

301st AIR REFUELING SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

301st Transport Squadron constituted, 4 Jun 1943

Activated, 21 Jun 1943

Disbanded, 1 Dec 1943

301st Air Refueling Squadron, Medium

301st Transport Squadron reconstituted and consolidated with 301st Air Refueling Squadron,
Medium 19 Sep 1985

Redesignated 301st Air Refueling Squadron, Heavy

STATIONS

Sookerating Apt, Assam, India

Barksdale AFB, LA, 7 Nov 1949-1 Jul 1962

Lockbourne AFB, Ohio

DEPLOYED STATIONS

Lakenheath, England, 17 May 1950-28 Nov 1950

ASSIGNMENTS

29th Transport Group

4238th Strategic Wing, 15 Apr 1958

WEAPON SYSTEMS

KB-29M
KC-97F
KC-97G
KC-135A

COMMANDERS

LTC William L. Orris, #1950
LTC Lewis J. Wright
LTC Daniel L. Sjodin, #@1954

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

Approved, 9 Aug 1974

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The KB-29s began arriving at the 301st in 1949, and by year's end had become functional — "operational" would be too strong a term. The tankers were organized into a new squadron, the 301st Air Refueling Squadron, which was activated in March 1949. The troops had little guidance on how to accomplish the refueling, only a one-half page "manual," so Harry Field of the refueling squadron and Pat Shinn of the 32d Bomb Squadron set up the procedures. Around 20 December the Unit's Commander, Colonel Harris Rogner, ordered that some fuel be transferred before the end of the year. The incentive was that the crews had to keep flying through the holidays until they had transferred the fuel. The two men made their first hookup on 22 December and maintained contact for thirty-five minutes. Just before Christmas, they were able to transfer five hundred to one thousand pounds of fuel. By March 1950, 301st bombers were successfully refueled on 75 percent of their attempts. The tanker unit was affectionately called the "Ape Squadron" as the KB-29s appeared to have tails when they transferred fuel. All of the tankers had nose art that featured apes as the central figures.

The tankers were key in the February 1950 cold-weather deployment of the 301st to Goose Bay, Labrador. This move stemmed from SAC's desire that all of its medium-bomb units equipped for refueling rotate through Goose Bay for one week's training to acclimatize them to

operations in extremely cold conditions. After an Eighth Air Force unit completed this training in January, the 301st sent five tankers, which remained the entire three weeks, as well as five bombers and crews from each bomb squadron in succession for a week each. Despite the severe cold, especially for the Louisiana-based airmen, there were no serious problems. The bomber crews flew one or two missions over northern Canada and in all, the Unit accomplished sixty-four of sixty-eight attempted refueling hookups.

The Wing made its first overseas deployment with the refueling squadron in May 1950, scheduled as a three-month TDY to Great Britain. An advance party departed Barksdale on 2 May 1950. The 32d Bomb Squadron, 301st Air Refueling Squadron, and Headquarters went to Lakenheath, while the 352d and 353d Bomb Squadrons went to Sculthorpe. The main body of aircraft arrived in England between 15 and 21 May, flying their first mission on the twenty-second. As usual, the majority flew via the Azores, while at least four bombers took the northern route by way of Iceland. The 301st sent 1,360 officers and enlisted men to Britain, leaving only 359 behind at Barksdale. One plane did not make it. Around midnight on 17 May, a KB-29 with one prop feathered attempted to land at Lajes, Azores. To complicate matters, the weather was bad, with thunderstorms, 500-foot ceilings, and high winds. The pilot, First Lieutenant James Garrington, attempted to go around but lost control and crashed into the salvage yard next to the runway. All sixteen men aboard the tanker were killed in the fiery crash. The 301st honed its refueling skills during this TDY, with both aerial training and ostensibly with classes at the British school. 'Ostensibly' because the American crew regarded the three or four-day British school as a boondoggle since it gave only a history of air refueling and discussed the probe and drogue method, which SAC did not accept at the time. In August the 301st Refueling Squadron went to Burtonwood. This "three-month TDY" to Britain that was scheduled to end in August was extended indefinitely, much to the detriment of morale to both the men in England and their families in Louisiana. Despite trips to the Continent, the marginal living conditions at the two British bases, as well as the uncertainty of the return date, made for a bad situation. One problem the airmen encountered was clothing as the troops had brought along only summer and lightweight gear for the 90-day stay — along with the TDY extension came cold weather. Finally an aircraft arrived carrying new blue USAF uniforms. Finally on 28 November, eleven 301st KB-29s began the homeward flight to Barksdale and on the next three succeeding days the three bomb squadrons left England. By 15 December all 301st aircraft were safely home.

