Fly with the 190th from coast to coast

By Spec. Debbie Maschke

Like many Kansans, I love to travel. Given the opportunity and funds, I would fly to a different destination every weekend. But with the cost of airfare as high as it is today, like most, I can't afford it.

But wouldn't it be great if there was a way to travel by air throughout the U.S., having to pay only for your lodging, food and entertainment? There is—"Space A Travel."

Through the 190th Air Refueling Group, Kansas Air National Guard, Topeka, members of all military branches, whether on active military, full-time component duty (AGR), retired or weekend status, can take a "hop" on a KC-135 (civilian Boeing 707) air refueling airplane to locations throughout the U.S. and possibly even overseas.

In August I decided to take advantage of this Space A benefit and scheduled a trip to visit friends in California.

To find out what flights were available, I called the Kansas Air National Guard flight line telephone number of (913) 231-4558 and found out a flight was going to the Naval Air Station in Alameda.

Having found a flight, the weekender sign up procedures consisted of calling Debbie Doyle (913-266-1010) at the State Defense Building. She placed my name on the roster and requested I bring her a DD 1853 form signed by my commander.

Doyle handles all Kansas Army National Guard weekend personal flight requests while active duty, full-time AGR, reserve and retired members sign up through the Kansas Air National Guard one week prior to their intended departure date.

According to Doyle "once Kansas Army National Guard personnel are chosen by Maj. Gen. Philip B. Finley, the adjutant general, I inform selected members of show times."

The Friday morning of our departure flight started off with a short briefing by the flight's boom operator (boomer) Staff Sgt. Mark Mertel.

After the briefing Mertel explained that while I was receiving a free flight the crew (two pilots, navigator, two boomers, crew chief and technician) would be executing a training mission. The mission included "refueling F-4s from Nebraska and celestial navigation," Mertel said.

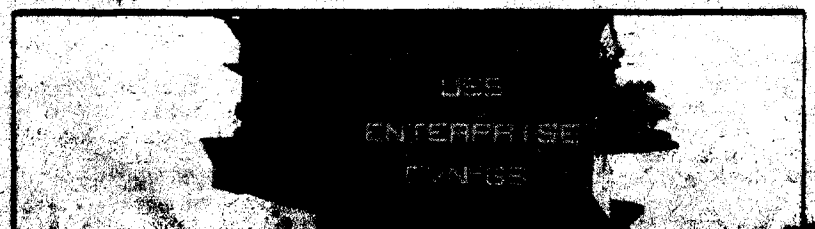
About two and a half hours after take-off I experienced my first adventure of Space A. I watched as we linked up and refueled two F-4s.

Having completed our mission we continued our flight and reached the naval air station in California. I knew that the base alone would have all types of adventures to pursue. The first sight I saw after leaving the plane was two aircraft carriers in port. After a good night's rest I would try to get a tour on one of them.

Saturday morning started off with a tour of the aircraft carrier Enterprise. The flight deck seemed to be as big as a couple football fields, while the decks below held narrow walkways and cramped sleeping areas. It was as if we were in a steel-floating city.

With the Space A flight bringing us only a short drive from San Francisco, we moved from the Enterprise tour into San Francisco.

The San Francisco tour wharf alone had enough sites to explore and foods to sample that I could have used at least one more day to tour that area.

