

**At this critical Bosnian air base, airmen work long days—seven of them a week—with little backup.**

# Tuzla Is Tough Duty

**W**HEN the C-130's rear cargo door touched the tarmac at the Tuzla airfield in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the loadmaster and aerial port team swarmed into the hold, rapidly unloading pallets of spares and supplies for NATO peacekeepers. On a runway apron, an An-124 transport awaited clearance for takeoff, ready to take home a contingent of Russian troops. Nearby, more aircraft were waiting their turns to land or depart.

Tuzla, once dilapidated and virtually unused, now is bustling. With sustainment trips, troop rotations, and VIP visits, Tuzla has been handling 2,000 flights per month, making it the busiest aerial port terminal in the Air Force's busiest major command, US Air Forces in Europe (USAFE).

The strain of a high operations tempo and long deployment is etched into the faces of the airmen at Tuzla, many of whom are pulling twelve-hour shifts, seven days a week. Alcohol is banned. Officers' and NCO clubs don't exist. On a typical day recently, the base volleyball court stood empty. Rarely are Air Force personnel permitted to leave the base, and then only in heavily armed convoys.

Col. Paul Cooper, commander of the 4100th Air Base Group (Provisional), notes that air traffic operations continue without letup, and work never ceases. "We can't go downtown and have a beer," said Colonel Cooper, "and there's not a lot to do here, so even the people who get time off tend to come back to the operations building to lend a hand."

The Colonel added, "Like most people here, the last day I had off was before I arrived in Bosnia, and the next day I have off will be after I go home."

## We Worry About It

Such pressures are felt throughout the Air Force but especially in USAFE, a command charged with executing many of the recent US peacekeeping and contingency operations. Lt. Gen. Everett H. Pratt, Jr., USAFE's vice commander at Ramstein AB, Germany, frankly acknowledged that USAFE has a problem. "No matter how you want to measure it," said General Pratt, "we clearly have a significant operations tempo, and it's something that we worry about."

The fact that Colonel Cooper, a Reservist, is in Bosnia illustrates part of the problem. Seldom has an AFRES officer been placed in charge of an active-duty unit, but USAFE needed such assistance.

"It is probably unique that a Reservist has been brought in to command an active-duty unit," said Colonel Cooper, "and it probably wouldn't have happened fifteen years ago. . . . My coming over . . . gives an active-duty officer a break."

Since 1990, the Air Force has cut force structure by nearly one-third, while the number of contingency operations involving its forces has increased by 300 percent. According to Air Force statistics, the number of airmen deployed to contingencies has increased steadily since the late 1980s—from fewer than 5,000 in 1988 to more than 18,000 today.

Even in a highly stressed Air Force, USAFE stands out, struggling mightily to stretch a smaller force structure to cover a dramatically larger set of operations. Once, the command's forces were sprawled across sixteen main operating bases and thirty-seven smaller installations. Today, USAFE is confined

By James Kitfield

*A ground crew of the 62d Aerial Port Squadron rushes out to meet an arriving C-130 at Tuzla air base, USAF's busiest terminal in Europe. Crews from the 62d can unload a C-130 in less than twenty minutes.*



DoD photo by TSgt. James Mossman, USAF

to just six MOBs and fourteen smaller installations. Its Cold War force structure of nine fighter wings with 636 aircraft has dropped to just three fighter wings and 168 aircraft. Since 1990, USAFE's troop levels have declined from 62,000 to 27,000, with more reductions in store.

This massive consolidation has caused major disruptions, but USAFE's commanders have had to cope with a steady rise in the number of crisis deployments.

USAFE forces played a major role in Operation Desert Storm. In the years since, they have flown thousands of sorties out of Incirlik AB, Turkey, to enforce a no-fly zone over northern Iraq. Air Force strength at Incirlik, a USAFE base, has grown by twenty-two percent since 1990—not including large numbers of airmen assigned there for temporary duty.

Meanwhile, USAFE units at Aviano AB, Italy, have continued to log combat flight time on missions in support of Operation Joint Endeavor, the peace mission in Bosnia [see *"The Force at Aviano,"* p. 26]. Aviano's population has nearly doubled,

even without counting the large number of personnel on TDY.

Elsewhere, USAFE personnel have played major roles in missions to Somalia, Rwanda, and more recently, Liberia. These operations have come on top of normal training missions that are part of every major Air Force command.