Earlier that same year, five crews from the air-refueling squadron took part in a special operation in Korea, codenamed operation HIGHTIDE. This was a combat test of aerial refueling of fighters using a different and simpler refueling system. Five 301st KB-29s went to Tarrant Rushton Airfield, Dorset, England, in February 1952, where they were fitted with probe and drogue refueling equipment. In this procedure, later used by USAF tactical aircraft and USN aircraft, the tanker extended a 40 to 50-foot fuel hose, with a pan or basket-shaped cone at the end, out from the tanker's tail. The fighters, RAF Gloucester Meteors in the British tests and in Korea F-84s, with refueling probes (nozzles) in their wing tanks, made the hook up. The five crews returned to Barksdale briefly in March before departing for Yokota Air Base, Japan, and arriving there on 26 March. The aircraft and crews became part of Detachment Four

commanded by Major Donald Goss (301st), under the administrative and logistical control of the 98th Bomb Wing, and the operational control of the 39th Air Division.

The 301st aircrews and aircraft supplemented resources already in the theater, giving the Detachment nine KB-29s. Operation HIGHTIDE was divided into three phases: the first from mid-April through mid-May practiced air-to-air refueling, the second from late May through early July provided a combat test, and the third ending in September consisted of two special missions. The tanker crews flew their first mission on 11 April 1952. The fighters in the first two phases (116th Fighter Bomber Group based at Misawa) had their tanks topped off, the transfer requiring about three to four minutes and perhaps involving seven hundred gallons. After overcoming problems of inadequate operational training, Detachment Four flew forty-one refueling sorties in Phase I and logged 261 hours of flying time. During the four combat missions in Phase II, the tankers flew fifty-one sorties, transferred over ninety-five thousand gallons of fuel to 174 fighters, and flew 343 hours. The third phase was flown by fighters of the 31st Fighter Escort Wing and consisted of two simulated missions, one air defense and one strike. In September the five crews returned to Barksdale without their aircraft.

In July 1951 the Command received its first Boeing KC-97. The 301st ceased operation with the KB-29 in May-June 1953. That summer 301st refueling crews went to West Palm Beach, Florida, for a 60-day TDY to undergo transition to the KC-97.

301st Air Refueling Squadron visited North Africa for fifteen days, 14 June through 2 July 1952, staging out of Sidi Slimane, French Morocco.

During the summer of 1952 the 301st lost a KB-29. On 25 August Captain Howard Evans attempted an engine-out land-in at Barksdale, drifted left, and elected to go around. As he added power, the aircraft cocked to one side. Flying about ten feet from the ground, the tanker approached a tree line. As the pilot attempted to pull up over it, the aircraft flipped over onto its back and crashed. All eight onboard died.

The refueling squadron had its full complement of tankers in August 1953, and by 10 December the 301st was fully equipped with forty-five B-47s and twenty KC-97s.

The 301st Air Refueling Squadron went to Goose Bay, Labrador, for a 20-day TDY in August 1954 supporting the 320th Bomb Wing's move from March AFB, California, to Great Britain. That same month one KC-97 and seventeen B-47s participated in atomic tests. Then in November 1954 the 301st, along with the 320th, participated in an exercise at Thule, Greenland. In contrast to the earlier northern deployment, this one was not quite as smooth for the fifteen tankers and fifteen bombers scheduled for the exercise. Fourteen KC-97s left Barksdale on 12 November, but half were delayed at Goose Bay for maintenance, and yet all but one were in place in Thule on the fourteenth. The B-47s were delayed for a day by bad weather at Thule before launching on 16 November. Twelve bombers had no problems, but three had to land at Goose Bay with refueling difficulties due to a boom operator's inability to accomplish a night refueling, a scattered tanker formation, and tanker equipment problems.

The B-47s were less hampered at Thule, although one from the 32d was unable to stop on the snow-covered runway and slid off the end, fortunately without serious consequences. The 301st returned to Barksdale on 18 November.

One side light on the Thule TDY illustrates the abilities of the 301st's maintenance personnel. One KC-97 was blown into another at Thule damaging the fabric elevator. Repairs appeared doubtful due to the dark and cold, and especially the concern that the dope on the fabric could not properly cure. When the maintenance troops learned this was the aircraft scheduled to return them to Barksdale, they rigged up heat lamps and made the repairs overnight. As a maintenance officer later remarked: "Our maintenance personnel were the best in the Air Force. When the chips were down, it was amazing the things they could do."

