ONE OF THE AIR FORCE'S BIGGEST PLANES HAS HELPED PULL OFF EVERY MAJOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS MISSION SINCE VIETNAM

60 YEARS OLD AND STILL PERHAPS THE MOST VERSATILE AIRCRAFT WE'VE EVER HAD

THE C-130 HERCULES (PRIMARY AIRCRAFT AT LITTLE ROCK AFB)

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An MC-130P Combat Shadow, top, an MC-130J Commando II, center, and an MC-130H Combat Talon II off the coast of Okinawa, January 26, 2015.

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Since the mid-1960s, the Air Force has used the MC-130 to support special-operations missions all over the world. The Air Force is now rolling out the MC-130J model, and it will remain important as special operators adapt to new challenges. "The MC-130 is a very versatile and flexible aircraft," a former Air Force officer and Combat Talon pilot told Insider.

The US military has thousands of aircraft that can launch attacks and support conventional operations, from the futuristic F-35 and F-22 fighters to the venerable A-10 and AC-130 close air support planes.

Happy 60th birthday to the Hercules – the oldest continuously produced family of military planes in history.

Lockheed has been making these airplanes longer than the legendary B-52 bomber and the famous U2 spy jet. Unlike those planes, the C-130 has never become a household name.

When it comes to supporting special-operations units, the MC-130 has an essential if little-known role.

MC-130 variants have participated in every major and minor US military campaign since the Vietnam War, backing up special-operations units in some of the biggest commando missions.

More than 40 variants of the Hercules, including civilian versions marketed as the Lockheed L-100, operate in more than 60 nations. The C-130 entered service with the U.S. in 1956, followed by Australia and many other nations.

The first versions of the aircraft flew in the Son Tay prisoner rescue in North Vietnam in 1970. Ten years later, MC-130s participated in Operation Eagle Claw, the failed mission to rescue American hostages held in Iran.

MC-130s were also part of the first major Delta Force and Ranger mission in Afghanistan in 2001, and an MC-130 was the first aircraft to land at Baghdad International Airport after the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

FROM THE JUNGLES OF VIETNAM

During the Vietnam War, the Air Force began experimenting with using a large transport aircraft to support large commando operations. Helicopters could only lift so much and fly so far.

Military Assistance Command Vietnam-Studies and Observation (MACV-SOG), a secretive force that conducted missions behind enemy lines, specifically needed the capability to support its recon teams that went across the fence.

Composed of Green Berets, Navy SEALs, Recon Marines, and Air Commandos, SOG conducted covert operations in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and North Vietnam, where US troops weren't supposed to be.

The introduction of the MC-130 allowed SOG to be more effective in its covert war in Southeast Asia. The Air Commandos who flew the aircraft received the Presidential Unit Citation for their performance, which paved the way for a mission that is still going nearly 70 years later.

An MC-130E on its final flight before retirement, April 15, 2013. The MC-130E was developed to support special operations during the Vietnam War

A SPECIAL OPERATIONS WORKHORSE

A cockpit of the MC-130J, seen here on April 5, 2011, has state-of-the-art technology.

The MC-130 fleet of about 60 planes is the backbone of Air Force Special Operations Command's fixed-wing force.

The latest iteration, the *MC-130J Commando II,* specializes in the infiltration, exfiltration, and resupply of special-operations units in semi- or non-permissive areas.

It can also support psychological operations — dropping leaflets and broadcasting messages *— and provide aerial refueling for special-operations helicopters.*

Each Commando II costs $114 million and is operated by a crew of five Air Commandos. It can haul up to 164,000 pounds as far as 3,000 miles without refueling. It also has significant external and internal upgrades over previous versions.

It has new Rolls-Royce engines that are 25% more powerful than those on the previous model, which is *known as the Combat Talon*.

Internally, the Commando II has state-of-the-art digital electronic and navigation systems that can be used by the same operator, meaning it needs fewer crew than earlier MC-130 variants.

An Australian special-operations unit exits a US MC-130 over Australia during the exercise Talisman Saber 2011, July 18, 2011.

The MC-130 can fly as low as 250 feet in adverse weather conditions using its potent terrain-following, terrain-avoidance radar system, the AN/APQ-187 Silent Knight. This means that in capable hands, the aircraft can fly nap-of-the-air routes to avoid detection from enemy radars and anti-aircraft systems.

"The MC-130 is a very versatile and flexible aircraft that can accomplish a wide range of special-operations missions," a former Air Force officer and Combat Talon pilot told Insider.

"You will seldom, if ever, see or hear about the aircraft and the men who fly it. We aren't as sexy as our AC-130 [gunship] colleagues, whom your audience might be well aware of," the former officer said.

