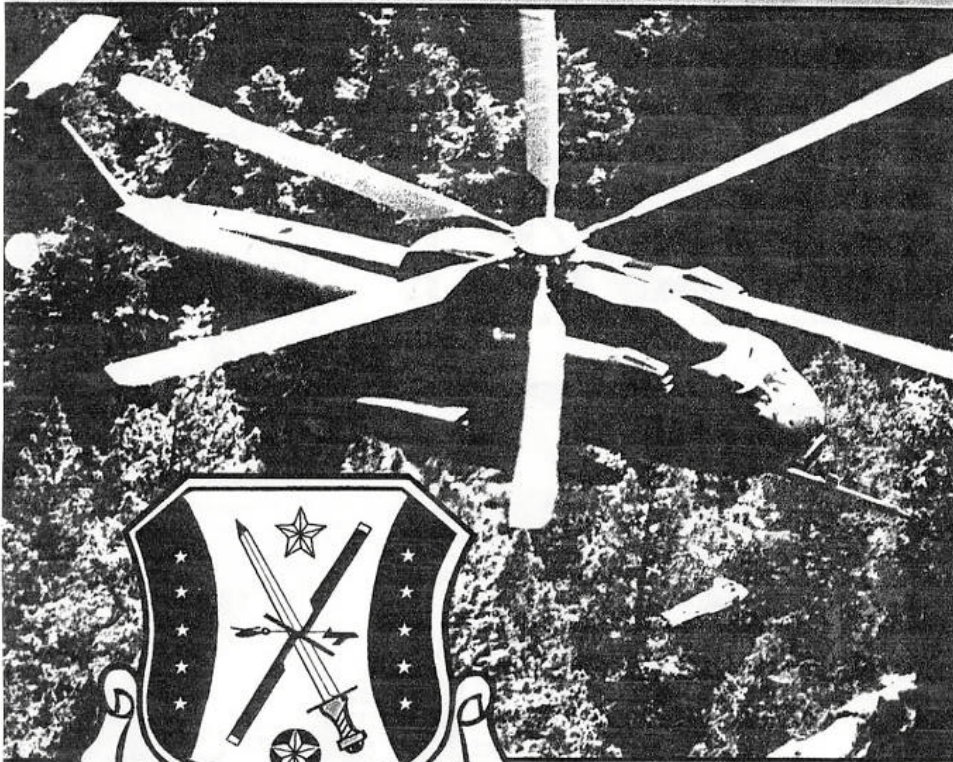


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THE MAC FLYER - For Greater Safety in MAC Air Operations



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1550th COMBAT CREW TRAINING WING

Higher education for the combat crewmember.

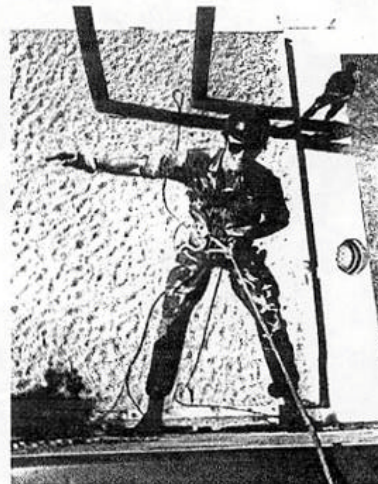


Lt. Col. Thierry G. Curtis and Mr. Willard A. Davis at the Air Rescue Museum.

Mr. Willard A. Davis conducting
a no-notice flight line safety check.

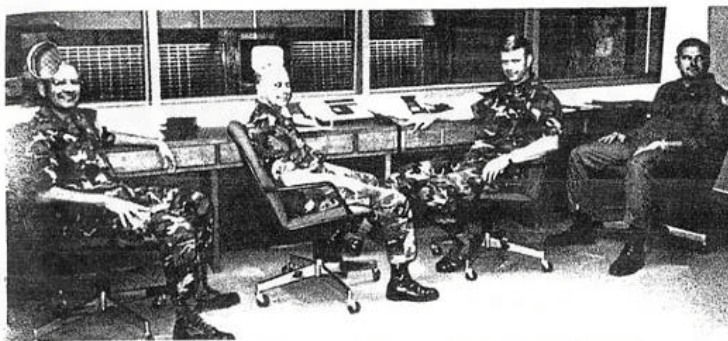


Maj. Brian Johnson preparing his helmet for the upcoming NVG flight.



Sgt. Ken Knutson demonstrates rappelling
techniques.





Col. Charles R. Holland, 2d from right, and his senior staff.

Capt. Karl B. Major, standing, and Major Ken Larson, second from left, at mission prebrief.