The Unit deployed to Goose Bay in July 1955 for a 45-day temporary stay, and this move also experienced difficulties. Goose Bay proved deficient in maintenance and communication facilities. In addition, the KC-97s had prop problems that grounded all but three of the squadron's twenty tankers at the end of July until late August when replacement props arrived.⁹³ Weak prop blades were a serious difficulty for the tankers. In 1956 the KC-97 prop situation became critical, and in 1957 SAC lost five tankers and thirty-nine lives due to in-flight prop failures. The Command changed from hollow, steel prop blades to aluminum ones in November 1958; yet, KC-97 prop problems continued. The tankers also suffered turbocharger and landing gear problems in 1959 and 1960.

In April 1956 the 301st Air Refueling Squadron deployed the maximum number of available tankers, eighteen KC-97s, to Goose Bay for a 60-day TDY. The tankers returned in the fall of 1956 in response to the Suez crisis when SAC concentrated its tanker force on the northern bases. On 24 November 1956 a 301st KC-97 was completely destroyed in a snowy-takeoff accident at Goose Bay. With low torque on all engines, Captain Clifford Rushing aborted the takeoff, the tanker ran off the runway, struck a road and sheared off the landing gear, caught fire, and burned. Three of the crew sustained major injuries and three others minor ones.

Deployment of 301 AREFS to Lajes AB, Azores for 90/day period that began as of 1 Jul 60. Redeployed to Barksdale 6 through 13 Oct 60.

301 AREFS deployed one KC-97 and two crews on reflex action at Goose AB. 1961 and 1962

301 AREFS scheduled for inactivation in Sep 61, with some phase out activity started in Apr 1961

301 AREFS terminated deployment of aircraft and personnel for Reflex obligations in preparations for inactivation on 1 Jul 62.

301 AREFS officially inactivated on 1 Jul 62

It was on 5 July 1966 that there occurred one of the most remarkable of these feats which General Tyler referred to as the "Peanuts Flight." This was a flight of four F-105s which had penetrated deep into North Vietnam and got into a fight with MIG aircraft, consuming a good deal more fuel than expected. In response to an emergency call, a tanker headed for them at maximum speed. When the tanker closed in, the F-105s had between 200 to 500 pounds of fuel remaining in their tanks. Two of the pilots, in fact, were just about resigned to abandoning their aircraft, but were talked into trying to hookup. The tanker hooked up first with No. 4 who by then had only 100 pounds of fuel on board. So desperate was he that he made the hookup in a left hand 30 degree bank and took on just enough fuel to keep going. By this time the lead F-105's fuel gauges indicated "empty," so the tanker gave him a token load. In this manner the tanker rotated with all four fighters, first giving each just enough to keep going until the others got a share and then providing sufficient fuel to all for a safe return to home base. This KC-135 surely saved all four valuable aircraft and very probably the lives of their crews as well. Its crew was T-89 from the 301st Air Refueling Squadron, under command of Captain Howard G. Stalnecker.

In the mid-1970s SAC began an adjustment of its tanker fleet, and in 1971 reduced the 301st from thirty to twenty aircraft. The 91st Air Refueling Squadron was inactivated and transferred to McConnell AFB, Kansas; ten of the aircraft went to Grissom AFB, Indiana, and the remaining five to the 32d, the 301st's remaining squadron. Then in October 1973 when SAC increased the aircraft authorization of the 301st from twenty to thirty, the 301st received KG-135s and crews from both McCoy AFB, Florida, and Westover AFB, Massachusetts. To handle the increase, the 301st Wing organized a second squadron and activated the 301st Air Refueling Squadron on 30 September 1973. Two years later the 301st Wing was reduced from thirty aircraft and forty-five crews to twenty-two tankers and twenty-eight crews. Obviously two squadrons were not required to handle this reduced force, so on 31 December 1975 the USAF deactivated the 301st Air Refueling Squadron.

In July 1974, Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger directed SAC to transfer 128 KC-135 tankers to the Air Reserve Forces in order to equip 16 eight UE units. Three units of the Air Force Reserve and 13 units of the Air National Guard would be involved in this program, which would extend over a four-year period. In the event of wartime mobilization, SAC would gain control of these squadrons. The transfer of aircraft actually began on 16 April 1975, when the 301st Air Refueling Squadron, Rickenbacker Air Force Base, Ohio, transferred the first KC-135, Serial Number 57-1507, to the 160th Air Refueling Group, also located at Rickenbacker. The 160th began operating on an eight UE basis on 1 July 1975. While these actions were taking place, SAC had inactivated two 15 UE air refueling squadrons: the 922d at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, on 30 September as part of the phaseout of SAC activities at that base, and the 301st at Rickenbacker on 31 December as part of the Air Reserve Forces program. Redistribution of the 14 UE element remaining after these squadrons were inactivated was scattered among several units. This action, along with other aircraft authorization realignments, created eight different categories of squadrons, each with a distinct UE. 1975

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

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