. Transportation Command's Force Flow element, the 618th Air Operations Center, and key elements of Air Mobility Command, including its Air Intelligence Squadron.

Leaders from these organizations, along with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Louisville District who oversaw the construction and turnover of the facility, participated in a ribbon cutting ceremony today to celebrate the successful completion and partnership of the effort.

Located in the building is USTRANSCOM's Force Flow element, which serves as the strategic architect for the Department of War's global transportation requirements. Whether by land, sea, or air, they determine what assets are required and the sequence in which they must arrive. This includes deconflicting crowded airfields, prioritizing time-critical aeromedical evacuations, and calculating the massive aerial refueling requirements needed to project combat power.

However, the largest footprint within the JOMPC belongs to the 618th Air Operations Center. If the Force Flow element is the



Attending the Joint Operations and Mission Planning Center ribbon-cutting ceremony on May 29, 2026, were former commanders from Air Mobility Command and U.S. Transportation Command, as well as civic leaders and congressional representatives. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman DeQuan Simmons).

master architect, the 618th AOC serves as its 24/7 dispatch center, directing a fleet of nearly 1,100 aircraft and delivering strategic airlift, air refueling, aeromedical evacuation and global air mobility support for operations around the world.

Brig. Gen. Michele Lo Bianco, 618th AOC commander, shared, "Our mission to execute rapid global mobility never stops. We have a critical responsibility to command and control the deployment of air power to delivery lethality, hope, and freedom. The JOMPC will foster greater collaboration and improve our mission capabilities." During the ceremony, Lt. Gen. Rebecca Sonkiss, AMC interim commander, underscored the sheer magnitude of their operations. "AMC is the maneuver for the Joint Force," she said. "No unit understands this better than the 618th Air Operations Center. As the



The Joint Operations and Mission Planning Center officially opened on Scott Air Force Base, May 29, 2026. The JOMPC enhances information sharing and coordination among military and commercial partners supporting global mobility missions. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Timothy Young).

“Global mobility demands a united total force. This facility brings numerous military entities together under a single roof and provides additional information-sharing capacity to keep us aligned with fellow international and commercial professionals. It is through physical and professional unity that we will grow as one to project power and deliver hope.” – U.S. Air Force Gen. Randall Reed, USTRANSCOM Commander



Clockwise from top: U.S. Air Force Gen. Randall Reed, U.S. Transportation Command commander, delivers remarks during the Joint Operations and Mission Planning Center ribbon-cutting ceremony. Ian Mitchell, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Louisville District engineering division chief, delivers remarks. Conducting ribbon-cutting honors were U.S. Air Force Gen. Randall Reed, United States Transportation Command commander, Ian Mitchell, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Louisville District engineering division chief, Lt. Gen. Rebecca Sonkiss, Air Mobility Command interim commander, and Brig. Gen. Michele Lo Bianco, 618th Air Operations Center commander, on Scott Air Force Base, May 29, 2026. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman De'Quan Simmons).

largest and busiest AOC in the Department of War, the 618th executes major combat operations across the globe. This team actively controls decisive mobility operations for over 1,000 aircraft across all seven continents. The AOC requires every single one of these advancements to properly plan, task, execute and assess global air mobility operation.”

To bring this facility to life, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, base civil engineers, and cyber specialists worked in lockstep to ensure the building met strict operational and security requirements.

Nolan Robben, USACE project engineer and contracting officer’s representative, said, “One of the things we are most proud of isn’t a single visible feature, but the collective attention to detail that went into constructing a facility capable of supporting the warfighter’s mission. Much of the work that enables that mission—secure spaces, communications infrastructure, and the integration of

complex building systems—will never be seen by the public, but it is essential to how the building operates.”

He also explained how this project required their team to navigate numerous technical challenges, evolving mission requirements, and significant design modifications during construction. Although the changes required careful coordination and some rework, he said the strong partnership among all stakeholders allowed the team to address the issue.

“The result is a fully compliant, secure facility that meets the updated mission requirements. Standing on site . . . and seeing the finished facility—knowing the challenges the team had worked through together—was an incredibly satisfying moment. More importantly, it represented the successful delivery of a building designed and constructed to carry out its mission and support the warfighters who will rely on it every day,” Robben said. ■

Air Mobility News & Views continued on page 16 >>>

621st Contingency Response Wing Responds to Accelerate Earthquake Disaster Relief in Venezuela

By 1st Lt. Jessica McLaughlin, 621 CRW Public Affairs

In the aftermath of the devastating earthquakes that struck Venezuela on June 24, U.S. military forces have mobilized to support a Department of State-led disaster assistance mission to deliver critical relief to the region.