By Maj. Dale E. Van De Ven
Associate Editor

What do 21,000 people, and a quarter MILLION jackrabbits and prairie dogs have in common? The answer is they all share the 55,000 acres or 88 square miles that make up Kirtland AFB, home of the 1550th Combat Crew Training Wing (CCTW) and its host wing the 1606th Air Base Wing (ABW).

Located on the southern edge of Albuquerque, New Mexico, an assignment to Kirtland is considered by some to be one of the Air Force's best kept secrets, but, as Col. Stephen Gemlich, 1550 CCTW/DCM put it, "You've got to love earth tones!" Albuquerque is definitely on the arid end of the scale, with an altitude of roughly 5,600 feet and a normal humidity

range of 28 to 59 percent—green better not be your favorite color.

Shortly after my arrival at Kirtland I was assured by Mr. Willard A. Davis, 1550 CCTW Chief of Ground Safety, that I was, in fact, still in the United States—a fact contradicting the opinions expressed in a *Wall Street Journal* poll where most businesses in the United States thought New Mexico was a sleepy country, south of the border, belonging to our southern ally!

Typical of *TMF* refugees, I found my way to the Wing Safety Office where Maj. Brian Johnson, Chief of Safety (former chief as of this writing), gave me a quick rundown of what the 1162 personnel assigned—115 officers, 946 enlisted, and 101 civilians, do during the workday after they've managed to avoid the one in four uninsured, and one in ten unlicensed drivers they pass on

their way to work.

The 1550 CCTW is the advanced helicopter, HC-130, and pararescue training school for the United States Air Force. As such, it's one of three MAC formal schoolhouses with the other two located at Little Rock AFB, Ark.; and Altus AFB, Okla. In the words of Col. Charles R. Holland, 1550 CCTW/CC, "We train combat crewmembers and pararescuemen for Special Operations Forces and Combat Rescue."

To gain some insight into how the 1550th accomplishes this mission, I spent some time with Lt. Col. Theiry G. Curtis, Technical Training Squadron Commander. According to Colonel Curtis, over 1,500 students a year pass through the unit training programs. Of this number, approximately 1,000 are sent here for simulator refresher courses. These students are fully qualified crewmembers assigned to units worldwide, who come to Kirtland for specialized training.

The fixed wing students attend the five-day program where Day One is spent on Aircrew Coordination Training (ACT) and the remaining four days are for system refresher. The helicopter simulator is a four-day course where, once again, the first day is spent in ACT and the remaining days in system work.

As the home of Special Operations and Combat Rescue Training, Kirtland will receive additional simulators over the next few years. Shortly, aircrew members will be able to hone their skills in MC-130 Talon, MH-60 Pave Hawk, and MH-53J Pave Low simulators. The projected MH-53J Pave Low unit will be, other than the space shuttle, the most sophisticated simulator in the Air Force inventory!

Not all the flying at Kirtland goes on indoors; four to five hundred aircrew members are sent



Left to Right, SSgt. Mike Hyers monitoring a weapons checkout by SSgt. Jerome Milligan Jr. and SSgt. Jerry Dow.



Capt. John Campbell (far right) speaking with German exchange officer Capt. Karl Schafer.



Mr. Willard A. Davis at the Air Rescue Museum flight display.



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here each year for initial or mission qualification training. Some of the programs available include: Basic Flight Engineer, MAC Instructor Lead In, Key Staff, and HC-130, H-60, H-3 and H-1 crewmember training. Recently, the first group of MH-53J students arrived; the first of many who will PCS to Kirtland for the new seven-month Pave Low course. This group will initially qualify in basic H-53 airframe and then move into MH-53J for refuel mission qualification.

Aircrew students normally transition into their weapon systems and then advance to more complicated tasks. For helicopter students the training may include low-level day/night formation, aerial refueling, high altitude remote site operations, gunnery, water hoist and landings, enhanced navigation, and night vision goggle operations. HC-130 training includes low-level day/night formation, assault landings, aerial refueling, airdrops of personnel and equipment, combat tactics, and night vision goggle operations.

Not all graduates from Kirtland wear flight caps. Each year nearly 150 students, the majority of which are here for initial qualification, attend the Pararescue School.

Pararescue candidates hone their skills as combat trauma specialists and are trained in SCUBA, mountain climbing, parachuting, weapons firing, survival training, combat tactics,

and aircrew duties. Upon graduation, the new pararescue specialists are awarded the distinctive maroon beret. The school also looks out for our sister services by providing advanced medical training to Navy SEALs and similar units.

