

THE HISTORY OF LAJES FIELD

The Portuguese Military Service first constructed a dirt-packed landing strip on the island of Terceira in 1934. Due to the increasing German threat, Portuguese fortified the site in 1941. Based upon a 600-year-old-treaty, the British secured rights to the use of Lajes field from the Portuguese in October of 1943. Throughout the war, the British protected transatlantic shipping by conducting operations out of Lajes Field against German U-boats.

The first American units began arriving at Lajes in late 1943 with the first US Bomber, a B17, ferried through on December 9th. Army engineers constructed a 10,000-foot runway to land transiting U.S. bombers and cargo aircraft. The use of Lajes cut the flying time to Europe and North Africa from 70 hours to 40 hours. In 20 months of operations, 8,689 aircraft dispatched through Lajes including twelve hundred B17 and B24s. Medical personnel handled over 30,000 air evacuations en-route to the US. In 1944 the U.S. was granted use of Santa Maria Island and under the strictest security an airfield was built. The base along with the three A shaped runways were completed 15 May 1945 Unfortunately, Santa Maria's tactical value was limited because the war in Europe ended a week before the field was completed. However, operations did begin in time for the new base to play an important role in cargo and troop movement as well as the evacuation of wounded soldiers.

British and American interim rights to Lajes airfield were completed in May 1946 and the Portuguese designated Lajes Field as Air Base No. 4. July 1946, the Portuguese government announced that the Americans would remain in the Azores, on the island of Terceira and Lajes Field. September 1946, the 1391st Army Air Force Base Unit and the Azores Base Command was transferred from Santa Maria Island to Lajes. Nine days later a temporary agreement was reached between the U.S. and Portuguese governments giving the U.S. military rights to Lagens Field for an additional 18 months. In turn, the United States was required to maintain services and support operations at the base "in collaboration with and under the superintendence of the Portuguese authorities." The U.S. sought a long-term agreement for use of Lajes and on 6 September 1951, the first bilateral agreement was signed.

Lajes Field has supported many historic airlift missions beginning with the Berlin Airlift in 1948. Over 3,000 OPERATION VITTLES aircraft transited the Azores and over the years, Lajes has been instrumental in providing support to many operations, both U.S. and NATO. These operations include the 1958 U.S. peace efforts in Lebanon and the 1961 United Nations peace initiative in Congo. During the 1973 Arab-Israeli Yom Kippur War, Portugal was the only country to grant landing rights for U.S. airlift to Israel. During the 1990s, Lajes continued to be a mid-Atlantic refueling station as it hosted tanker aircraft during OPERATIONS DESERT SHIELD/STORM and RESTORE HOPE. In the summer of 1998, C-17 aircraft staged from Lajes to shuttle equipment to and from Southwest Asia, during OPERATION DESERT THUNDER. During OPERATION ALLIED FORCE, the NATO campaign in Kosovo, Lajes maintainers serviced more than a third of the U.S. Air Force combat aircraft involved. Today, Lajes continues to play a vital role in the ongoing war on terrorism providing expert personnel and supporting aircraft transiting en route to and from OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM as part of the world's premier Expeditionary Aerospace Force.

Lajes Field also served as center stage for the historic meeting between the President of the United States, George W. Bush, the Prime Minister of England, Tony Blair, Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar. This Atlantic Summit, hosted by Portuguese Prime Minister Jose Manuel Durao Barroso, provided a last chance for a diplomatic solution in Iraq and stated clearly to the world that the coalition was prepared for military action.

The Air Force and its current host unit, the 65th Air Base Wing, have not been the only occupants of Lajes Field. Lajes was also the headquarters of a joint command, USFORAZ which was disestablished in 2003. Sister services like the Navy and Army had a stake in Lajes' ability to enable air power. Port Transportation Battalion of the U.S. Army arrived on 2 February 1952 and remained (under several different designations) until October 2000. The U.S. Navy also staked a claim to the island with a Detachment at Agualva, the Naval Security Group Activity. This unit would operate from 1952 to 1994 providing a HF Direction Finding facility and communications support to the Navy and DOD elements in the area. From 1957 through 1993, the Lajes Naval Air Facility had a primary mission of ASW operations.

For over 50 years, Lajes has been the Crossroads of the Atlantic bridging the gap of the wide ocean expanse. In most contingencies that required U.S. aircraft and allied forces to cross the Atlantic, Lajes had a supporting role. From the B-17s and C-47s to B-1s, C-17s and F16s. Lajes was and will continue to be the fueling station that gets the aircraft and crews where they need to "fly, fight and win."



LINEAGE AND HONORS OF THE 65TH AIR BASE WING

Lineage: Established as 65th Troop Carrier Wing, Medium, on 26 May 1952. Activated in the Reserve on 14 June 1952. Inactivated on 1 April 1953. Redesignated 65th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, Medium, on 1 April 1953. Consolidated (1 January 1992) with the 1605th Military Airlift Support Wing, which was established, and activated on 1 January 1982. Redesignated: 65th Support Wing on 27 January 1992, then 65th Air Base Wing on 1 October 1993.

