

Oklahoma Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve partnership ensures

Aeromedical evacuation squadron members from five Air National Guard units load medical equipment on a KC-135 Stratotanker, from the 507th Air Refueling Wing, Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma, before completing in-flight training scenarios at Tinker Air Force Base near Oklahoma City, March 27, 2018. The Multiple Aircraft Training Opportunity Program (MATOP) was created by the 137th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron from Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City in 2012. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Tyler Woodward)

WILL ROGERS AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, Okla. -- Two Oklahoma units, one Air National Guard and the other U.S. Air Force Reserve, used their shared legacy of teamwork and cooperation to make an ANG-wide aeromedical evacuation exercise run successfully for the third year in a row.

The 137th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron of the 137th Special Operations Wing at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City hosted MATOP, or the Multiple Aircraft Training Opportunity Program, Mar. 27-30.

Historically, the unit has hosted the event for the past two years and once before in 2012, allowing Airmen from all nine ANG aeromedical

evacuation squadrons to receive the same training on all three of their primary airframes in a single location.

"It's mainly about getting to see all the airframes at the same time," Lt. Col. Darcy Tate, 137th AES commander and crew evaluator. "The Airmen have the ability to go back and forth between the three and really see the differences. It also allows us to consolidate the training and get more done in a three-day timeframe than you do with a couple days here and there."

However, the success of the event rests on the continuing partnership between the Air National Guard 137th SOW and AFR's 507th Air Refueling Wing from Tinker Air Force Base, right across town in Oklahoma City.

"The 507th is awesome to work with," said Maj. Tiffany Andersen, 137th AES officer in charge and MATOP planner. "They fly with us pretty much whenever we need it. They do early flights, they do late flights, and they're very supportive of MATOP, especially this year. We reached out to them and they said, 'Yeah, we'll do whatever you need.' They even opened up a static plane just for egress training."

The 507th flew three KC-135 Stratotanker missions in addition to the static as part of MATOP. For aeromedical evacuation Airmen, the KC-135, along with the C-17 Globemaster III and C-130 Hercules, serves as an integral part of their mission, especially in deployed environments.

"The KC-135 is our primary airframe," said Andersen. "We're the only ones in the guard with such close access to it. It's a high-priority for

other units, and it's eagerly sought after for flights because the other units don't get to work with it often."

With its unique availability for aeromedical evacuation squadrons, the use of the KC-135s during MATOP rests solely on the 507th, and the use of those aircraft is based largely on the two units' shared history.

In 2005, the 137th and 507th comprised the first ever Air Reserve Component association between the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Command, which meant the two wings used the KC-135s from the 507th while the 137th's maintenance and operations groups flew and maintained them.

Though the 137th SOW has changed to a special operations mission with a new aircraft since then, the close partnership between the two units still stands.

"We're neighbors," said Col. Douglas Gullion, 507th ARW commander. "The 137th helps us out a lot with civil engineering training, because they own equipment that we don't. We have aircraft that we can take aeromedical evacuation crews on, and the 137th doesn't. It just seems like a natural fit and a way to get both of our missions accomplished."

For aeromedical evacuation Airmen, MATOP provides integral training for the entire career field, allowing them to care for and treat simulated patients in the air while anticipating the complications of flight and changing conditions.

"It allows them to get hands-on during a much less stressful time," said

Tate. "They are able to work with the planes and equipment before they head out to work with them in the real world."

Targeting all nine of the Air National Guard aeromedical evacuation squadrons, MATOP and the partnerships that make it happen will continue to be an important part in the training of Guard members.

"The 507th made MATOP possible, honestly," said Andersen. "They're the ones that made it happen. They've been fantastic."