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## **Active duty departs Duke for Hurlburt, ends six-year era**

BY JASMINE DENAMUR 919TH SPECIAL OPERATIONS WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Two active-duty squadrons that made Air Force history at Duke Field returned to Hurlburt Field this month.

The move came with mission changes for the 8th Special Operations Squadron and the 716th Maintenance Squadron. The 8th SOS will become the first operational CV-22 Osprey squadron in the Air Force Special Operations Command, and members of the 716th MXS were absorbed into Hurlburt Field's 16th Maintenance Group in support of AFSOC assets there.

The two squadrons came here from Hurlburt in February 2000 to form the first and, at the time, only active-duty associate unit. In an active-associate unit, the Reserve component owns the aircraft and the active force provides aircrews and maintainers to support the mission.

It was a little rough in the beginning because the units didn't know how to handle each other, said Tech. Sgt. William Sewell, 716th MXS aerospace ground equipment craftsman.

"As time went by, we wound up learning from each other and working well together," he said.

Six of the 14 MC-130E Combat Talons the 919th Special Operations Wing has today were owned by the 16th Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt before the two active-duty units relocated to Duke. The merger was initiated by AFSOC to combine Reserve and active-duty components onto common airframes.

The ability to deploy and fight as a single weapon system with a centralized operations and maintenance base allowed for a synergy that could not have been possible with either unit alone, said Lt. Col. Thomas Mims, 919th Operations Group deputy commander.

"Neither unit would have had the ability they've had since Sept. 11 if the Talon I force had not combined," he said.

As members of the 716th MXS left the wing in small groups throughout the year, 8th SOS members exited Duke Field the same way they arrived — by running.

The squadron's "Blackbirds" took turns running the squadron flag through a 26-mile stretch from Duke to Hurlburt Aug. 9.

Once they arrived, the festivities continued at Hurlburt with a ceremony to reestablish the unit there. Many special operations officials, including Lt. Gen. Michael Wooley, AFSOC commander, were present to witness the celebration.

"As we say good-bye to the Talon I and prepare for the arrival of the CV-22 in November of this year, the traditions of the 8th SOS will carry on," General Wooley said.

"We have a lot to look forward to," said Lt. Col. Theodore Corallo, 8th SOS commander. "This unit has always performed tremendously, and we will continue to do so."

The night ended with a dinner that highlighted the squadron's accomplishments while at Duke.

The departure of the 300 active-duty personnel is a bittersweet change for reservists who worked with both units.

"The 8th SOS gave us the ability to launch on extremely short notice to new taskings," Colonel Mims said. "As reservists, it will be a more difficult process to generate crews and maintenance for short-notice taskings."

"With the 716th gone, we're having to pick up the pace a little bit and better utilize our time; but with that, the reservists here are getting more experience," said Master Sgt. Michael Norris, 919th Maintenance Squadron fuel systems section chief.

"I've been on active duty for 17 years now," said Tech. Sgt. Michael Hanna, 716th AGE craftsman. "I've never seen such strong and supportive morale as I've experienced on this base."