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J News

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Hercules turns up the heat with MAFFS training

California's firefighting calvary joined by fellow units for intense, week-long training exercises

Article courtesy of Master Sgt. Mike R. Smith, National Guard Bureau

Returning fresh from last year's wildfire season, more than 300 National Guard and Reserve Airmen hope that the Modular Airborne Firefighting System (MAFFS) training they participated in Tucson, Ariz., in May will give them the edge over destructive blazes that can spark at any time.

Officials say that 78,979 wild land fires burned 5,292,468 acres in 2008 — slightly higher than the 10-year average. As of early May, there were already 11,878 more wildfires than last year at this time, and the greater firefighting season is still ahead, according to the National Interagency Coordination Center. This year's wildfire season starts June 1.

For the Air National Guard, getting Airmen and equipment ready for a state call-up was the purpose of the training at Tucson

"MAFFS Training" continues on page 2



C-130Js from the California Air National Guard participates in exercises during the annual Modular Airborne Firefighting System (MAFFS) training, held this month in Arizona. Photo by John Rossino.

A four-star thumbs-up

Little Rock Air Force Base in Arkansas and the 41st Airlift Squadron ("Black Cats") welcomed their 13th C-130J Super Hercules in early May. The bird was flown from Lockheed Martin's Marietta, Ga., plant by a guest pilot: Gen. Arthur Lichte, commander, Air Mobility Command, Scott Air Force Base, Ill.

"While this isn't my first Lockheed Martin delivery this year [C-5M], this is my first C-130J delivery, and I have been looking forward to this great opportunity," Lichte said. "And we [the Air Force] couldn't have done it without you [Lockheed Martin] and the great leadership of this organization along with the hard work of each individual on the floor who builds these aircraft each and every day."

C-130Js from the 41st Airlift Squadron are engaged in high-tempo operations in multiple combat theaters. Little Rock will receive 16 C-130Js in total.



Gen. Arthur Lichte, commander, Air Mobility Command, at the helm of Little Rock Air Force Base's latest C-130J. Photo by John Rossino.



C-130Js equipped with MAFFS systems and loaded with thousands of pounds of water took to the Arizona skies for training this month. Photo by John Rossino.

“MAFFS Training” from page 1

International Airport. The annual training also provides the recertification required by the U.S. Forest Service prior to the fire season.

“We do this every year prior to the main fire season to ensure everybody is trained and ready to go and is proficient as possible for when the fire season does start,” said Lt. Col. Wylie Walno, a pilot from the Wyoming Air Guard’s 153rd Airlift Wing, who was serving here as the training commander.

Air National Guard units from North Carolina, Wyoming and California operate three squadrons with MAFFS-equipped, C-130 Hercules aircraft. The Air Force Reserve operates one MAFFS squadron.

All operational MAFFS aircraft were flown during the training, including the latest MAFFS II system now operated by the California Air Guard’s 146th Airlift Wing based at Channel Islands Air National Guard Base.

From a staging area at the international airport, ground support crews sweated under the sun and hustled around their aircraft through a mix of triple digit heat and hotter engine exhaust.

The aircraft, loaded with thousands of pounds of water, lumbered on takeoff, following a lead aircraft across the southwestern Sonoran desert, toward the mountains to make their practice fire retardant drops.

MAFFS and the newest MAFFS II are owned by the U.S. Forest

Service and are flown on military aircraft. The older system consists of five tanks with dissemination tubes that run out the aircraft’s cargo ramp. The tanks are loaded with 3,000 gallons of orange-colored fire retardant and water, which coats fuel sources, such as dry grass, brush and trees to keep fire from spreading. The flight line surrounding the training area was strewn with equipment and water hoses. Although it may have looked confusing, the ground support system can reload MAFFS with retardant mixture in less than eight minutes.

One of the advantages of the recently operational MAFFS II system is its onboard compressors, which remove the need to recompress air tanks from ground systems, officials said.

Walno said the idea of a military unit being used in support of firefighting missions was conceived in 1970, but an operational system didn’t get to the units until five years later. “There’s military and as many other agencies now, and it’s a growing entity, growing faster and faster as we speak,” he said.

“Most interesting for us is the structure of the firefighting services here, and the interaction between the civil and military fire services,” said Col. Vladimir Bekker, deputy director of Kazakhstan’s firefighting service, who watched the training during a larger State Partnership Program tour with the Arizona National Guard.

About 75 civilian personnel from the U.S. Forest Service, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the Bureau of Land Management supported the training event and recertification during this exercise.



