

NC National Guard Returns to Firefighting

Written by Steve Frank
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The North Carolina Air National Guard's 145th Airlift Wing, based in Charlotte, will resume fighting wild fires in the western United States beginning today. The mission comes a month and a half after four of the unit's airmen died when their Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System (MAFFS) equipped C-130 crashed while fighting a fire in southwestern South Dakota. Boone resident Maj. Ryan David was among the four killed in that crash.

"Our folks from Charlotte are ready to rejoin our MAFFS brothers and sisters," said Col. Roger Williams, 145th Airlift Wing Operations Group commander. "We all feel it's extremely important for our people to get back to this critical mission, and we will carry the memory of MAFFS 7 in our hearts as the wild land fire fighting continues." MAFFS 7, operated by the 145th, was battling the White Draw fire near Edgemont, S.D., on the evening of July 1 when it crashed killing four crew members and severely injuring two others. Lt. Col. Paul K. Mikeal (pronounced michael), 42, of Mooresville, N.C.; Maj. Joseph M. McCormick, 36, of Belmont, N.C.; Maj. Ryan S. David (pronounced da-veed), 35, of Boone, N.C.; and Senior Master Sgt. Robert S. Cannon, 50, of Charlotte, died in the crash.

The unit retired the aircraft's U.S. Air Force tail number and the MAFFS 7 designator during a memorial ceremony held July 10 on base. The cause of the crash remains under investigation.

The 145th will send two aircraft and 16 airmen to Boise, Idaho, where they will fight fires at the direction of the U.S. Forest Service beginning Tuesday, Aug. 14.