

## **The 910th and YARS – a commentary by the commander 2.0**

It is hard to believe that nearly two years have passed since I returned to the Defense Community of the Mahoning Valley to take command of the 910th Airlift Wing and Youngstown Air Reserve Station, Ohio. It is also hard to believe that more than a year has passed since I took the opportunity to address the civic leaders and residents of the valley regarding our shared mission to ensure the future viability of the 910th and our military installation, YARS.

I believe serving one's country gives purpose to life. The ability to live locally and serve globally is the strength of the Air Force Reserve. I've had the fortunate opportunity to do both in the Mahoning Valley for nearly 30 years. The best thing that has happened to me in my professional life has been the honor and privilege of serving as the 910th's commander and leading our nearly 1700 Reserve Citizen Airmen to successfully complete airlift, aerial spray and agile combat support missions across the country and around the globe. As the installation commander, it has been my responsibility to oversee more than \$1 billion of federal assets with an annual economic impact to our region of approximately \$100 million.

However, all good things must come to an end, and in February, my time as commander here will end. Although my assignment is concluding, our mission to increase the military value of YARS can never be finished.

Military value is the combination of the unit's mission effectiveness, the strength of the community partnerships with the installation and economic impact delivered to the surrounding region. It takes a continuing coordinated effort between business leaders, elected officials and state agencies to continue to increase the military value of YARS.

The 910th's mission is to provide a current, qualified, mission-ready force. Our vision is to provide unrivaled tactical airlift, aerial spray and agile combat support - Always ready to answer our nation's call! Those assigned to the installation are obligated to perform their jobs and execute the mission and vision of the Wing at the highest level of effectiveness possible with the resources provided. YARS is a vital platform to launch our C-130s and contribute to America's superior air power.

Outside the installation, community influencers and decision makers led by our advocates at the Youngstown-Warren Regional Chamber, the Eastern Ohio Military Affairs Commission and the Youngstown Air Reserve Base-Community Council must continue to learn about and advocate for the capability of the installation and requirements of our nation's defense. This is necessary so YARS can remain integral to current and future basing and force structure requirements and be provided the

resources that those assigned here require to complete the assignments asked of them.

Capital projects, funded by legislation authored by our local federal congressional delegation, have increased the operational readiness and military value of YARS with the recent addition of a state-of-the-art indoor combat arms range and upgrades to our main and commercial entry complexes to meet current Anti-Terrorism and Force Protection standards scheduled for completion within the next few years. These improvement projects, totaling nearly \$24 million in investments, position our military installation to accept additional missions should they become available. Additionally, the 910th will soon receive the prototype of a new Modular Aerial Spray System. The result of years of collaboration between the 910th's aerial spray experts and the Ohio-based company building the system, dubbed MASS 2.0, will allow the 910th to successfully carry out the Department of Defense's, or DoD's, only large-area, fixed-wing aerial spray mission into the foreseeable future.

I'm pleased to say our local, state and federal representatives and their staffs have worked cohesively in their efforts to sustain and promote operations at Youngstown Air Reserve Station. They must continue to do so, especially when decisions impacting the installation are required. Soon, we'll receive the Joint Land Use Study report, a result of a program commissioned by the Office of the Secretary of Defense in collaboration with the Trumbull County Commissioners. The recommendations contained in this report should be followed to assure no mission impact or encroachment to YARS occurs while allowing for mutual growth and livelihood. Vienna and Fowler townships, our neighboring communities, may need to be assisted by the state or county at large as they may experience the greatest restrictions because of their proximity to YARS.

The Western Reserve Port Authority continues to be a strong partner for YARS. The continued existence of Youngstown-Warren Regional Airport and a manned local FAA tower to support our flying mission should remain a top priority for the commissioners of Mahoning and Trumbull Counties. YARS is an air station, not an air base, because we don't own or maintain the runways and don't have military personnel providing air traffic control for our flying operations. Instead, we rely on our long-lasting relationship with the port, the airport and the FAA to accomplish our mission. In exchange, the 910th provides fire department services and aircraft rescue support for the airport and all aircraft using the facility. The airport's infrastructure also contains our assault runway and night vision lighting, allowing the 910th and other military and federal government aircraft from across the region to use these assets for critical flight training.

YARS acts as a hub for humanitarian shipments from local charitable organizations due to its strategic location. Through the years, we've shipped more than 1 million pounds of clothing, medical supplies and even vehicles to impoverished populations in developing countries on several continents. Our Aerial Port personnel gain valuable training by preparing, palletizing and loading the much-needed cargo.

Recent events regarding the valley's employment industry give even more cause to build on the air station's viability. It remains an important asset to the nation's defense and the Mahoning Valley's economic viability. As a longtime valley resident, I've seen tremendous changes both on the installation and within the surrounding community. I have borne witness to the days when there were three shifts at GM Lordstown producing automobiles in record-breaking numbers while the 910th hosted two flying squadrons made up of 16 of our C-130H Hercules aircraft at YARS. Today, Air Force programmatic changes have reduced the 910th's fleet to one squadron made up of eight C-130s and our community faces an impending shutdown of the Lordstown plant.

These events may seem cataclysmic, but we have been here before when we faced the collapse of our steel industry. Somehow, despite the challenges and changes thrown at our community, we survive, and in many ways, we thrive. We hear all the time that change is inevitable and often necessary to avoid becoming irrelevant. But, one thing that hasn't changed and cannot change is the resiliency of our region's people. Our residents are one of the factors that cause companies such as Vallourec and TJX to choose our community to do business in among countless locations they have to pick from. Crisis can bring opportunity. There are many avenues existing to increase the military value of YARS by taking steps to improve the installation and exploit opportunities such as additive manufacturing working with YSU, America Makes and the Air Force Research Laboratory through the Air Force Community Partnership Program to develop the future of DoD logistics. New ways to improve the installation could be found in micro grid technology, allowing YARS to be energy independent and able to continue our missions in the event of attacks to our country's power infrastructure.

As we work diligently on the local and federal levels to build the military value of YARS, similar efforts are taking place at the Statehouse in Columbus. Currently, plans are being finalized to establish an Ohio Office of Government and Military Affairs within Governor DeWine's cabinet. The purpose of this office would be to uniquely position state resources to protect federal installations like YARS within the Buckeye state. Many Ohio installations came dangerously close to extinction in the 2005 Base Realignment And Closure round. Our community successfully surged to convince the powers that be to spare YARS. But, the days of being able to surge to meet this type of threat to our installation's future are past. We must be on constant vigil to ensure the future of our military installation. An agency to assist and empower Ohio's military installations to survive and thrive will align our efforts and bring us on par with the 36 other states that currently have such programs.

The Reserve Component of our military, made up of the Reserve and National Guard of the various branches of service, is more essential than ever to our nation's operational military as it is to strategic defense. Since 2001, more than 6000 of our 910th Air Force Reservists have deployed in support of global military and humanitarian operations. We

are an operational reserve force and we are required to successfully support our warfighters in harm's way around the world and to help citizens in times of need in the aftermath of natural disasters, both here at home and wherever else we are needed. At the end of each and every day, we cannot do what we do without you.

To those reading this, your continued support of our service members, and specifically YARS and the 910th Airlift Wing, is essential as a resident of this region, and it is greatly appreciated. Your understanding and assistance in spreading the "good news" of YARS is your civic duty as a member of our Mahoning Valley Defense Community.

Colonel Daniel J. Sarachene  
Commander, 910th Airlift Wing  
Youngstown Air Reserve Station, Ohio