At the direction of U.S. Southern Command, the 621st Contingency Response Wing deployed a Contingency Response Element (CRE) from the 321st Contingency Response Squadron to Simón Bolívar International Airport. The 110-Airman element is working with local aviation authorities, the Venezuelan interim authority, and the U.S. interagency response team to safely expand the intake of humanitarian aid via air transport.

First on the ground, the Contingency Response Airfield Assessment Team evaluated the airfield's structural integrity and runway load-bearing capacity to ensure heavy cargo aircraft could land safely. Once verified, the remaining CRE elements arrived to establish airfield operations in support of the host nation's air traffic control operations, airfield management, and cargo handling.

"The ability of our Contingency Response Airmen to quickly adapt to their environment and inject the order needed to move aid is nothing short of amazing, which the entire joint force and interagency immediately recognized," said Col. Joseph Michaels, 621st Contingency Response Group commander.

By stepping in to help manage tower and ground operations, the Airmen are clearing logistical bottlenecks. This critical infrastructure support ensures that vital supplies, heavy equipment, and relief personnel reach the front lines of the disaster zone as quickly and safely as possible.

"I am immensely proud of our Griffins and their selfless service in supporting the Venezuelan people," said Lt. Col. Jessica Foster, 321st Contingency Response Squadron commander. "During any crisis, international cooperation is essential, but it is the incredible tenacity and profound care for humanity our Airmen have showcased that is truly awe-inspiring. It is a privilege to lead such an impressive and inspiring team."

Executing rapid mobility operations in the wake of natural disasters is a cornerstone of the 621st Contingency Response Wing's mission. Known as the "Devil Raiders," the wing has built a proven history of delivering critical humanitarian assistance and disaster relief on a global scale.

When a devastating earthquake struck Haiti in 2010, the wing provided vital airfield operations expertise in the immediate aftermath. That same year, the wing managed complex logistical flows to support relief efforts during the massive floods in Pakistan.

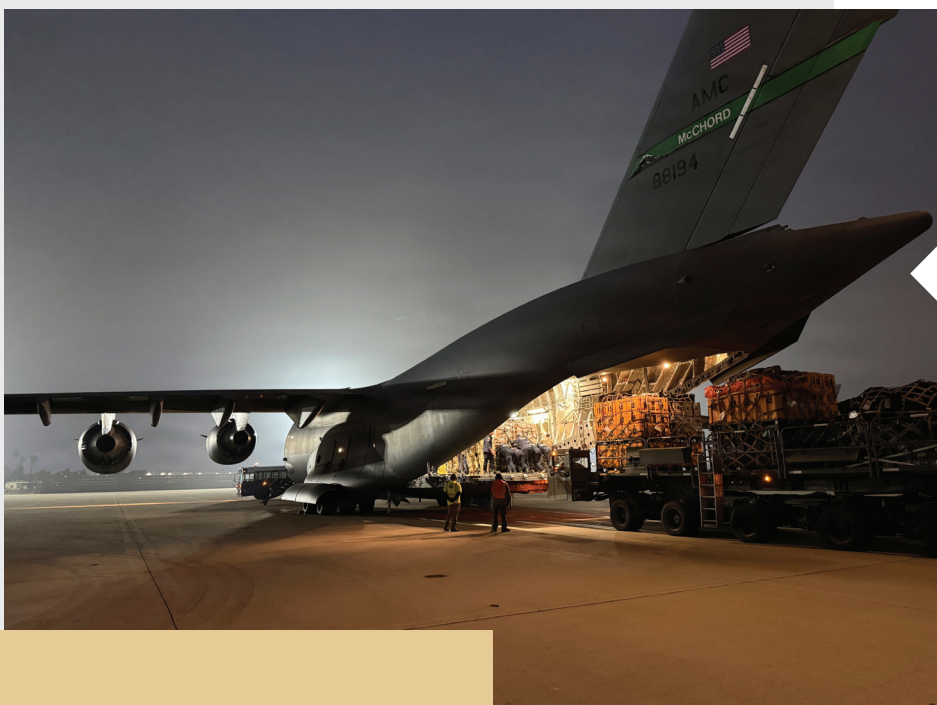
Their agility was tested again in 2017 as they navigated the overlapping devastation of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria across the Southern United States and the Caribbean.

Whether responding to combat contingencies or humanitarian crises, the CRW remains ready to open airfields and deliver hope — anytime, anywhere.

"The appearance of U.S. Department of War (DoW) visual information does not imply or constitute DoW endorsement." ■



U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Kevin J. Jarrard, speaks with Bolivarian Military Aviation and 621st Contingency Response Wing personnel at Simón Bolívar International Airport, Venezuela, June 28, 2026.(U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Devin M. Rumbaugh).



