

Tyndall unit races to California's fires

By Andy Meinen

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TYNDALL AIR FORCE BASE

The U.S. Air Force is sending local airmen to help in the battle of deadly blazes now consuming swaths of Southern California.

The 1st Air Force stationed at Tyndall Air Force Base sent an Air Component Coordination Element, or ACCE, to the region to support firefighting operations.

The eight-person ACCE team will coordinate all Air Force, Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve units helping with firefighting efforts, said Lt. Col. Don Arias, director of public affairs for 1st Air Force. The Air Force also dispatched six C-130 aircraft, which can dump 3,000 gallons of fire retardant on blazes, to help with the firefighting effort, said Maj. Gen. Hank Morrow, commander of Air Forces Northern.

The ACCE team arrived in California on Wednesday night, and it will act as a liaison between the Air Force and civilian officials in California, Morrow said.

"They will fan out and get what (California officials') needs are," he said.

The Air Force then will deploy whatever is needed, such as medical supplies, evacuations, search and rescue or aerial imagery of the fires, Morrow said.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency requested Department of Defense resources to help with the relief effort in Southern California, Morrow said.

The six C-130s are part of the Military Airborne Fire Fighting System, or MAFFS, according to a 1st Air Force news release. They can deliver their 3,000-gallon, firefighting payload over a 60-foot by quarter-mile path, Morrow said.

Five of the C-130s were airborne Wednesday night, helping fight fires around Camp Pendleton, Calif., because base housing at the Marine Corps base was on fire, Morrow said.

The six C-130s came from all over the country. Two aircraft are from the 153rd Airlift Wing, Wyoming Air National Guard; two others were sent from the 302nd Airlift Wing, U.S. Air Force Reserve, Peterson AFB, Colorado Springs, Colo.; and the final two came from the 145th Airlift Wing, North Carolina Air National Guard.

"Our job is to help in any way possible," Morrow said.





Tech. Sgt. Rick Sforza / U.S. Air Force
A C-130 Hercules, equipped with a Military Airborne Fire Fighting System, drops water during annual MAFFS training in New Mexico. Six of the C-130s have been dispatched to help battle wildfires in California.