

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WR-ALC AND ROBINS AFB

Continued from [A Brief History of WR-ALC and Robins AFB 2001 version](#)

Robins AFB, Georgia, like all U.S. military installations, was deeply affected by the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Security measures so restricted access to the Base that for the first few days long lines of traffic stretched for miles and many members of the workforce were not able to even get to their job sites. However, as they have done since the Base opened in 1941 the military and civilian leadership and personnel adapted and overcame. Like the rest of the nation they soon took up their role in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) surging repair materials and spares and pushing forward sustainment and support operations for U.S. forces going in harm's way.

Between 7 October 2001 and 18 March 2002, they performed remarkable service for Allied forces during Operation *Enduring Freedom*, the liberation of Afghanistan. They exceeded expectations even through a change of command when on 11 January 2002 Major General (later Lieutenant General) Donald Wetekam took over for Major General Dennis Haines. This performance continued during Operation *Iraqi Freedom* from 19 March to 1 May 2003 as Allied forces destroyed the evil regime of the dictator Saddam Hussein and freed the people of Iraq.

Since that time Afghan and Iraqi rebuilding efforts have also been supported by the men and women of Robins AFB. Even after the capture of Hussein on 14 December 2003, underground resistance has continued in both nations. However, the U.S. has remained determined to complete its nation-building effort. To this end, Robins has continued to play a vital role in this noble cause.

To better achieve this wartime sustainment process, AFMC leadership decided to reorganize the entire Command along more military lines. In an effort to "Blue" the Command, the Air Logistic Centers were divided into new unit organizations that changed directorates into wings, divisions into groups and branches into squadrons. Led by the current WR-ALC Commander Major General Michael Collings, the Center made these changes beginning in the second half of 2004 and culminating in early 2005. Indeed, this Center led the way in the reorganization converting its units first and obtaining its new lineage/honors, heraldry and unit histories first. Reaching back into the

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illustrious history of the Air Force the Center reactivated World War II and Cold War wings to designate the new units.

In 2005, the WR-ALC had four Wings—the 78th Air Base Wing (78ABW), 330th Aircraft Sustainment Wing (330ASW), 402 Maintenance Wing (402MXW) and 542nd Combat Sustainment Wing (542CSW). Even as the reorganization went into effect, the Base survived another round of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC). In May 2005, Robins AFB did not appear on the closure list. Even though there will be changes with personnel at Robins AFB sustaining some new weapons systems and equipment and the make up of the units may be different, the men and women at Robins AFB will always fulfill their mission—“to keep them flying.”

By 2010, the 330 ASW and 542 CSW had merged into a single unit eventually being re-designated the 330 Aeronautical Support Directorate. In addition, much of the parts workload from the old 542 CSW was placed under the control of 638th Global Logistic Support Center headquartered at Scott AFB, Illinois even though most of its workforce remained in place at Robins AFB.

As for the RAFB Museum, while Pat Bartness remained the head of the Museum Board, Ken Emery now served as Museum Director. In 2009, a magnificent new building opened featuring the history of World War II.

In addition, much of the parts workload from the old 542 CSW was placed under the control of 638th Global Logistic Support Center headquartered at Scott AFB, Illinois even though most of its workforce remained in place at Robins AFB. In the summer of 2010, the US Marines arrived. The details of this unit were as follows.

Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773 (HMLA-773) is a component of Marine Air Group 49 (MAG-49) and the 4th Marine Air Wing (4 MAW). Their nickname is “Red Dogs” and their motto is “Fit Via Vi” or “the way is made by labor.” The current commander is Lt. Col. Paul C. Fagan, “Divot.” It has been active from September 1958 – August 1962; April 1968 – September 1969; and September 1971 – Present.

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Emblem: **Colors:** Red and Gold are the colors of the USMC. Black is for the night when most 773-HMLA missions are flown and executed. It should be noted that red is a combat color which is what this unit does—thus, the Red Dogs. **Elements:** The Bulldog with a chain around its neck is the traditional symbol of the USMC. The targeting device above the Bulldog is emblematic of the CAS, Reconnaissance, Humanitarian, and Aerial Interdiction missions which the 773-HMLA conducts. The words on the collar are the motto of the unit “Fit Vita Vi.” The Scrolls contain the unit designation and the squadron nickname.

Role: Light/Attack squadron for CAS, Assault Support, Air Interdiction and Aerial Reconnaissance.

History: HMLA-773 is a Marine Corps helicopter squadron consisting of AH-1W Super Cobra attack helicopters and UH-1N Huey utility helicopters. The squadron is based at Naval Air Station Atlanta, Georgia. They operate under the command of MAG-49 and the 4 MAW. Due to a re-organization within Marine aviation, the squadron is set to move to Robins Air Force Base, Georgia, on 23 June 2010.

The squadron was originally commissioned in September 1958 as Marine Helicopter Transport Squadron 773 (HMR-773) at Naval Air Station Grosse Ile, Michigan and assigned to the Marine Air Reserve Training Command. They operated the Piasecki HUP-2 Retriever which were shared with the Naval Reserve. On 1 April 1962, the squadron was re-designated Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 773 (HMM-773). Four months later, on 31 August the squadron was deactivated.

