

Airbus milestone: 1,500th plane

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MOBILE — The number of in-service Airbus commercial aircraft in North America reached a new high of 1,500 following the delivery of an A321 to American Airlines last Friday. The company delivered its first North American-operated aircraft to U.S.-based Eastern Airlines in 1977 and has gone on to tally more than 2,000 orders with 25 airline companies and lessors in the region.

A celebration was held at the Airbus U.S. Manufacturing Facility in Mobile, with delivery teams from American Airlines and Airbus marking the milestone.

Paul Oliver, vice president-customer services for Airbus Americas, praised the teamwork of both Airbus and American, citing their commitment to hard work in advancing the future of airline transportation.

"This milestone showcases the continued growth of commercial aviation in North America — and our four decades of commitment to providing the right

aircraft at the right time with benchmark customer support for our customers. We're proud to recognize this milestone with our partners at American Airlines, and it's gratifying for it to happen with an aircraft built in the U.S.," he said.

American Airlines operates more Airbus passenger aircraft than any other airline in the world. Since the first delivery of 25 Airbus aircraft to American in 1988 and 1989, the relationship between both companies has grown, with American now flying 416 Airbus aircraft in their fleet, with another 122 on order.

Joe Maloy, director of fleet acquisitions, dispositions and records for American Airlines, was in Mobile to accept the aircraft.

"As the world's largest operator of Airbus aircraft, American Airlines is proud to accept the 1500th in-service Airbus aircraft in North America, and that the aircraft was built at the state-of-the-art manufacturing site in Mobile, Alabama. American greatly values our relationship with Airbus.



Photo submitted

Airbus employees pose proudly with the A321 that was the company's 1,500th commercial aircraft in North America.

Congratulations to Airbus for reaching this milestone," he said.

The 1,500 in-service air-

craft milestone exemplifies the growing need in North America for Airbus commercial aircraft. In its life-

time, Airbus has globally received 17,287 orders across its product line, with more than 10,000 delivered. Over

the next 20 years, Airbus predicts that more than 5,900 new aircraft will be required in North America.

Champ's story of redemption

Napier says he's on a mission to save young people's lives

BY ARTHUR L. MACK
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It has been a long tough road for Chris "Champ" Napier.

The 46-year-old Prichard native — who sold drugs and engaged in gang violence and sex before being sentenced to life in prison and was paroled after being incarcerated nearly 15 years — has recently visited various places such as schools and rehab centers to tell people about his redemption.

"One of the things, when I speak to younger kids, is that people who you think really have it going on, they may be selling cocaine," he said. "But from a personal experience I know that when the rich snort cocaine, they get high because people on the streets said that was the rich man's high. At that time, we were selling crack, but personally, I was snorting cocaine. Easy E had a song out that said, 'Don't get high off your own supply,' so I didn't get high off what I was selling.

"So, even though I was selling drugs and becoming addicted to drugs and becoming addicted to the lifestyle, I didn't realize that I was just as worse as the person I was selling it to. That lifestyle had a negative side effect, because the people who were addicted to the drug and the people who were addicted to the lifestyle were basically the same, because addiction is addiction."

Napier spent 14 years and eight months in jail for committing murder and since his release he has been on a mission to encourage young people not to make the mistakes he made. Those experiences have prompted him to not only go through the community to convince young people to make the right choices, but also to write two books about his life. In his second book, entitled "Poverty and Prison," which was a follow-up to his first book, "Frustrations of My Past," he talked about the things that led him to prison as well as his prison experiences, and the lessons learned.

"Never in my life would I try to glorify all of the negative things I've done in my past, but I just use that as a moral example that you can transform and make a transition from negative to positive," he said. "In actuality, I went to prison when I was 18 years old for killing one man, but I believe the good I do in my life outweighs the bad, so that's why I'm on a mission to save young people's lives and help them escape the madness (I was in).

