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by Tech. Sgt. Jeffrey Williams
934th Airlift Wing Public Affairs

1/28/2009 - **Minneapolis-St. Paul** -- The 27th Aerial Port Squadron's participation in the Denton Amendment program reached an important milestone in December when it processed four pallets of humanitarian goods onto a KC-10 Extender aerial refueling aircraft, bound for the Caribbean island of Dominica. The mission completes the 15th year of the squadron's participation in the program, in which 5,230,746 pounds of goods were loaded onto 182 different flights.

The first Denton shipment occurred on Dec. 3, 1993 when four pallets bound for Honduras were flown to Klamath Falls, Ore., on a C-130E flown by the 934th Airlift Wing's 96th Airlift Squadron.

The program was created in 1985 when U.S. Senator Jeremiah Denton introduced an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 that allows donors to use space available on U.S. military cargo planes to transport humanitarian good and equipment to countries in need.

Senator Denton was a retired Navy admiral who served eight years in the Hanoi Hilton when his A-6 Intruder was shot down over North Vietnam during a bombing mission in Thanh Hoa Province on July 18, 1965. After the conclusion of his 34-year naval career, he ran for the U.S. Senate in Alabama, and served for one six-year term from 1981 to 1987.

The Denton program is administered by the U.S. Agency for International Development, commonly known as USAID, and has oversight by the U.S. Department of State, which reviews and approves the applications from non-governmental organization donors.

The Denton flights help the Aerial Port Squadron and aircrews meet their training needs each year, said Chief Master Sgt. Dale Place, 27th APS air transportation superintendent. "The missions we use for Denton helps the whole Air Force," he said. "We had four KC-10s come in this past year to fly five training missions. They have to qualify in having certain types of cargo flown aboard, and this is training they normally wouldn't get."

"When we do Denton cargo, it encompasses every functional area for Aerial Port except for passengers. Our cargo guys build pallets and process paperwork, the ramp guys get the experience loading various types of aircraft, our special handling Airmen inspect for hazardous materials, our air transportation operations center personnel get more training in flight coordination and loadmaster interaction, while our load planners create the load plans necessary for proper shipment," Chief Place added.

The 27th APS role in facilitating the transportation of Denton cargo originated in 1993 with Chief Place's predecessor, Chief Master Sgt. Michael Dressen, who retired last year. "I don't know who he contacted or how he coordinated it back then, but if it wouldn't have been for Chief Dressen, we wouldn't have done this," Chief Place said. "He gets a lot of credit for getting our involvement off the ground."

The 27th Aerial Port Squadron has processed goods as small as crutches and wheelchairs, to larger items like fire trucks and ambulances, Chief Place said. "We've loaded hospital beds, crutches, medical supplies, fire trucks, ambulances, school desks and skids of clothing over the years. Because we have to palletize all of this, it takes a little longer. We get pretty inventive. Try putting 200 wheelchairs on a pallet, they just don't fit right, so we have to become inventive."

Once a non-governmental organization applies for transport through USAID and gets the approvals from the State Department, the Department of Defense Denton Program office at Charleston Air Force Base, S.C., notifies the different aerial port squadrons on shipment coordination.

"The folks at Charleston are really good to work with," the Chief explained. "They do a great job in moving things through and not letting it sit in their yard too long. They coordinate everything so we are in place and ready a couple days before the aircraft arrive so it's all a one-time deal when they get here."

While the Denton flights averaged once a month in 2008, they normally average one flight per quarter each year. The squadron has loaded eight different types of cargo aircraft including the C-130, C-141, C-5, C-17, KC-135, KC-10 and a few others.

The first C-17A to land at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport occurred on Sept. 13, 1999 when it picked up 25 skids of clothing and medical supplies, through the Denton program, bound for Soto Cano, Honduras in support of relief efforts when Hurricane Mitch ravaged the area.

"The idea that we are helping people out in other countries with stuff that we no longer need is extremely rewarding," Chief Place said. "From an aerial port perspective, it offers us great training as well. There are absolutely no drawbacks in being involved with this program whatsoever."

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Photos



Airman 1st Class Christopher Graybill, 27th Aerial Port Squadron, unloads donated Denton cargo which will be transported to Dominica. (Courtesy Photo)

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