### Operations Other Than War

USAFE's leaders continue to train their forces to fight in a major regional conflict, such as Desert Storm. However, they said the command is increasingly preoccupied with the demands of the smaller ventures, which drain their energy and resources on a daily basis. If such contingencies are indeed the future of military operations, as some defense analysts maintain, then USAFE will have to change its rotation policies, force structure, and organization.

"Though we still have to be prepared for the worst-case scenario and operating across the full spectrum of conflict, the most likely scenarios we face are these Operations Other Than War," said Brig. Gen. William R. Hodges, USAFE director of Lo-

gistics at Ramstein. "We just have to accept the fact that these Operations Other Than War are the nature of the beast we'll be dealing with on a day-to-day basis."

Six years of wrestling with that beast have taken a toll on USAFE. General Pratt recalled, "When I first got here in 1994, we had a pretty big flap [over] a squadron where almost every pilot had received a waiver to miss training because of deployments in the previous six months. We had some kids who were on the road and away from home for more than 200 days that year."

USAFE has been able to "drive those numbers down" over the past two years, the General noted. On a computer screen in his office, he has displayed a chart that depicts the reenlistment rates and average number of days USAFE's active-duty personnel have spent away from their home bases and from their 46,000 dependents. At the touch of a key, General Pratt can find out how many fathers recently missed a wedding anniversary or the birth of a child, for instance. The prototype software is part of a USAFE effort to accurately track operations tempo and

catalog the many intangibles that collectively constitute command readiness and well-being.

By any measure, the figures reveal that USAFE rates as one of the busiest commands in the US military structure. For example, they show that USAFE aircraft have flown more sorties over northern Iraq as part of Operation Provide Comfort than the Air Force flew in the entire Korean War. They also have been deployed far longer.

"Yet, I doubt the average American citizen could tell you what Operation Provide Comfort was or what we're doing still flying over northern Iraq," said General Hodges. "Because there is usually no [previously appropriated] funding to support these kinds of operations—some of which seem to go on forever—a lot of those costs come out of our hide."

### "Highly Stressed"

A number of serious mishaps in the last few years has made some wonder if USAFE is beginning to come apart under the stress. In 1994, two USAFE F-15 fighters enforcing the no-fly zone over northern Iraq accidentally shot down a pair of Army UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, killing twenty-six persons. An investigation identified training and procedural lapses.

It was a USAFE transport of the 86th Airlift Wing, based at Ramstein, that crashed near Dubrovnik, Croatia,

on April 3, killing Secretary of Commerce Ronald H. Brown and thirty-four others. An investigation found that USAFE officials had asked for and had been denied authority to allow aircraft to fly into eastern European airports before USAFE had conducted safety inspections.

"The investigation revealed poor crew training and a commander who had asked for and been denied waivers to facilitate a high operations tempo," said one knowledgeable USAFE officer. "Both of those are signs of a highly stressed command."

General Pratt acknowledges the pressures but believes the command has relieved some of the strain. As part of its effort to reduce operations tempo, USAFE has set a goal that personnel will not be deployed away from home base for more than 120 days a year, and no more than twenty-five percent of the command will be deployed at any one time.

"I think we'll meet those goals this year, because we're just not leaving our people deployed for six months or more if we can help it. We're trying to rotate fresh blood in every 120 days," says General Pratt. Besides averting fatigue and alleviating long spells away from homes and families, he says, the 120-day rotations allow individuals—especially pilots—to sharpen their critical skills through home-base training.

"Even though pilots log combat

time flying in some of these contingencies, some of their skills are degrading because they're not practicing the full spectrum of operations," said General Pratt. "While the after-action reports [on the accidents] did reveal a few problems associated with our operations tempo, we think we at least understand the problems now, and we're working to fix them."

The move to limit deployments to 120 days in the face of major operational requirements forced USAFE to lean heavily on US-based Air Reserve Component units. Reservists and Guardsmen not only routinely fly transports into Tuzla but also fly fighters over northern Iraq and Bosnia.

In Fiscal 1995, the most recent year for which complete data are available, reservists contributed more than 100,000 "man-days" of work to USAFE. According to USAFE, aircraft piloted by reserve components accounted for the following:

- Nearly sixty percent of F-16 sorties, nearly twenty percent of F-15 sorties, and more than fifty percent of defense suppression sorties flown in support of Operation Provide Comfort.

- Nearly twenty percent of F-16 sorties, forty-five percent of A-10 sorties, and twenty-five percent of tanker flights in Operation Deny Flight over Bosnia.

### Burnout

Col. Robert Marshall, reserve advisor to USAFE, said that the infusion of help from the Air National Guard and AFRES is not a luxury but a necessity. "The reserve forces are doing more and more of the work in USAFE because the operations tempo [is] so high, and they were burning the active-duty guys out by deploying them all the time," he said.