With all the flying activity going on at Kirtland, it's easy to understand how 75 percent of the people assigned to the 1550th belong to the wing maintenance community. According to Maj. Michael N. Wetherall, AMS/CC, as far as the maintainers are concerned "Manning isn't the problem. Training is the problem." The current airframe inventory at Kirtland include five H-1, three CH-3E, three HH-3E, four CH-53A, four MH-53J, six UH-60J, four HC-130H, and four HC-130E. So, as you can see, the maintenance folks must be able to support not only five different weapon systems but a considerable variance in those systems as well. The end result is the line maintenance troop has to be more versatile than in the past in order to meet the wing's requirements and keep topnotch airframes on the flight line.

One of, if not the, most challenging course of instruction offered to both fixed and rotary wing students is the green world of night vision goggles (NVG). The rationale behind this intensive NVG program was explained by Colonel Holland, "The reason it's important that everyone be

exposed to NVGs, in whatever airplane they're comfortable in, is it becomes one less variable whenever they go into the Pave Low or Pave Hawk. We are trying to expand our SOF orientation throughout the entire wing to make sure we're going to be able to put out that 'top quality' graduate to meet the needs of both special operations and combat rescue."

I was given the opportunity to try a set of NVGs on an HC-130 refueling flight where Capt. Karl B. Major, 1550FTS/SE, further explained the value of the goggles. According to Captain Major the primary mission of the HC-130 is low level ingress/egress into a threat area and, "In an actual situation we probably would be doing it at night, for complete avoidance. Our job is to go in undetected and leave undetected; that means avoidance of everything!" The NVGs make a significant difference in the crew's ability to accomplish the mission. They do work, and they certainly do make a difference.

There is a down side to the amount of night flying required to meet the unit's goals. The individual crewmember is exposed to some significant juggling of his sleep cycle and, as put by Capt. John (Scott) Campbell, 1550 CCTW/FSO, "You just can't turn your circadian rhythm on and off; by the time you adapt, the night flying cycle is over! In addition, we have a small number of airframes and often only one or two guys who are qualified to do the training and the students must graduate, so scheduling can be atrocious. We put a lot of pressure on the instructors to generate quality training, and to be very creative, to pull the whole training scenario together."

So how does the unit handle the inherent problems of night

orientation and a schoolhouse environment? Here again, Captain Campbell had some insight, "There is a heightened safety awareness and attitude here to not force anything; if anyone on the crew has a problem, they don't hesitate to bring it up. Our crews are not intimidated; if they want to question operations on something or have a discussion about an interpretation, they don't hesitate. There's a lot of experience here and they feel comfortable in the atmosphere that's been established. We have a strong flying corps."

Still, it takes more than extra effort on the part of rated personnel to establish and maintain a safe working environment. It takes a safety awareness throughout the wing, which is probably why one of the first things Colonel Holland did upon assuming command was to issue this safety directive to all men and women of the 1550th, "If you can fix it, fix it! If you can't fix it, get it to the people who can!" This "can do" attitude isn't limited to the 1550th but can be found throughout Kirtland, as demonstrated by the outstanding support the unit ground safety program receives from the 1606 ABW. As Colonel Holland stated, "There are two MAC wings here; all our support comes from the 1606th ABW; we're partners; we do this together."

This partnership mirrors Kirtland's relationship with the city of Albuquerque. According to Colonel Holland, "We're getting a lot of super support from the community. For example, we have drop zones that are donated to us. We have a memorandum of agreement between us and the individual land owner. They just donate the land, which shows the relationship we have with the community. They want us here, and they want us doing the tax-

payers some good!"

Kirtland's relationship with Albuquerque is a two-way street. The base has been able to provide local rescue support to the civilian population. This was demonstrated on 18 June when a MH-53J NVG training sortie was diverted to rescue an injured hiker trapped in a steep canyon in the Pecos mountains.

What does the future look like for 1550th? Among future plans is continued support of the exchange officer program, where highly experienced pilots from NATO countries are stationed at Kirtland. This allows the 1550th to gain insight and technique while at the same time exposing our NATO allies to mission capability not available at their home country. The wing also plans to continue interfacing with the operational units who supply the student body as much as possible. This interface insures the user is happy with the school graduate. If not, the 1550th examines the programs to find what's needed to meet the user's requirements. Major Johnson pointed out that, "We are driven by the user, instead of the user being driven by us!"

The wing is also anxiously awaiting the arrival of the MH-60G Pave Hawk, which will arrive this fall. This helicopter was designed specifically for special operations and will also be the mainstay of the combat rescue inventory and, according to Colonel Holland, "Probably for the first time in our history, we have built an airplane to do the mission of combat rescue. In the past we've taken an existing airframe, such as the Jolly Green and, without putting a lot of sophistication into it, went out and did the job. Now we've got an airplane that was designed to do it!"

I can assure you, the 1550th does do its job. ☺