

## CCT - HUMANITARIAN WARRIORS

Compiled using published data in CCT's historical archives  
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In a published report, Air Force combat controllers related how they had landed at the Port-au-Prince airport 24 hours after a devastating 7.0 earthquake. It was chaos. The control tower was damaged and out of commission. Once on the ground, *"We went to see the pilots and we told them, 'Hey, we are Air Force combat controllers. We are taking control of the airport.'"*

**January 13, 2010 – Port-au-Prince, Haiti --** When a devastating earthquake struck Haiti on Tuesday, January 12, 2010, it knocked out the control tower at Port-au-Prince airport. The following day, a team of Air Force special operators reopened the airport — operating it for twelve days until a mobile tower was established and manned.

### The Deployment

Two MC-130Hs from the 15th Special Operations Squadron and multiple teams from the 720th Special Tactics Group deployed to Haiti Wednesday in support of humanitarian operations in Haiti.

These teams brought an array of capabilities with them to the devastated country.

*"Our special tactics teams have many specific capabilities that will allow for them to provide the best possible combination of support to Haiti,"* said Maj. Jason Daniels, 720th Operations Support Squadron director of operations.



### Airfield Operations

*"We are scheduled to be among the first people on the ground over there and we don't know the extent of damage done to the airfield,"* said Major Daniels. *"Our goal is to have the airfield ready to take on full traffic by tonight. We bring our own lights and communication equipment so we are prepared."*

In addition to opening up the International Airport at Port-au-Prince, combat controllers are trained to survey other areas to look for potential airdrop and landing zones so other cargo and personnel can be accepted into the country if required.

*"Every Airman we sent has either recently returned from a deployment, is getting ready for a deployment or both,"* said Major Daniels. *"Our Airmen are motivated to help the people of Haiti."*

### Combat Controllers Crucial

Thanks to a specialized group of Airmen used to working in austere locations, airlift operations in Haiti were possible in the initial days after an earthquake destroyed much of the capital, and since then these Airmen have made the airport one of the busiest in the world.



*"...a fold up table and some chairs in the middle of the infield at the Toussant Ouverture International Airport. No air conditioning. It's hot. It's humid. It's noisy. And rather than directing air strikes on hostile forces in Afghanistan, they're controlling hundreds of flights per day bringing life saving supplies for the people here who need them." (Air Force Photo)*

These FAA-certified combat air traffic controllers are accustomed to working in locations devoid of functioning air traffic control. Equipped and trained to set up and help secure new airfield operations, these Airmen have made aerial resupply missions to Port-au-Prince International Airport possible.

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*"One of our primary jobs here is to take over and set up an airfield in an austere environment and provide air traffic control for follow-on aircraft; it's really just the same as combat operations, except no one is shooting at us," said Staff Sgt. Joshua Craig, a Combat Controller from the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Fla. "We came in, we set up an airfield in an austere environment, and immediately - after 20 minutes - we started bringing in aircraft and aid into Haiti."*

And now, more than a week after the earthquake, they are preparing to turn over air traffic control operations but only after they made the airport the busiest in its history.

*"In the initial days there were so many aircraft and so much humanitarian aid coming in, they compared it to the Berlin Airlift with aircraft every three minutes," Sergeant Craig said. "In first days after we got here there were aircraft coming in every five minutes. Right now, with another airport opening up and the sea port opening up, it's reduced our air traffic."*

Though operations are more streamlined, there are still a number of difficulties these Airmen must overcome.



*An aerial view shows Toussaint L'Ouverture International Airport in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Jan. 23, 2010. Aircraft from all over the world are flying in and out to drop off humanitarian aid and transport people out of the Haiti in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake that struck the country on Jan. 12. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Desiree N. Palacios)*

*"The only problem real now is that the language barrier can be difficult," said Sergeant Craig. "We have pilots from all over the world trying to talk and we're trying to use the standard air traffic control phraseology, but sometimes it's hard to understand pilots from different nations."*

Another difficulty is the limited physical space to park aircraft at an airport that was never designed to handle more than 100 aircraft per day.