He added, "With all the reserve units back in the United States eager to come over here, . . . it was a natural to just fold them into these peacekeeping operations."

Senior USAFE officials concede that their present operations tempo would probably be unsustainable without increased support from the Guard and Reserve.

USAFE officials have attempted to rein in extracurricular activities. For example, the number of so-called "joint contact events" between the command and other nations as part

USAF photo by SrA. Jeffrey Allen



Because most jobs in Bosnia are stressful, such as removal and destruction of ordnance, performed here by SrA. Mike Chamberlain (left) and TSgt. Kenny McClure, USAFE has moved to strictly limit the length of deployments.

of the Partnership for Peace program has mushroomed from sixty-five in 1993 to more than 400 events in 1996. Senior US officials, civilian and military, would visit eastern European countries and pledge USAFE's participation to various events. Now, such events must be approved and scheduled a year in advance.

"We kept getting these 'pop-up' exercises," said Lt. Col. Tony Salmonson, USAFE director of Partnership for Peace programs. "Each of those exercises requires a lot of effort from the worker bees, and we were really getting overtasked."

USAFE has evolved from its Cold War persona (a forward-deployed force prepared to fight a major war from its home bases) to a new, post-Cold War self—a forward staging base for contingency deployments on Europe's periphery.

General Hodges pointed out, "We've clearly downsized dramatically in this theater, and that's meant going from a big, fight-in-place force to a much smaller force that considers the need to deploy as a given. We've also become so small that any significant fracas we get involved in—and that means something even the size of Bosnia—requires that we receive significant augmentation from forces based in America."

It was their concept of USAFE as a forward-based but swift-deploying air arm that prompted USAFE officials to retain basing capacity in excess of what would be needed merely to bed down the command in the wake of a two-thirds cut from its Cold War size.

USAFE essentially vacated Rhein-Main AB, Germany, near Frankfurt, but concluded a base-maintenance contract to keep the facilities in working order and ready for use in an emergency. During the initial stages of Operation Joint Endeavor late last year, Rhein-Main was pressed into service as a billeting post for Bosnia-bound troops and airmen.

To better prepare for and manage such deployments, USAFE officials have also established an Air Operations Squadron at Ramstein. The AOS staff's job is to anticipate and plan



Staff photo by Guy Aceto

**With the increase of operations in Europe, the population at such bases as Aviano AB, Italy, has exploded, even as USAFE has shrunk by two-thirds. ANG and AFRES troops also participate, sometimes even commanding USAFE units.**

for potential contingencies and to manage and execute operations in the event of a deployment decision.

"The AOS is our stay-at-home command post to plan for and execute these contingency Operations Other Than War," reported General Hodges. "Any time a crisis kicks off, the AOS becomes the nucleus of the crisis-action team."

General Hodges has seen the strain that deployments have placed on a smaller logistics structure. During the Cold War, for instance, major operating bases in Europe typically hosted a wing of seventy-two fighters, twenty-four aircraft per squadron. Today Spangdahlem AB, Germany, is home base to a single squadron of only eighteen aircraft.

### Peter Is Gone

"In the past, there were a lot of synergisms to having three squadrons, with three sets of testing equipment, three packages of spare parts, and three maintenance crews," said General Hodges. "In an emergency, you could also cannibalize one squadron in order to launch two robust ones."

"Now, we don't have the luxury to beg from Peter to pay Paul. When you start to split up one squadron of

eighteen aircraft, which is not unusual for these contingencies, you find that the synergisms are gone. So our logisticians start meeting themselves coming and going, trying to support these Operations Other Than War."

To compensate, USAFE has developed High-Priority Readiness Spares Packages tailored to specific aircraft types. Unlike the old War Readiness Spares Kits, which individual squadrons brought along when they deployed, the new spares packages are brought to a site in advance and are used by all arriving units.

"By predeploying these High-Priority Readiness Spares Packages for operations like Provide Comfort, we save our rotating squadrons from having to move a lot of spares back and forth as they deploy and then return home," said General Hodges.

USAFE officials believe that, barring new contingencies or a new round of force reductions, the adjustments they've made in operations tempo, organization, and procedures will be sufficient to cope with the present level of operations. The problem, they say, is that the unexpected has been occurring with almost predictable regularity. "The problem comes when something pops up that you haven't planned for," said General Pratt. "I mean, we went into Provide Comfort in Turkey as a 'contingency operation,' and we've been down there for five years." ■

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