Assignments. First Air Force, 14 June 1952-1 April 1953; Twenty-First Air Force, 1 January 1982-1 October 1993; Eighth Air Force, 1 October 1993-1 October 2002; Third Air Force, 1 October 2002-present.

Components. Group: 65th Troop Carrier: 14 June 1952-1 April 1953.
Squadrons: 1605th Military Airlift (later 65th Airlift) Support: 1 January 1982-1 October 1993. 65th Air Base Wing (see current units assigned).

Stations. Mitchel AFB, NY, 14 June 1952-1 April 1953. Lajes Field, Azores 1 January 1982-present.

Commanders. See US Lajes Field Commanders.

Aircraft. See Aircraft.

Operations/ Mission. Provide enroute support for aircraft transiting Lajes.
(see Mission 65 ABW)

Service Streamers. None

Campaign Streamers. None

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers. None.

Decorations. Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards: 1 June 1988-31 May 1990; 15 January 1991-15 January 1993; 16 January 1993-31 March 1994; 1 April 1994-1 May 1995; 1 June 1997-31 May 1999; 1 June 1999-31 May 2001; 1 June 2001-31 May 2003.

Bestowed Honors. Authorized to display honors earned by the 65th Observation (later, 65th Reconnaissance) Group prior to 14 June 1952.

Service Streamers: None.

Campaign Streamers. World War II: Antisubmarine, American Theater.

Decorations: None.

U.S. BASE OPERATING UNITS

US Army Air Force

Station #15, North Atlantic Wing (29 December 1943 – 28 July 1944)

Station #15, North Atlantic Division (28 July 1944 – 1 August 1944)

1390th Army Air Force Base Unit (1 August 1944 - 1 November 1945)

1391-1Y Operation Location (1 November 1945 - 1 September 1946)

1391st Army Air Force Base Unit (1 September 1946 –26 September 1947)

US Air Force

1391st Air Force Base Unit (26 September 1947 – 1 June 1948)

523rd Air Base Group (1 June 1948 - 1 October 1948)

1605th Air Base Group (1 October 1948 - 1 February 1953)

1605th Air Base Wing (1 February 1953 - 1 January 1982)

1605th Military Airlift Support Wing (1 January 1982 - 1 January 1992)

606th Support Wing (1 January 1992 - 27 January 1992)

65th Support Wing (27 January 1992 - 1 October 1993)

65th Air Base Wing (1 October 1993 - present)

MAJOR COMMANDS TO WHICH ASSIGNED

Air Transport Command - 29 December 1943

Military Air Transport Service – 1 June 1948

Military Airlift Command – 1 January 1966

Air Mobility Command – 1 June 1992

Air Combat Command – 1 October 1993

United States Air Forces in Europe – 1 October 2002

CURRENT UNITS ASSIGNED

65th Air Base Wing

65th Comptroller Flight

65th Operations Support Squadron

65th Mission Support Group

65th Contracting Squadron

65th Civil Engineer Squadron

65th Mission Support Squadron

65th Services Squadron

65th Security Forces Squadron

65th Communications Squadron

65th Medical Group

65th Medical Operations Squadron

65th Medical Support Squadron

Tenant Units and Associate Units

729th Air Mobility Support Squadron (Air Mobility Command)

Detachment 6, Air Force News Agency

Detachment 516, Air Force Office of Special Investigation

Army and Air Force Exchange Services (AAFES)

Defense Commissary Agency (DECA)

Department of Defense Dependent School (DoDDs)

Resident Officer in Charge of Construction (ROICC) (US Navy)

LAJES FIELD COMMANDERS

Lieutenant Colonel Arthur F. Callahan (11 December 1943 – 28 December 1943)
Colonel David A. Morris (28 December 1943 – 24 January 1944)
Brigadier General A. D. Smith (24 January 1944 – 13 October 1944))
Colonel Harry L. Putnam (13 October 1944 – 17 December 1944)
Colonel Sigmund F. Landers (17 December 1944 – 19 June 1945)
Colonel George O. Bond (19 June 1945 – 16 December 1945)
Colonel Sam W. Agree, Jr. (16 December 1945 – 16 March 1947)
Colonel John W. Warren (16 March 1947 – 1 June 1948)
Major Robert C. Morris, Jr. (1 June 1948 – 16 July 1948)
Colonel Joseph A. Wilson (16 July 1948 – 12 January 1950)
Brigadier General George S. Cassady (12 January 1950 – 1 July 1952)
Colonel Harold L. Smith (1 July 1952 – 16 August 1958)
Major General George B. Dany (16 August 1958 – 9 August 1961)
Brigadier General Eugene B. LeBailly (9 August 1961 – 6 January 1964)
Major General George S. Boylan (6 January 1964 – 19 October 1965)
Major General William H. Brandon (19 October 1965 – 17 July 1967)
Brigadier General John H. Buckner (17 July 1967 – 12 September 1969)
Brigadier General Warren D. Johnson (12 September 1969 – 1 June 1971)
Brigadier General Thomas A. Aldrich (1 June 1971 – 1 June 1973)
Brigadier General William P. Comstock (1 June 1973 – 12 January 1975)
Brigadier General Erskine Wigley (12 January 1975 – 24 October 1977)
Brigadier General Richard T. Drurry (24 October 1977 – 11 June 1980)
Brigadier General Duane H. Erickson (11 June 1980 – 25 June 1982)
Brigadier General Donald C. Smith (25 June 1982 – 22 May 1984)
Brigadier General Donald A. Rigg (22 May 1984 – 15 July 1986)
Brigadier General Larry D. Wright (15 July 1986 – 27 July 1987)
Brigadier General James C. McCombs (27 July 1987 – 7 July 1989)
Brigadier General Charles C. Barnhill (7 July 1989 – 22 August 1991)
Brigadier General Thomas D. Pilsch (22 August 1991 – 20 August 1993)
Colonel Brian A. Arnold (20 August 1993 – 28 July 1995)
Colonel Melvin M. Reeves, Jr. (28 July 1995 – 2 December 1996)
Colonel John M. Calvert (2 December 1996 – 3 March 1997)
Colonel Rodney E. Gibson (3 March 1997 – 13 July 1999)
Colonel Wilhelm F. Percival (13 July 1999 – August 2001)
Colonel Judith A. Fedder (August 2001 - May 2003)
Colonel Barbara Jacobi (May 2003 – May 2005)
Colonel Robert Winston (May 2005- June 2007)
Colonel Jack L Briggs II (June 2007-Present)