"The reception is overwhelming because when I'm out and the kids see me somewhere, they tell me that they got their first job, how I inspired them to get their driver's license, and even inviting me to their graduations, weddings or their baby showers," he said. "Or, they may introduce me to their families, and I'm like, 'Wow, I remember that little boy, I thought he wasn't going to make it.' So, I don't give up on them and I think that they appreciate it, because I tell them that even though you make some mistakes and you think that you have failed, I'm going to be there to help you find a solution to your problem."

Mobile Police Chief Lawrence Battiste knows Napier well. While Battiste was working at Strickland Youth Center, he and Napier worked together developing a mentoring program.

"He told me that he didn't think he would ever get out of prison and make a positive difference," Battiste said. "I read his first book, and it was eye-opening. It was looking at life from someone who had issues and decided to do something positive."

The two also worked together with the Youth Advocacy Program. "He served in a lot of positive mentoring roles," Battiste said.

How Napier got the nickname of "Champ" is a story in itself.

"My father was infatuated with Muhammad Ali and he was a big boxing fan, and he would hold me up after I was fighting my cousin and call me Champ," he said. "My father taught me how to fight, and Champ is not only my nickname, it's my alter ego because (with) my lifestyle, I didn't comprehend or relate to Superman, Spiderman or Batman. I was always my own superhero, and now I'm a champion, for the people as well as myself. When the burdens weigh down on me heavy, I tap into my own psychological strength and come up with solutions and solve our problems."

Almost from the start, it appeared Napier was doomed to go down a rough and rocky road, one that led him on a path of violence, sex, drugs, murder and ultimately prison.

"The tragedy of my life was that at a young age, I was exposed to violence," he said.

"Growing up in Prichard, which is one of the poorest cities in the nation, and poverty breeds violence, so unfortunately, at the age of 3, I witnessed the death of my father."

Napier remembered the day his father, Willie James Bonner, died. At that time, he and his family were living in the Queens Court Projects in Prichard. Queens Court, known as a hot spot for crime, was one of approximately 15 places Napier lived growing up.

"Me and my brother were outside playing, and this guy came by and shot my father in retaliation of my father shooting him," he recalled. "So, after that, I was brutalized by my environment, and I grew up in a dysfunctional family and community which had me completely unstable."

It got no better once Napier started school. Because he did not take school seriously, he was constantly in trouble.

"My elementary years, I stayed suspended or expelled, which would explain why I was sent to jail at the age of 18," he said. "The neighbors, the Mobile Press-Register,

and the Mobile County School System labeled me a rabble-rouser, a troublemaker, high school dropout and a drug user, but that's not the person I am today."

The fact Napier and his family moved around so often didn't help matters as it didn't allow him to settle down and keep out of trouble. "That was part of the reason I had a dysfunctional family," he said.

It was after he dropped out of school Napier began engaging in a full-fledged life of crime. From shoplifting out of stores in Bel-Air Mall, using stolen credit cards, Napier eventually began selling crack cocaine. "By the time I was 15 years old, crack cocaine was the main thing and monopolized the black community," he said. "The way we had viewed it, it was an outlet to get rich quick. I always stated that in my neighborhood, you could get drugs or a gun faster than you could get a decent job. That's why a lot of people were inclined to the high crime rate and drug activity."

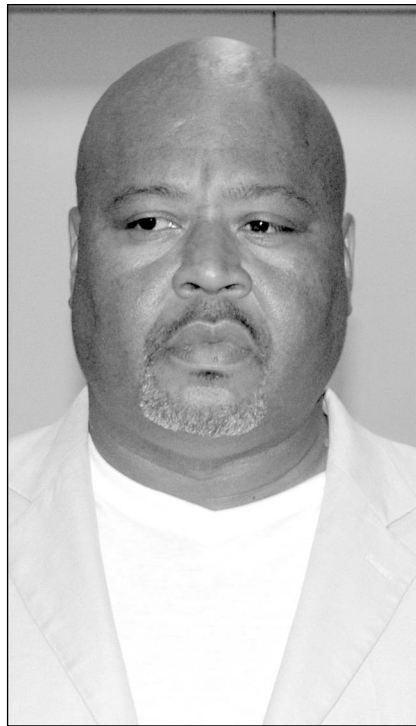
The lure of easy money made Napier immune to the risks of drug dealing.