On 15 April 1968, HMM-773 was reactivated at Naval Air Station Los Alamitos and assigned to Marine Aircraft Group 46 of the 4 MAW. The squadron's personnel and aircraft came from her sister squadron HMM-764. They both flew HUS-1 Sea Horses. This version of the HMM-773 was short-lived and the squadron was deactivated in September 1969.

On 1 September 1971, Marine Attack Helicopter Squadron 773 (HMA-773) was stood up at Marine Corps Air Station El Toro. The squadron was assigned AH-1G Cobras, many of which had seen action with Marine squadrons in Vietnam. HMA-773 relocated to NAS

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Atlanta, Georgia during June 1976, absorbing the personnel of HML-765 which had just been deactivated. In late 1978, HMA-773 transitioned to the twin engine AH-1J Sea Cobras which they operated for the next fourteen years.

In November 1990, HMA-773 was the first reserve helicopter squadron to be activated and deployed to the Persian Gulf during Operation Desert Shield/Storm. While embarked aboard the USS New Orleans and USS Tripoli, the squadron distinguished itself with mine sweeping escort and combat missions. In recognition of their exemplary combat achievements members of the HMA-773 received the Navy Unit Commendation.

In the fall of 1992, the squadron received eight, state of the art AH-1W Super Cobras. In November 1993, HMA-773 began receiving UH-1Ns and personnel from other disestablished units. In October 1994, HMA-773 reorganized and re-equipped with the addition of the UH-1N utility helicopter, pilots, and personnel from HML-776, NAS Glenview, Illinois. Having re-designated as a Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773, the squadron now mirrored the active duty HMLA structure and enabled rapid total force integration for current and future combat and contingency operations.

Since reorganizing, the "Red Dogs" of HMLA-773 have deployed on numerous counter narcotic operations throughout the United States, the Caribbean, and the West Indies. In May 1995 the Squadron deployed to the island nation of Antigua for the first in a series of "Weed eater" marijuana destruction missions. They have further developed their eradication tactics on the islands of St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, and Nassau-Bahamas. HMLA-773 counter-narcotics missions in the United States have included joint operations with the Army, Coast Guard and several US Law Enforcement Agencies in Kingsville, Texas, El Paso, Texas, Naco, Arizona, Palm Beach, Florida, and El Centro, California. In the space of two years, the Red Dogs aided in the destruction of over \$20 billion worth of illegal narcotics.

In 2002, HMLA-773 and HMLA-773 Det A based at NAS Belle Chasse, Louisiana, combined in order to form one complete HMLA squadron that was capable of fulfilling any assigned HMLA mission in the Marine Corps. The current squadron organization is structured to maintain 2/3 of the squadron at NAS Atlanta and 1/3 of the squadron at NAS Belle Chasse.

Following the 9/11 attacks, the HMLA-773 prepared for the Global War on Terror. The squadron activated in October 2003 and deployed to Bagram, Afghanistan, for further deployment along the international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Since then, the Red Dogs have been flying combat missions in support of Combined Joint Task Force 180/76. They have instituted Operation Red Dog, in which the Marines and Sailors of the unit gather school supplies and other humanitarian items and distribute them to the local population.

The squadron was the subject of exclusive documentaries for the Military Channel and ABC Nightline in Afghanistan during its deployment there. This film, "Task Force Red Dog" captured the squadron at war in a way that no other documentaries had done on

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helicopters in recent memory. Filmmakers Richard Mackenzie and William Skinner spent six months with the Marines of HMLA-773 at the front line in Afghanistan.

After 18 months of continuous combat operations in Afghanistan, the squadron deployed to Camp Pendleton, CA in support of Revised Combined Arms Exercise (RCAX) to assist in the preparation of ground forces for duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. During this time, Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, the home to many of the Marines of HMLA-773. The squadron was one of the first military units to arrive in the city for rescue and relief operations.

Beginning in October 2005, the reserve Marines of HMLA-773 began to demobilize and return to civilian life. And in February 2006, HMLA-773 returned to the status of drilling reserve unit. On September 2007, HMLA-773 replaced HMLA-269 in Al Asad Air Base in Iraq for a 6 to 7 month deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

On July 30, 2008, a ground breaking ceremony was held at Robins AFB for the 40,000-square-foot (3,700 m²) hangar that is being constructed for HMLA-773. The hangar was completed in March 2010 at which time the squadron will transfer from its current location at NAS Atlanta. Commander: Lt. Col. Thomas J. Nemeth III to relinquish command to Lt. Col. Michael H. Johnson on 1 July 2010.

Unit Aircraft



UH-1N Huey Utility Helicopter of the 773-HMLA

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AH-1W Super Cobra Helicopter

In spite of the many changes that have affected both the Air Force and Robins AFB, the mission to serve the war fighter has not changed since Robins AFB opened for business as Robins Field in 1942.

Dr. Bill Head