"Nevertheless, we fulfill an important mission — transporting and resupplying special operations forces anywhere in the world. We don't kick in any doors, but we enable the special operators on the ground to kick them."

ADAPTING FOR THE FUTURE

An MC-130J airdrops a Maritime Craft Aerial Delivery System over the Gulf of Mexico during an exercise, November 12, 2015

The Air Force has begun retiring the -E, -H, and -P versions of the MC-130 fleet and plans to completely replace them with the MC-130J by 2025. The "Combat Talon" designation, active since 1977, will also be retiring.

But the MC-130 will remain an important asset as US special operators adapt to new challenges. One key role for the Commando II will be as a Forward Arming and Refueling Point (FARP).

During FARP operations, an MC-130 can refuel and rearm special-operations aircraft, such as AH/MH-6 Little Bird helicopters, and unmanned aerial vehicles while using austere or improvised airfields in semi- or non-permissive areas.

The MC-130's FARP capability isn't limited to special-operations aircraft. *The Air Force has been experimenting with using MC-130 refuel some of its more advanced fighter jets, such as the F-22 Raptor, from impromptu airfields.*

The US military, the Air Force in particular, is looking to counter the growing size and reach of China's military by dispersing its forces across the Indo-Pacific region, often using dilapidated or under-developed bases.

A more robust FARP capability could therefore be invaluable in a conflict with China, especially if paired with the Marine Corps' F-35B fighter jet, which has a short-take-off-and-vertical-landing capability that makes it suitable for very austere environments.

WHAT OTHER PLANS ARE COMING FOR THE C130'S?

THE AIR FORCE WANTS TO MOVE FAST ON BOAT-PLANE FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS

A rendering of a twin float amphibious modification to an MC-130J Commando

Military.com

15 Sep 2021

The Air Force is moving forward with an amphibious, pontoon-equipped version of the MC-130J Commando II used by its special operators -- and hopes to be able to fly a prototype of the aircraft in less than a year and a half.

A U.S. Special Operations Command official said at a conference in May that the military was considering developing an amphibious MC-130, but that concerns about feasibility meant that the Air Force would take a hard look at the idea before proceeding.

But in a Tuesday press release, Air Force Special Operations Command outlined plans to go ahead with the MC-130J Commando II Amphibious Capability, or MAC, program.

AFSOC said that adding removable pontoons to the Commando will be important as the military's focus shifts to areas near seashores or lakes -- and free its aircraft from having to land on physical runways.

The military in recent years has, for example, become concerned about China's increasing activity in the South China Sea, and its creation of man-made islands there on which it has built military installations.

But a Commando that could land on water would be able to do a lot more to infiltrate troops, get them out, and recover trapped or wounded personnel, Lt. Col. Josh Trantham, AFSOC's deputy division chief for science, systems, technology and innovation, said in the release.

That will be even more important in a future war, which might result in situations where land forces, bases or equipment are endangered by the enemy, AFSOC said.

"Seaborne operations offer nearly unlimited water landing zones, providing significant flexibility for the joint force," Trantham said.

The MC-130J is used to fly secret missions, often at night and at low altitudes, to insert special operations forces into sensitive or hostile areas, get them out, or resupply them. It also can conduct aerial refueling operations.

MC-130s are outfitted with extensive electronic warfare capabilities that allow the crews to detect and avoid radar and infrared-guided threats. They have advanced computers and navigation equipment, as well as radars that are specially designed to help the aircraft fly exceptionally low and in harsh weather conditions. And their tails are stronger than the typical C-130 tail to make it easier to conduct high-speed airdrops.

AFSOC has been working with the Air Force Research Laboratory's Strategic Development Planning and Experimentation directorate, as well as defense contractors, on the amphibious modifications.

The prototypes for the modified plane are being tested virtually on the Digital Proving Ground, using digital design, virtual reality modeling and computer-aided designs, AFSOC said. The hope is this will allow the project to use digital simulation, testing and advanced manufacturing to quickly create and test physical prototypes.

"Being able to experiment with existing technology to evaluate design tradeoffs and test a new system before ever bending metal is a game-changer," said Maj. Kristen Cepak, AFSOC's technology transition branch chief, in the press release.

The Air Force's still-in-development T-7A Red Hawk trainer aircraft also heavily used digital tools in its design and engineering process, which the service said allowed it to catch problems earlier than the typical process would permit.

AFSOC hopes it can develop prototypes quickly and possibly fly an experimental version in 17 months. And if it works, the Air Force hopes to outfit other versions of the C-130 -- including Hercules aircraft flown by other services -- with similar amphibious capabilities, with just a few tweaks.

