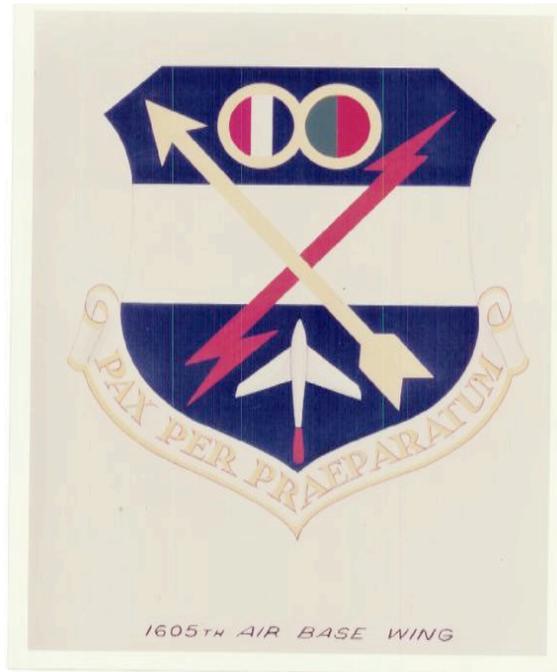


1605 AIR BASE WING



MISSION

LINEAGE

1605 Air Base Wing

STATIONS

Lajes AB, Azores

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

On 11 August 1952, Headquarters Atlantic Division initiated correspondence to Headquarters, Military Air Transport Service requesting that the 1605th Air Base Group at Lajes be permitted to enlarge to wing status. The justification for this was that the group organization was unrealistic and inadequate to effectively accomplish the mission of the Azores Air Transport Station (as Lajes was referred to). Headquarters Atlantic Division believed that the location of the group in a foreign country involved problems of liaison with local government and military activities and that the prestige of the command would be greatly enhanced by the establishment of a wing. Permission was granted and on 1 February 1953, the 1605th Air Base Group was redesignated as the 1605th Air Base Wing.

On 1 January 1980, an earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale struck Terceira Island. Damage to Lajes Field was minimal, however there was extensive destruction to Portuguese communities throughout the island. Military personnel responded to the local crisis with food, shelter, equipment and manpower. The 1605th Air Base Wing Crisis Action Team became the focus for disaster relief operations by all U.S. forces and a coordination point with Portuguese military and civil authorities. Teams of U.S. Air Force, Army, Navy, civilian and dependent personnel were organized and dispatched into the communities hardest hit by the quake. These teams were engaged in clearing roads, digging through rubble and helping Portuguese families move their belongings to protected shelters. The base set up the gymnasium as a reception point for displaced Portuguese and American families. Dining facilities went on a 24-hour schedule feeding earthquake victims and emergency relief volunteers. Temporary housing was provided on base in dormitories. By 15 January, 150 families were housed in base facilities. Heavy equipment was used extensively by Civil Engineers to supplement the Portuguese machines that were clearing roads, moving rubble, toppling dangerous structures and in other ways facilitating the emergency operations. Base civil engineers provided generators to restore power to the Angra hospital, Angra bakery, and the Praia telephone system. For two weeks, U.S. forces assisted disaster recovery until Portuguese agencies could effectively take over the relief efforts.

The 1980 earthquake was just one of the many relief efforts made by American personnel in the history of Lajes Field. In 1963, six weeks of severe wind prevented Portuguese supply ships from reaching Santa Maria Island. The 1605th Air Base Wing coordinated to divert a C-124 to Lajes where it was loaded with five tons of food. The C-124 then airdropped the food to Santa Maria helping the residents survive until the next shipment arrived. In 1964, a series of earthquakes struck the island of Sao Jorge destroying homes and leaving thousands of people homeless. Many Sao Jorge residents made their way to Terceira Island. The 1605th Air Base Wing provided blankets, mattresses, pillows, and sheets to Terceira's hospitals and relief centers. Other Military Air Transport Service (MATs) and Air National Guard (ANG) units flew in clothing from California

to Lajes. The clothing was loaded onto U.S. Army port landing craft that delivered the clothing to Sao Jorge.

As Lajes entered the 1980s, a change in the organizational structure of the Wing took place. On 1 January 1982, the 1605th Air Base Wing was redesignated the 1605th Military Airlift Support Wing. The major change involved reassigning the Air Terminal Operations section, formerly under the 1605th Transportation Squadron, and the Wing Command Post and Station Operations sections to Aircraft Maintenance Squadron and redesignating that squadron the 1605th Military Airlift Support Squadron. This move would also take Lajes away from being an en route aircraft maintenance facility to an en route support facility. However, station air traffic continued along at a steady rate. Transiting aircraft, crews and personnel participating in exercises such as Bright Star and the annual REFORGER (Return of Forces to Germany) were still making their way through Lajes.

Lajes supported the massive airlift during the Gulf war. On the first day of the deployment over 90 aircraft transited Lajes. Strategic Air Command staged a provisional tanker wing at Lajes to support the airlift. At the height of the operation a peak of 33 tanker aircraft and 600 troops deployed to Lajes. At one point during Operation DESERT SHIELD there was a maximum of 56 aircraft on the ramp – which included SAC, MAC, Guard, Reserve, Marine, Navy, and several fighter aircraft drop-ins. Despite having the airfield close to capacity, not one aircraft was refused landing or service. During the entire Gulf War, Lajes provided quality en route support for over 12,000 aircraft operations. Military Airlift Support Squadron personnel handled over 15,000 tons of essential cargo needed for the war effort. With the second largest fuel disbursement facility in the Air Force, Lajes pumped five times the normal amount of fuel. Fuels personnel issued over 40 million gallons of petroleum products without a major safety incident or delay in aircraft departures. Throughout the campaign, civil engineering personnel worked over 9,450 man-hours to maintain an antiquated, 35-year-old hydrant refueling system. Throughout this period over 75,000 personnel passed through Lajes Field. Over 10,000 of them were billeted during both operations. To accommodate them all, the base gymnasium was converted into a 330-bed overflow facility. Services personnel ensured all transitory aircrews and troop movements bound for the Gulf region had a clean and comfortable place to sleep. The in-flight kitchen prepared over 18,000 flight meals and set up a 24-hour dining service operation for crews on call. The 600 deployed personnel at Lajes were treated as part of Team Lajes. The challenges of Operations DESERT/STORM were met head on with determination and pride that far exceeded expectations. The 1605th Military Airlift Support Wing received the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award for its support of operations during the Gulf War. The Lajes U.S. base command changed from the 1605th Military Airlift Support Wing to the 65th Support Wing in January 1992.

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.
Unit yearbook. *Lajes AB, Azores, 1984*. Walsworth Publishing Co. Marcelline, MO. 1984.