Hollywood Hercs

More than 200 students from Pass Road Elementary school in Gulfport, Miss., packed into the library on May 6, 2009, to watch as Air Force Reservists from the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron and the 815th Airlift Squadron from the 403rd Wing at Keesler Air Force Base, Miss., signed their names on a wall-sized mural painted in honor of their service. “We wanted to dedicate this mural to you guys because you are our heroes on the (Mississippi Gulf) Coast,” said Penny Walton, Pass Road Elementary’s library media specialist. “You are like Hollywood — these kids hear about you all the time, but they never get to see you. This is their Hollywood.” (U.S. Air Force photo/1st. Lt. J. Justin Pearce)

Hurricane Hunters fly into eye of social media

Keesler Air Base hosts bloggers on WC-130J flight, a first for USAF

*Article courtesy of Staff Sgt. Matthew Bates,
Defense Media Activity, San Antonio, Texas*

Airmen in the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron based out of Keesler Air Base in Mississippi hosted the Air Force's first ever orientation flight for military bloggers May 19.

The flight, which took place aboard one of the reserve unit's WC-130J Hercules, was designed to give the bloggers a taste of what it's like to fly on a military aircraft and learn what these "Hurricane Hunters" do when they fly through the large storms.

For the bloggers, the flight was not only educational, but entertaining.

"It was a blast," said Cynthia Morgan, a truck driver who blogs about military topics. "I'm a sort of a thrill junkie so this flight was awesome. I'll be putting this in my blog for sure."

This is one of the reasons squadron members hosted the flight. Blogging is becoming increasingly popular throughout the world and Air Force officials are taking notice.

"All of these bloggers address military or weather issues in their blogs," said Maj. Chad Gibson, public affairs officer with the 403rd Wing. "Blogging is another medium we can use to get information out. So, providing this flight gives the bloggers a better idea of what we do and allows us to use them to tell the rest of the world."

And, with social networking and media sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and Youtube, bloggers do have unlimited reach. A message posted to one of these popular sites reaches literally across the globe.

"Blogging is a way for the military to reach a lot of people fast," said Petty Officer 3rd Class William Selby, a mass communications specialist and military blogger. "So it can get information out that it otherwise might not be able to using conventional media, such as newspapers and magazines."

This is one reason Morgan started blogging. She worked as a civilian contractor in Iraq for several years and noticed a lot of good things were happening there; things the media weren't reporting.



Master Sgt. Randy Bynon answers questions from military bloggers onboard a WC-130J "Hurricane Hunter" during a training mission May 19. A first for the Air Force, military bloggers were invited to fly with the crew on the mission. Sergeant Bynon is a loadmaster assigned to the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron at Keesler Air Force Base, Miss. The training flight featured the unit's weather reconnaissance mission as they prepare to enter hurricane season, which begins June 1. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Desiree N. Palacios)

"So, I started a blog and talked about what our military was doing in Iraq," she said. "I just wanted people to know there was a lot of good going on."

Department of Defense officials also are looking at ways it can use servicemembers as bloggers.

"Blogging is the new media," said Petty Officer Selby, who produces a video blog for DOD on important military topics. "And it's easily accessible. People can blog from anywhere and at anytime. So, I see blogging becoming even more popular in the future and the military is looking at how it can be a part of this new media."

This orientation flight was a good first step.

"It's great the Air Force is giving this opportunity to bloggers," Morgan said. "It's definitely helpful to get a firsthand look at what the military does ... it'll sure make my blog more

► *Tweet, tweet: It's not a bird; it's the 403rd's official Twitter feed. Check it out @ <http://twitter.com/403PA>*

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*Petty Officer 3rd Class William Selby,
mass communications specialist and military blogger*



European airlift on the line

The flightline at the Lockheed Martin facility in Marietta is a very busy place these days. Pictured are a collection of Europe-bound C-130Js. Italy and the United Kingdom are in for block upgrade installations, Norway is getting ready for the delivery of its second aircraft and the next two for Ramstein Air Base in Germany are being prepared. Photo by Damien Guarnieri.

J View

Each month *J News* offers an individual's perspective of the C-130J program.

"I've got the best job at Lockheed Martin. If you can't be flying the C-130J, then the next best thing is the simulator. I am the C-130J Engineering Simulator Operations Engineer, a member of the Simulation and Systems Integration Laboratory (SimSIL) organization. I schedule the lab, help with test planning and setup, collect data and operate the Engineering Simulator. On a typical day, engineers from around the company come into the simulator to test new software and hardware before it goes on the airplane. Pilots from our domestic and foreign customers come in to train before taking delivery of their new C-130J. Dignitaries from around the world come in to the simulator to 'fly' and have the J's capabilities demonstrated to them. Lately, USAF generals have been coming into the simulator to practice a flight before flying the C-130J to their home base. It's great to see the customers put the C-130J through its paces!"

Sharon DuBois,
C-130J Operations Engineer, Simulation and Systems Integration Laboratory



Photo by John Rossino.



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