It wouldn't be the first time a C-130 variant was modified to allow it to land in unusual environments. The New York Air National Guard's LC-130 "Ski bird" aircraft, for example, is outfitted with skis and rockets to help it land on and take off from icy Antarctic surfaces on missions to resupply scientific stations there.

THE C-130'S CAPABILITIES TO LAND AND TAKE OFF FROM AN AIRCRAFT CARRIER

During 1963, a KC-130F aircraft made history by landing and taking off from the aircraft carrier; USS Forrestal (CVA-59). The crew successfully negotiated 29 touch-and-go landings, 21 unarrested full-stop landings, and 21 unassisted takeoffs at gross weights of 85,000 pounds up to 121,000 pounds. Lockheed's only modifications to the original plane included installing a smaller nose-landing gear orifice, an improved anti-skid braking system, and removal of the underwing refueling pods. *No tail hook...No catapult*. Painted on the side of the fuselage; "LOOK MA, NO HOOK. *The airplane became the largest and heaviest aircraft to ever land on an aircraft carrier, a record that stands to this day.*

To view a C-130 actually doing this copy and paste the below link into your browser

https://www.military.com/video/military-aircraft-operations/carrier-landings/c-130-carrier-landing-without-hook/2812569251001

LETHAL AC-130 GUNSHIP UNLEASHES "THE ANGEL OF DEATH"

Military vehicles at one point or another will end up in harm's way, as is the nature of their purpose. Aircraft, in particular, may find themselves vulnerable to attack if fighters aren't to defend. So in a worst-case scenario, many aircraft are equipped with aerial flares as a means of saving their lives. *When*

deployed flares can burn at temperatures of several thousand degrees, much higher than the flames from the engine creating a diversion for heat-seeking missiles.

"When modern warplanes have missiles fired at them, they deploy flares or chaff to lead those missiles off-target.

The magnesium-containing flares are designed to burn hotter than the airplane's exhaust, drawing heat-seeking missiles to the flare rather than the plane. Meanwhile the reflectiveness of chaff—typically small pieces of aluminum or reflective plastic—are meant to dazzle and confuse radar-guided missiles."

C-130 GUNSHIP CAPABILITIES

The AC-130J is the world's biggest flying artillery gunship and also the deadliest - nicknamed 'Hell in the Sky.' With *three side firing weapons, a 25mm gatling gun, a 40mm Bofors cannon, and a 105mm howitzer, it's easy to see why it got its name.* It inspires terror in the terrorists with its massive arsenal of weaponry. When targeted by enemies it deploys its own system of countermeasure flares to keep it safe that resembles an angel. Watch this awesome clip and see just why they call the AC-130 the *Angel of Death*.

COPY AND PASTE THE BELOW LINK INTO YOUR BROWSER

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbqAmgmWnlQ

C-130 GUNSHIP ARMAMENT

The capabilities of the weapon system can be explained by copying and pasting the below link into your browser

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7lrfdzU8k4k

DO YOU KNOW THE STORY ABOUT THE LAST C-130 TO LEAVE VIETNAM ?

On April 29, 1975, tail number 56-0518 flew the last mission out of Vietnam before the fall of Saigon. Prior to that date, the aircraft was delivered to the South Vietnamese Air Force in 1972 as part of the Nixon administration's effort to bolster that country's defense against the invading communist forces from the North.

On the 29th, the day before Saigon fell, North Vietnamese forces destroyed virtually all aircraft – more than 100 planes – on the flight line at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. 0-5-1-8 was the only C-130 to avoid ruin.

In a panicked state, hundreds of refugees rushed to get aboard this last flyable C-130, the aircraft representing their final ticket to freedom. *In all, 452 people were on board, including 32 in the cockpit alone.*

The aircraft was overloaded by at least 10,000 pounds and required every foot of runway to become airborne, including hitting the brakes while taxiing in order to close the rear ramp doors. The plane ultimately landed in Thailand, and was later returned to the U.S. Air Force.

DUE TO ITS ORIGINAL ASSIGNMENT WITH THE 62ND TROOP CARRIER SQUADRON AND THE 314TH TROOP CARRIER WING THE AIRCRAFT WAS RETIRED TO LITTLE ROCK AFB AND HAS BEEN ON DISPLAY AT THE MAIN GATE SINCE 1989

THE FRIENDLY AIRPLANE WHO HAS DONE EVERYTHING WE'VE ASK OF HER AND MORE

HAPPY 60TH BIRTHDAY

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