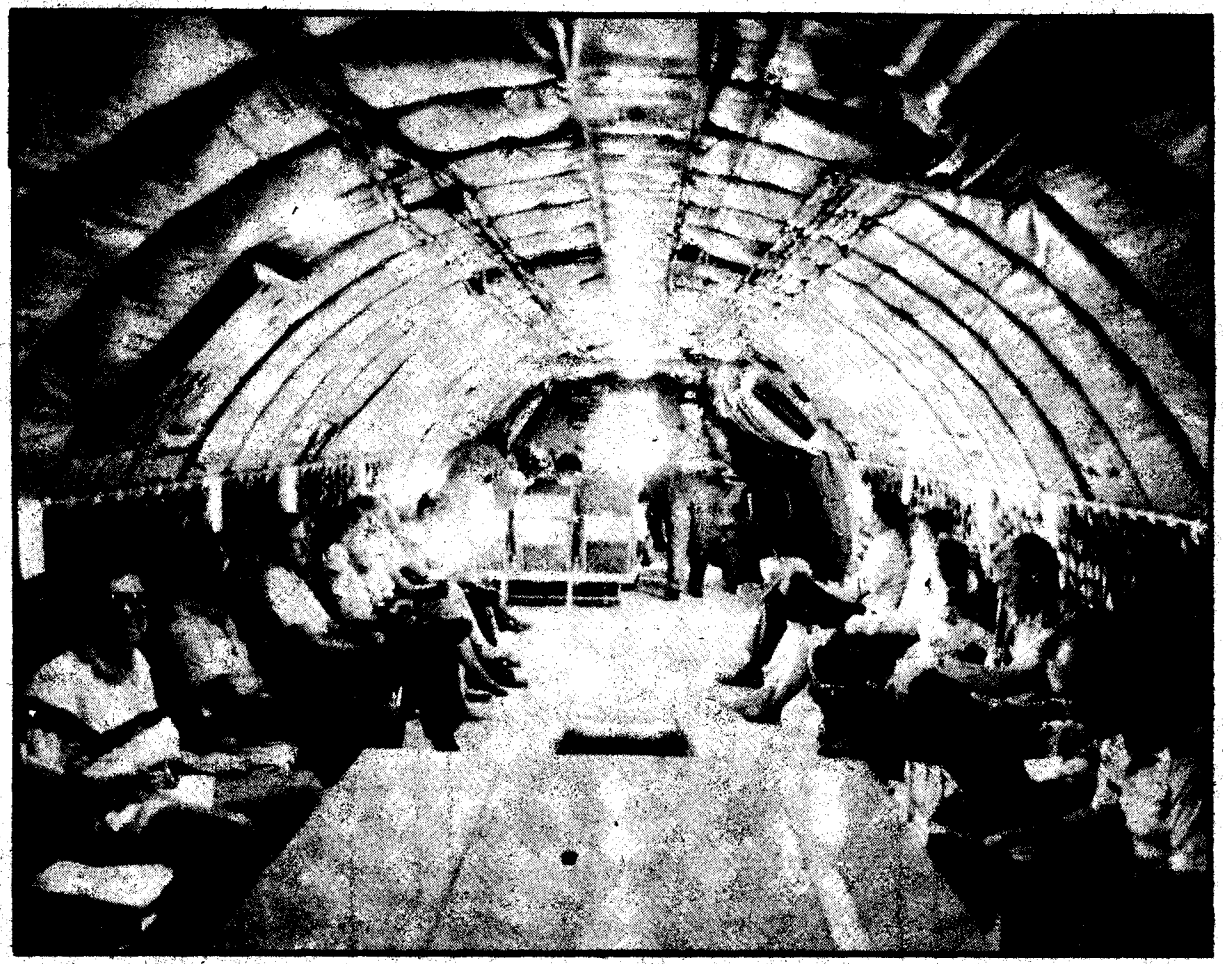


Spec. Debbie Maschke and her friend, Barb Jannatpour, tour the aircraft carrier Enterprise while at the Alameda Naval Air Station. (Photo by 2nd Lt. Greg Bowzer)

were back on the KC-135 and enroute to Kansas. The return flight mission included "refueling an EC-135 air command control center," according to Mertel. The plane is the same size as the KC-135 but is used for air reconnaissance.

Then with another successful refueling completed we were soon back on the ground in Kansas.

But with the travel opportunities and free air transportation available through Space A, it won't be long before I'm back on a KC-135 for another adventure.



Military members taking advantage of Space A benefits ride on a KC-135 (civilian Boeing 707). The cavernous interior of the plane allows plenty of room and comfort while on the way to the destination. (Photo by 2nd Lt. Greg Bowzer)

Refueling Group enroute to California. (Photo by Spec. De Maschke)

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