65 Air Base Wing Mission

1940's

- Primary mission was moving troops and equipment to and from Europe and the Pacific.
- Operation Green Project (Santa Maria) moved aircraft and personnel between Europe and the States.
- Operation White Project (Lajes) serviced aircraft and troops moving to the Pacific.
- Assigned aircraft: B-17, C-47

1950's

January 1, 1948; Military Air Transport Service

- Average of 800 scheduled flights a month, primary fueling spot for SAC, TAC MATS, and Navy
- Attached SAC and TAC liaison offices, assisted with transiting aircraft; offices remained at Lajes until early 1990s.
- Average of 9-10,000 passengers per month
- Rescue support for Gemini missions
- Assigned Aircraft: C-47, C-54

1960's

Jan 1, 1966; Military Airlift Command

- Average 500 aircraft per month, most movement to SE Asia
- C-54, C-118, and C-135 Aircraft refurbishing
- Rescue support for Apollo missions
- Joint Rescue Coordination Center
- 1967, P3 training site (approx 100 hours flying a month)
- 57th Aero Space Rescue Service stationed as tenant, SH 119, SB117, and 9 HC130s. Inactivated 1972.
- Assigned Aircraft: C-54, C-47 and C-118

1970s

- Base support for Navy Anti-Submarine Warfare mission (continues unit 1990's)
 - Naval Security Group
- C130 Refurbishing for Pope AFB
- Assigned Aircraft: C-54, C-118 (All assigned aircraft left by 1972)

1980's

- Base and enroute support for all MAC and Naval aircraft (approx 250 a month)
- Tanker Bridge for Coronets
- Base support for Army (Exercise REFORGER '86 brought 10,000 troops to Lajes over two month period)

1990's

1 June 1992; Air Mobility Command

1 October 1993; Air Combat Command

- Tanker Bridge (steady deployment of aircraft)
- Average of 200 C141 and C130 per month
- Coronet movements
- Space Shuttle support/diversion site

2000's

1 October 2002; United States Air Force in Europe

2003 – Inactivation of USFORAZ

- Tanker Bridge
- Coronets
- Space Shuttle Support/Diversion
- Global Communication Support

EMBLEM

65th Air Base Wing



BLAZON

Sable, issuant from base a demi-globe Azure, grid lined, surmounted and issuant at fess point a pair of wings conjoined displayed all Or, charged with a mullet Gules bearing a plate; all within a diminished bordure Or.

Attached below the shield, a White scroll edged with a narrow Yellow border and inscribed "65TH AIR BASE WING" in Blue letters.

SIGNIFICANCE

Ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The field above the globe represents the area of flight and the delivery of air power in the sky, space, and cyberspace. The globe represents support of the world community and embodies the Air Force vision of vigilance, reach, and power. The wings signify the unit mission and values. The extension of the wings symbolizes protection of the crossroads. The star and circle are historic elements which emphasize the unit's heritage. Symbolically combined the emblem symbolizes the history of the unit and its early connection to the Military Air Transport Service and Military Airlift Command.

PREVIOUSLY ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT

Aircraft assigned to unit

B-17 (ca 1946- ca 1950)

C-54 (ca 1950- 1973)

C-47 (ca 1944 – 1970)

C-118 (1972 – 1975)

Aircraft owned by 57th Rescue Squadron

SB-17 (ca 1947 – 1956)

SC-54 (1956 –1965)

SH-19 (1956 – 1964)

SC 130 (1965 – 1972)

ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT

There have been no permanently assigned aircraft at Lajes Field since 27 June 1975



An aerial view of Northeast corner of Terceira Island showing Praia Harbor in the bottom and Lajes Field at the top of the photo.