

The Resurrection of Tactical Air Command and Military Airlift Command by Daniel Haulman

September 26 and October 1, 2016 were very historic dates in the history of the Air Force. After more than 24 years, Tactical Air Command and Military Airlift Command, two of the most historic of the Air Force's major commands, became active again. This is the story of how they went away, and how they came back.

In the summer of 1992, as the Cold War ended, the leadership of the United States Air Force undertook an organizational revolution, to streamline itself and to save federal dollars. It inactivated five of its major commands: Strategic Air Command (SAC), Tactical Air Command (TAC), Military Airlift Command (MAC), Air Force Logistics Command (AFLC), and Air Force Systems Command (AFSC). In their places, it activated three new major commands: Air Combat Command (ACC), Air Mobility Command (AMC), and Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC).

The three new commands were not redesignations of any of the five commands they replaced. They were starting from scratch in 1992, with no years of service and no honors. While they had some of the same personnel, aircraft, bases and functions of the old commands, they were not lineally connected with any of them. All five of the inactivating major commands, each with more than 40 years of active service, was placed on the shelf, with the possibility that one day the Air Force might activate them again.

The inactivations and activations came in two stages. First, Strategic Air Command, Tactical Air Command, and Military Airlift Command were inactivated on Jun 1, 1992, while Air Combat Command and Air Mobility Command were activated. Air Combat Command received the fighters of Tactical Air Command and the bombers and missiles of Strategic Air Command, while Air Mobility Command received the transports of Military Airlift Command and the tankers of Strategic Air Command. One month later, Air Force Logistics Command and Air Force Systems Command were inactivated, while Air Force Materiel Command was activated. Air Force Materiel Command

assumed the functions of the two inactivating commands, but the new command was not the redesignation of either of them.

The revolutionary changes of 1992 had merits. By dropping five major commands and establishing three new ones to take over their functions, the Air Force reduced its number of major commands by two. The move was expected to improve the administration of the Air Force and to save enormous amounts of money. But there was a problem in the transition.

Although Air Combat Command had absorbed resources and functions of Strategic Air Command and Tactical Air Command, it was not a redesignation of either. Still, it was inexplicably directed to use the emblem of Tactical Air Command, as if it were the Tactical Air Command transformed into the Air Combat Command. If that is what the leadership wanted, it could have merely redesignated Tactical Air Command as Air Combat Command, instead of ending the first and starting the second. From a lineage and honors history perspective, Tactical Air Command had no connection with Air Combat Command, despite their use of the same emblem.

The same problem emerged with Air Mobility Command. Although it had absorbed resources and functions of Strategic Air Command and Military Airlift Command, and had no lineal connection with either of those inactivated commands, it was directed to use the emblem of Military Airlift Command, as if it were the Military Airlift Command transformed into the Air Mobility Command. If that is what the leadership wanted, it could have merely redesignated Military Airlift Command as Air Mobility Command, instead of ending the first and starting the second. From a lineage and honors perspective, Military Airlift Command had no connection with Air Mobility Command, despite their use of the same emblem.

There should have been two options. One was to let the new commands have new emblems, since they were not redesignations of the old commands whose emblems they got, but brand new commands with no previous heritage. The other option was to simply redesignate Tactical Air Command as Air Combat Command and Military Airlift Command as Air Mobility Command. There was reason not to go that way. Strategic Air Command would have been the only one of the three major commands to be inactivated on June 1, 1992. No one

wanted to offend the veterans of Strategic Air Command by keeping Tactical Air Command and Military Airlift Command, even if they were redesignated under different names. If SAC was going away, TAC and MAC were also going away.

What happened instead was a sort of cross between the two alternatives. The Air Force leadership did not favor Tactical Air Command and Military Airlift Command over Strategic Air Command, so it inactivated all three of them. Yet by directing Air Combat Command to use the Tactical Air Command emblem and Air Mobility Command to use the Military Airlift Command emblem the Air Force leadership inadvertently made it appear that the Air Force was discarding only Strategic Air Command on June 1, 1992.

