

**Speech of Brigadier General James P. Scanlan** (Commander of the 440<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing)  
Merville-Franceville - France - June 7, 2014

Bonjour,

Thank you for allowing me to speak here today. I would like to welcome members of the armed services, our hosts from France, and most of all, our veterans, their families, and their friends.

Today, the skies over Merville and the beaches of Normandy are calm. As I walked these grounds this morning, I could hear many of the sounds we hear every day - children laughing and playing in the distance, people going about their daily lives, dogs barking, a church bell in the distance. But when I took those simple sounds of life and attempted to contrast them to what it must have been like 70 years ago, it was almost inconceivable. Those tranquil sounds I was hearing were anything but ordinary, they suddenly became memorable.

Of course, June 6, 1944, was nothing close to an "ordinary" day. In fact it could easily be described as one of the least "ordinary" days of the 20th century. In the early morning hours, the skies over Normandy echoed with the sounds of gunfire and aircraft, bomb blasts thundered throughout the region. Through the wind came soldiers jumping heroically from their C-47s, throwing caution into the wind, launching their bodies into the night sky to help liberate a region many would never leave. Their actions, and the freedom they fought for was instinctual, common in their training of doing what was necessary and sacrificing for the greater cause. These actions are the reason we commonly refer to all of them as heroes.

As the Commander of the 440th Airlift Wing, it is an honor to be a part of the 70th Anniversary of what can be defined as one of the most important days in world history. It is with great respect and admiration I stand here with you as we mark this day in history.

Today, we're here to remember heroes – over 150,000 soldiers on that one day; we come together to remember the 4,413 Allied soldiers who perished on this hallowed ground, on the first day of what General Eisenhower called the "great crusade" to liberate France. We're here to remember those who answered the call, many who did not return home; to honor the heroes we can never truly repay. This world is ours because of them, the simple sounds of freedom I heard this morning, the children, the dogs, the church-bell; those "ordinary" sounds are the memories we're creating right here, right now, because of their actions 70 years ago.

I am humbled to represent the more than 1200 Citizen Airmen of the 440th Airlift Wing stationed at Ft. Bragg, in the state of North Carolina. Only a few of our 1200 could be here today, but we all carry on the lineage of the citizens who answered a call in 1944. Citizens of allied nations who banded together and fought tyranny in a giant undertaking unparalleled in human history.

Our Wing's heritage stems from the 440th Troop Carrier Group, which encompassed the 95th, 96th, 97th, and 98th Troop Carrier Squadrons. During the war, our Group flew the venerable C-47 Dakota, including the SNAFU SPECIAL on display here in Merville. Heroes from the 95th flew this aircraft into combat and airdropped paratroopers from the 101st Airborne Division over the fields of Normandy in the pre-dawn hours of June 6, 1944.

It's amazing to look at this beautiful aircraft, the heritage of our Wing, and know that it was part of the formation which delivered the first wave of Allied soldiers to land here in Normandy. Those heroes came not from the sea, but from the sky. They were called Pathfinders, the first paratroopers to make the jump. Those heroes, deep in the darkness, descended upon these surrounding fields to light beacons for the airborne assaults that would soon follow.

Our military leaders knew that a frontal assault alone would not crack the Atlantic wall put in place by the Germans; our leaders knew that wall must be vaulted and the cracking process begun

from the rear. That effort would be spearheaded by troop carrier forces led by the aircrew flying the SNAFU SPECIAL.

Over the years, the 440th Troop Carrier Group evolved into an Operations Group under the 440th Airlift Wing. The 95th Troop Carrier Squadron flying C-47s evolved into the 95th Airlift Squadron flying C-130Hs. The 96th Troop Carrier Squadron was reassigned to the 934th Troop Carrier Group in 1963. Similar to the 95th they were re-designated as an Airlift Squadron, flying the C-130 Hercules. In a few moments you will witness a 2-ship flyover of C-130 Hercules from the 95th and 96th Airlift Squadron's. Today's crew consists of 5 crew-members to include: two pilots, a navigator, loadmaster and flight engineer. The mighty Herc has the capability to airdrop 64 paratroopers at a single pass, significantly different when compared to the C-47.

The SNAFU SPECIAL comprised of two pilots, a navigator and a radio operator. It was capable of airdropping 28 paratroopers and provided approximately half the capability of the C-130 you'll see flying over today. As the two Herks pass overhead, take note of the tail flash on the lead aircraft; the colored horizontal stripes placed on both sides of the vertical fin; it contains elements of our Normandy heritage. Also notice our unit's original Airborne Troop Carrier emblem, the World War II invasion stripes which were painted on the wings and fuselage of 440th C-47s just before take-off on D-Day, and the silhouette of the state of North Carolina, honoring the home of the 440th Airlift Wing, and the bold words "BRAGG-POPE", symbolizing our pride in the place we call home. Through changing times, the men and women of the 440th Airlift Wing continue to honor our legacy, which was so famously proven here in the skies over Normandy.

The Airmen of the 440th have been activated numerous times since Normandy, including the invasion of Southern France, Operation Market Garden, the Battle of the Bulge and later, the Korean War. In 1957, the 440th and 95th Troop Carrier Squadron were moved to Wisconsin's Billy Mitchell Field where we continued to fly missions supporting the Cuban Missile Crisis and Vietnamese conflict. As technology and systems evolved, airframes were replaced and in 1971 our unit received its first C-130A-model which we flew well into the 1980s when we began to take delivery of the C-130H, a predecessor to the C-130H2 model which we are proud to fly today.

As our heritage continued to forge onward, our unit was activated in 1991 and deployed to support Operation Desert Storm flying men and equipment throughout Southwest Asia. Since September 11, 2001, hundreds of Citizen Airmen (including some here today) have deployed throughout the world providing airlift support for Operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom and many others.

Finally, in 2007, the 440th and the 95th returned home to Pope Field, North Carolina, which is located at Fort Bragg. The same Fort Bragg that is home to the 82nd Airborne Division; the same division who distinguished themselves so gallantly here in Normandy 70 years ago. Currently, our mission at Fort Bragg is to maintain operational readiness on a global scale. We routinely fly training, humanitarian and operational missions around the globe and as Reservists, maintain the ability to mobilize within 72 hours of notification; ready to deploy anywhere in the world to aid in defending liberties and promoting democracy. We are proud to live the motto of the United States' Air Mobility Command – "We Answer the Call of Others, So They May Prevail."

The SNAFU SPECIAL is unique, "special" in remembering the heroes who came before and "special" in helping us maintain our lineage to those who helped pave our way forward. Today, our mission is to expand freedom's reach, continue to test the full potential of each of our Citizen Airmen as we maintain the strength of our nation and its armed forces. Those who came before did that and more, we must do nothing less. Those who flew the SNAFU SPECIAL and those who jumped from her, helped liberate a country in need, those heroes struggled in war so that we might thrive in peace.

To the men and women of the 440th Airlift Wing in attendance, I charge each and every one of

you here today to make a pledge to serve as this generation's "Pathfinders" and continue the journey of those who came before us. This is your time, this is your generation. Honor those who sacrificed, by continuing their mission of liberty. In closing, I would like to thank you for allowing us the opportunity to commemorate this great event here in this beautiful place. France and free people everywhere live on today because of the sacrifices made in the past; sacrifices which we will never forget. Rest assured, today, there are men and women who are trained, who are willing and who are able to make those same sacrifices when called to defend the precious freedom earned by those we honor on this very special day.

Thank you very much, and God bless you all.