*"It's a small airport and we've got so many aircraft coming in it's kind of hard to adequately coordinate with radar approach control - the guys bringing them in, following them out, and holding them in orbit. All of these operations must be sequenced to adjust for the amount of space we have available here at the airport. We're trying to park aircraft on the ramp, in the grass and any other open space we can on the airport."*

*Operating man-pack mission radios, on a "card table," in the grass, next to the runway, Combat Controllers talk to aircraft circling the Toussaint L'Ouverture International Airport in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Jan. 23, 2010. The Airmen are from the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Fla. In the initial days of Operation Unified Response air operations were similar to the Berlin Airlift with aircraft landing every five minutes. Now, aircraft from all over the world are still flying in and out to drop off humanitarian aid and transport people out of the Haiti.*

Though it's difficult to find space for known aircraft, Sergeant Craig and the other Combat Controllers also must find places for aircraft they've never seen before.



*"We get birds in with types that we've never heard of so we have to ask them, 'what's your wingspan, what kind of a bird are you, how fast are you,'" he said.*

With a portable tower now being erected, the Combat Controllers will depart when the tower is up and running. However, Sergeant Craig and his fellow Combat Controllers will bring the replacement controllers up to speed

before departing.

"Once that tower is up we're definitely going to do a handover with the new air traffic controllers," he said. "We're probably going to take no less than 96 hours. The first day we're going to do it and let them watch. The second day they're going to integrate a little bit. The third day we're going to let them do and we're going to watch. The fourth day we're going to let them do it all and we're going to give them a hand if they need it."

Though Sergeant Craig and his fellow Airmen have proven crucial to Operation Unified Response, with the more permanent and capable tower nearly ready it's time for them to abandon their card table in the grass and go to where they are needed next.



"Our job is austere airfields so once they set up towers it's time for us to go," he said.

*Combat controllers talk to aircraft circling the Toussaint L'Ouverture International Airport in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Jan. 23, 2010. The Airmen are from the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Fla. Aircraft from all over the world are flying in and out of the small airport to drop off humanitarian aid and transport people out of the Haiti after the devastating earthquake that hit the nation Jan. 12. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Desiree N. Palacios)*

### After Action Report

Chief Master Sgt. Antonio Travis was one of the first U.S. military members on the ground at the Toussaint L'Ouverture International Airport; arriving only 30 hours after the earthquake and less than 12 hours after the nation's president requested U.S. assistance. The Chief led a combat control team of special tactics Airmen from the 23rd, 21st and 123rd special tactics squadrons.

With his team of combat veterans, Chief Travis orchestrated the largest single-runway operation in history, using hand-held radios to control thousands of aircraft. Their make-shift air traffic control tower was a folding table set up next to the airport's runway.

*Chief Master Sgt. Antonio Travis has been recognized by editors of **TIME Magazine** as one of the 100 most influential people in the world for his efforts after the Haiti earthquake. Chief Travis is shown here with combat controllers (from left) Senior Airman William Barrett, Staff Sgt. Kyle Graman, Staff Sgt. Jose Diaz, Staff Sgt. Joshua Craig, Staff Sgt. Chad Rosendale and Senior Airman Johnnie Yellock. (U.S. Air Force photo)*

"Twenty-eight minutes after touchdown, we controlled the first air landing followed immediately by a departure, and we did not slow down for the next 12 days," said Chief Travis, who hails from Nelson County, Ky.



After establishing control of the airfield there, his team orchestrated an orderly flow for incoming aircraft and dealt with the constraints of the inadequate airfield, which potentially could have limited relief operations. Facing 42 aircraft jammed into a parking ramp designed to accommodate 10 large planes, untangling the gridlock was the first of many seemingly insurmountable challenges necessary to facilitate the flood of inbound relief flights.

In the dawn of the U.S. response to the Haitian crisis, Chief Travis coordinated landing slots with Miami FAA officials via text messaging on his Blackberry. His ingenuity paid massive dividends as priority aircraft transited the

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small airport, delivering lifesaving water, food and medical supplies in support of the U.S. Agency for International Development-led international humanitarian effort.

From chaos, Chief Travis established order as his combat controllers reduced a four-hour hold time in the air on day one to less than two hours on day two and less than 15 minutes by day three.

For his actions at Toussaint L'Ouverture International Airport, Chief Travis was nominated by Captain Chesley B. "Sully" Sullenberger (*Miracle on the Hudson*) for the "2010 Time 100 List". The list, now in its seventh year, recognizes the activism, innovation and achievement of the world's most influential individuals. As *TIME's* managing editor Rick Stengel has said of the list in the past, "*The TIME 100* is not a list of the most powerful people in the world, it's not a list of the smartest people in the world, it's a list of the most influential people in the world. They're scientists, they're thinkers, they're philosophers, they're leaders, they're icons, they're artists, they're visionaries; people who are using their ideas, their visions, their actions to transform the world and have an effect on a multitude of people."