A month later, the same mistake was made. Air Force Materiel Command might have inherited the functions of Air Force Systems Command and Air Force Logistics Command, but it was a new organization entirely. Both Air Force Systems Command and Air Force Logistics Command were inactivated on July 1, 1992, while Air Force Materiel Command was activated, but Air Force Materiel Command was directed to use the emblem of the Air Force Logistics Command, which made it appear that Air Force Logistics Command was remaining active while Air Force Systems Command was going away. If Air Force Materiel Command was not the redesignation of either Air Force Logistics Command nor of Air Force Systems Command, but an entirely new command starting from scratch, it should have had its own emblem. The alternative would have been to simply redesignate Air Force Logistics Command as Air Force Materiel Command, since the emblem of one was to be the emblem of the other. But that would have meant choosing Air Force Logistics Command over Air Force Systems Command, and the Air Force did not want to do that. As a result, it inactivated both of the commands whose functions were being taken over by the new Air Force Materiel Command. Despite the Air Force's intent not to choose one of the older commands over the other, that is exactly what appeared to have happened when Air Force Materiel Command was directed to use the emblem of Air Force Logistics Command.

Air Force Materiel Command was not a merger of the two older commands. Air Force Logistics Command and Air Force Systems Command could not be consolidated, since they had been active at the same time. Either a

choice had to be made between them, or both had to go away as Air Force Materiel Command was activated. Air Force Materiel Command thought it was a combination of Air Force Logistics Command and Air Force Systems Command, but it was neither. Despite that fact, Air Force Materiel Command began with the emblem of Air Force Logistics Command.

The use of the emblem of one organization by another organization violated heraldic policy, yet that is what was happening. In three cases, one command was using the emblem of another command with which it had no lineal connection. One way to correct the error was to consolidate Tactical Air Command with Air Combat Command, Military Airlift Command with Air Mobility Command, and Air Force Logistics Command with Air Force Materiel Command. That would involve the merger of three pairs of major commands. Such a move would justify Air Combat Command's use of the Tactical Air Command emblem, Air Mobility Command's use of the Military Airlift Command's emblem, and Air Force Materiel Command's use of the Air Force Logistics Command emblem. No one wanted to do that at first, for fear of offending the veterans of the other commands inactivated in 1992: Strategic Air Command and Air Force Systems Command.

In 2009, the story changed. Strategic Air Command, which had been inactivated in 1992, was redesignated as Air Force Global Strike Command and activated again. It eventually got back the bombers and missiles it had at first lost to Air Combat Command, if not the tankers it had lost to Air Mobility Command. With Strategic Air Command back, there was no longer any reason to not bring back Tactical Air Command and Military Airlift Command back too, by consolidating them Air Combat Command and Air Mobility Command.

After the return of Strategic Air Command as Air Force Global Strike Command, historians at the Air Force Historical Research Agency, recommended the consolidation of Tactical Air Command with Air Combat Command and Military Airlift Command with Air Mobility Command. In each case, consolidation would in effect merge two commands into one. There were five good reasons to do so:

1. The consolidations would justify the Air Combat Command's use of the Tactical Air Command emblem and Air Mobility Command's use of the Military

Airlift Command's emblem. 2. The consolidations would increase the years of service of both Air Combat Command and Air Mobility Command by more than 40 years, allowing them to trace their heritages to the 1940s instead of 1992. 3. The consolidations would increase the number of honors of Air Combat Command and Air Mobility Command by giving them also the honors of the older commands that would be merging with them. 4. The missions of Tactical Air Command and Air Combat Command were similar, if not identical, and the missions of Military Airlift Command and Air Mobility Command were also similar, even if the former did not have tankers. 5. Because Strategic Air Command was back, there was every reason to bring also bring back Tactical Air Command and Military Airlift Command, too.

Although it took seven more years for the consolidations to go forward, they happened in one crucial week in 2016. Between September 26 and October 1, Tactical Air Command was consolidated with Air Combat Command and Military Airlift Command was consolidated with Air Mobility Command. The mergers of the two pairs of commands has all advantages and no disadvantages. Bringing back Tactical Air Command and Military Airlift Command not only greatly enhances the heritages of Air Combat Command and Air Mobility Command, but also the heritage of the Air Force. We should rejoice that the old Strategic Air Command, Tactical Air Command, and Military Airlift Command, all of which died in 1992, are alive again in Air Force Global Strike Command, Air Combat Command, and Air Mobility Command.

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