

JN News

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News From the World of the C-130J Super Hercules

Tactical Airlift Excellence Defined. Carry On!

At the end of a hastily called U.S. Air Force budget meeting held one week after the Korean War started in June, 1950, an idea was born. One of the participants, whose name is unfortunately lost to history, said that the service needed a rugged medium transport that could be operated out of unimproved landing strips and haul cargo or troops a considerable distance at moderately high speeds.

Funds for the new transport were included in the service's supplemental research and development budget that year. In July 1951, the then-Lockheed Aircraft Corporation's Model 82 was chosen over designs from Boeing, Douglas, and Fairchild to be the U.S. Air Force's new tactical airlifter.

Later designated C-130 and nicknamed Hercules, this airlifter, with its distinctive shape and four turboprop engines, has been in continuous production since early 1954, or nearly half the entire history of powered flight. The C-130 is the product of the longest, continuous, active military aircraft production line in history.



The first prototype was flown Aug. 23, 1954, in Burbank, Calif. The first production aircraft was flown from Lockheed's Marietta, Ga., facility on April 7, 1955. Since then, more than 2,260 Hercules aircraft have been delivered to 60 countries. Today, 67 countries, counting those that bought used aircraft, fly the Hercules.

The C-130 entered operational service in 1956 and since then, aircrews have, quite literally, been everywhere and done

everything. It is safe to say that anytime there is a conflict, a natural disaster or situation where significant quantities of people, supplies or equipment have to be on scene quickly anywhere in the world, Hercules crews will be flying them there.

You name it and the Hercules has been used to do it. The C-130 has been flown from both poles; landed or airdropped cargo at every hot spot from the Congo to Vietnam to Kosovo to Afghanistan and Iraq; and hauled relief supplies to every outpost on the globe. It has been used to airdrop 15,000 pound bombs, paratroopers, and leaflets that weigh ounces.





The C-130 serves as a gunship; it monitors and jams enemy radio transmissions; it is used to track icebergs in the North Atlantic and drug traffickers in Caribbean and Pacific. The Hercules is flown into hurricanes to obtain wind and rain data; it is used to drop retardant on forest fires and insecticide on mosquito infestations.

A modern-day Noah's ark, the C-130 has been used to haul whales, camels, horses, and cows. It has been used to medevac thousands of casualties to hospitals. As further proof that this aircraft can be used for everything, there was once a four-ship aerial demonstration team that flew C-130s. Incredibly, a C-130 once carried 452 people, despite being designed to carry only 90. In 1963, a Hercules crew landed on and took off from an aircraft carrier 21 times. That particular aircraft is still in active service with the U.S. Marine Corps.

There have been five major military versions of the C-130 along with close to 70 special purpose variants. Between 1954 and 1959, 231 C-130As were built. Production of the C-130B ran from 1958 until 1963 and resulted in 230 aircraft. A total of 488 C-130Es were built from 1961 to 1974. The most produced version of the Hercules so far is the C-130H, with 1,205 aircraft coming off the assembly between 1964 and 1997. Production of the L-100, the civilian variant, totaled 115 aircraft and production ran primarily from 1964 to 1987.

Today's C-130J represents a nearly complete reinvention of the Hercules. The C-130J, first flown in 1996, and, like every other Hercules, has a wingspan of 132 feet — 12 feet longer than the Wright Brothers' first flight — a height of 38 feet, and comes in two lengths. The short fuselage aircraft is 97 feet, the same as all previous models, and the longer aircraft is 112 feet, which allows it to accommodate more payload. The longer aircraft can carry a maximum payload of 47,812 pounds. Maximum range with a 25,000 pound payload is more than 3,700 nautical miles without external fuel tanks.

A total of 179 C-130Js are on order as of 2004, and more than 100 been delivered to date. In the U.S., Air Force Reserve Command and Air National Guard units fly C-130Js and have the EC-130J psychological warfare variant. The Marine Corps operates KC-130J tankers, and the Coast Guard has introduced the HC-130J into service. International C-130J operators include the Royal Air Force, Royal Australian Air Force, Italian Air Force, and the Royal Danish Air Force.

The capabilities and performance of the Lockheed Martin C-130J in supporting light, fast, and lethal combat operations make it a true transformational asset, and one that will be as vital tomorrow as earlier models have been for the past 50 years.



*J News is a monthly newsletter from the C-130J program office in Marietta, Ga.
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