"Every day, you realized that your life was in jeopardy and we were taking risks because things were taking place at a fatal rate," he said. "You can't imagine that the drugs, the crime, the hustling, the women, the cars, the unwashed bodies, as well as the blood and ambulances coming to take people who had been shot or stabbed. Life was fast, but none of that affected me because I was making money fast, living fast and staying high. So, I medicated myself to escape the cruel reality of my everyday environment."

On numerous occasions, Napier carried a weapon, not only for protection, but also to use if a drug deal went bad or if there were other disputes as were bound to happen if drugs were involved.

"There was one incident where me and my friends shot a guy; he had owed us some money," Napier recalled. "He didn't even go to the hospital and the only thing he was saying was that 'We're even, I don't owe y'all no more.' So, we stopped shooting and started beating people with baseball bats, because that pain from a baseball bat lasts longer than a pain from a bullet."

"I think I hit about five or six people with baseball bats, and I think it's a blessing that I was always the aggressor and had never been attacked like that before, because I couldn't take (being beaten). That's why I always prayed and asked God for forgiveness for some of the things I know



"Don't get caught up in the negative activity of the street life, because the street is only a delusion of grandeur that tricks you into thinking this is the easy way."

— Chris "Champ" Napier's advice to young people who want to turn their lives around

I've done, because my lifestyle would not allow me to take it. That's why I said it was a blessing in disguise."

Napier's luck ran out when he and a friend were crossed by three other men in a drug deal. Napier shot and killed one of them as they attempted to flee. After the first trial ended in a hung jury, he was tried again and sentenced to life in prison in February of 1990.

"Prison was the most awful experience I ever had in my life," he said. "If I sat down and talked with a Vietnam veteran and the heroin addict combined, it could never describe the horrible effect of prison, because it's like you are dead while you are still alive. At one point, when I had served four or five years in prison, I used to dream that I was at my funeral, and my homeboys were standing over my casket, throwing dirt on my body."

"I would wake up from my dream, crying, and I would write a letter to my mother and telling her if I don't get out alive, don't let the state have my body. For 10 years after my release, I used to always wake up crying, because I felt that I was still in prison. The psychological repercussions that prison has on a person's life, you will never be able to imagine (that), because even today, when I go through hardships and challenges, I say one thing about it — I ain't locked up no more."

For the most part, Napier kept to himself while serving time, trying to avoid the pitfalls of prison life.

"I isolated myself from the prison activities," he said. "Like I tell my friends, I was like Jesus. When Jesus said that he was in the world, but he wasn't of it; well, I was in prison, but I didn't participate in the prison activities. It was nothing they could do to pacify me to make me think that my punishment was OK. I wasn't satisfied with the visitation or the education process. Even though I was tutoring other inmates to get their GED, I said all that we do is want to play (the game) until we put it to proper use."

Eventually, Napier got involved in the Free by Choice Program, a program designed for inmates in minimum custody to travel around the state to schools, drug rehabilitation centers and different civic organizations. The purpose was for inmates to tell their life stories to try and help prevent others from making the type of mistakes that lead to incarceration.

Napier told the Call News he has advice for young people, especially those who are prone to wind up in trouble.

"Take education (more) seriously," he said. "I tell them to be obedient to their parents and set goals for themselves. Don't get caught up in the negative activity of the street life, because the street is only a delusion of grandeur that tricks you into thinking this is the easy way. One of the examples I use is that you can go out in the streets and make \$50,000 in six months, but as a consequence you might do 10 years in prison, so 10 divided by 50 (thousand), that's next to welfare. So, I tell them that you can be more productive getting a job at Target or one of these grocery stores and move up the ladder and get an education."