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The Speed of Heat: An Airlift Wing at War in Iraq and Afghanistan

Thomas W. Young

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With its fleet of large transport aircraft, the United States military can put personnel and equipment anywhere on the globe within hours. In the Iraq and Afghanistan wars in particular, virtually every soldier, every bullet, every pint of blood, and every bite of food have arrived in the war zone by airlift. Transport aircrews have accompanied the troops from the beginning, flying them in, supplying them, bringing them out for medical treatment or rotations home, and in the most heart-breaking missions, carrying them on their final journey back to grieving relatives.

This book tells the story of one Air National Guard airlift wing as related by its members. The 167th Airlift Wing of the West Virginia Air National Guard consisted of a squadron of 12 C-130 cargo planes, their crews, and all the supporting sections--in all, more than 1,200 people. The author, a former Associated Press reporter turned aviator, flew as an active member of that unit and interviewed nearly 70 servicemen and women for this book. Their stories include C-130 aircrews who dodged heat-seeking missiles, mechanics who made combat repairs, flight nurses who treated and transported the wounded, even two motor pool truck drivers struck by a roadside bomb. The interviewees vividly describe their day-to-day work in the war zone, revealing the inner workings of a part of the military not usually well covered by the news media.

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