Airmen at March Air Reserve Base supported the rapid deployment of a humanitarian assistance task force responding to the recent earthquake in Venezuela. (U.S. Air Force photo by Maj. Perry Covington).

At the direction of U.S. Southern Command, assigned U.S. military forces are supporting Department of State-led U.S. disaster assistance to the people of Venezuela in the aftermath of the June 24, 2026, earthquakes. Contingency response elements provide rapidly deployable air mobility capabilities to assess, open, operate and sustain airfields during contingency, humanitarian assistance and disaster-response operations.

U.S. Air Force Airmen assigned to the 621st Contingency Response Wing mobilize a Contingency Response Element and board a C-17 Globemaster III in support of Venezuela's disaster relief response at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, June 27, 2026. (U.S. Air Force photo by Capt. Michael Hong).





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Brig. Gen. Marty Chapin
USAF (retired)

As I sit down to write this article, our nation stands on the eve of celebrating its 250th birthday. Everywhere around us the entire nation is rallying around this milestone, and we see red, white, and blue everywhere. It even appears that the number 2-5-0 has surpassed 6-7 in pop culture!

I can remember back in 1976 when we celebrated our 200th birthday. The nation had that same festive spirit — everything dressed in flags and Bicentennial logos, with a year-long “national party” atmosphere. And let’s be honest: “Bicentennial” rolls off the tongue a lot more easily than “Semiquincentennial.”

I was eight years old then. While I remember how important that milestone felt, I didn’t fully grasp the gravity of two hundred years of the United States and how profoundly it changed the world. Today, I have a much deeper appreciation for what 250 years of our great nation truly means.

As we are simultaneously hosting the World Cup, it has been amazing for so many visitors to our country to get their first in-person experience with the USA and our people. I’d like to think that a little of our 250-year celebration will rub off on them as they return home.

So what does all this have to do with A/TA? Probably not much directly — but there was no way I was going to let our nation’s milestone pass without wishing her a heartfelt happy 250th birthday! Yet perhaps there is a meaningful connection between our nation’s birthday and the A/TA.

It was almost exactly 57 years ago that the 834th Air Division held a reunion in Las Vegas to help maintain the camaraderie and bonds that developed since the division’s founding in 1966 at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. That reunion was the precursor to today’s annual A/TA symposium, and while 57 is not nearly as amazing as 250, it still represents a significant milestone towards preserving the bonds, culture, and heritage of Mobility Airmen.

Now, what does any of THIS have to do with industry? Not much—except to say that American industry remains the powerful engine that drives both our nation

Industry Partner Highlights continued on page 20

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A/TA Industry Partnership remains a bargain at the annual rate of \$2000. Industry Partner benefits include a reduced exhibit rate, opportunity to select your exhibit location (based on established criteria), a write-up with your logo in the convention issue of the *Airlift/Tanker Quarterly* (as well as a listing on our website) and five “free” individual memberships. A new and exciting benefit for our Industry Partners is our Industry Partner News page on our website. This is a place where you can share information about new products/services or company news. Contact Sondra Hart at ata@atalink.org or 423-902-2297 to become an A/TA Industry Partner today.

and A/TA. Neither would have reached 250 or 57 years without the innovation, partnership, and dedication of our industry partners.

On behalf of the entire membership of A/TA, I continue to be extremely thankful to all our industry partners for supporting our organization all year long – not just at the annual symposium. The years I have spent as the Vice President for Industry have only served to reinforce my appreciation for the vital role all of you play in supporting our Mobility Airmen. Today's Air Force is more reliant on partners than ever before. We need to continue to learn how to work and integrate together and A/TA plays an important role in helping to foster that relationship.

There probably was not much of an exhibit hall floor back in Las Vegas in July of 1969 since it was really just

a gathering of friends, but we have come a long way in 57 years and I'm proud of where our organization is today, fully integrating industry as part of our Mobility Airman culture.

While the origins of A/TA may not carry the same weight as the 56 patriots who gathered in Philadelphia to adopt the Declaration of Independence and give birth to the greatest nation on earth, we are still deeply proud of our 57 years of Supporting Mobility Airmen, Preserving Mobility Culture, and Enhancing Mobility Relationships. And do not count us out yet—we still have another 193 years to go until our own Semiquincentennial!

Happy birthday America...and I will see you on the floor!

Marty Chapin

Vice President of Industry



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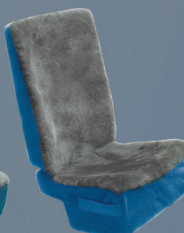


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