

# Hill keeps workhorse running

by Donna Brown  
Hilltop Times staff writer

The workhorse of the Air Force will spend less time in the pasture and more time on the run thanks to a vital improvement in the Directorate of Maintenance.

The C-130 Hercules is a medium-range tactical airlift aircraft designed primarily for transport of cargo and personnel within a theater of operations. In the past 30 years, more than 900 C-130s have been delivered to the U.S. Air Force.

Hill AFB received its first C-130s in May 1988, and with them, aircraft technicians inherited a serious problem.

Vapors were getting trapped inside fuel cells when the aircraft were brought in for repairs, according to Glen Baker, a process engineering technician in Maintenance. Mr. Baker is a people improving process facilitator for the directorate.

When a C-130 lands and is in need of repairs or inspection, all fuel must be drained from it before it can enter a hangar. A special tank is used to retrieve and store the fuel for future use. There are six fuel cells on the C-130 that hold a combined total of 7,000 gallons of fluid.

After the fuel is drained, the cells are rinsed and cleaned with a purging fluid to clear out residue and assure that the cells are free of residue.

Because the aircrafts' fuel cells are filled with foam, vapors get trapped inside and over time build up to a potentially explosive level, Mr. Baker said.

There are six to nine C-130s at a time in Bldg. 225. In the past, the vapor levels in the aircraft were becoming so high they had to be hauled outside to be aired out or repurged.

Mr. Baker said it takes four technicians about eight hours to haul the 97-foot long, 38-foot high aircraft with a 132-foot wingspan outside the hangar to complete the cleansing process. It had to be done once a week to two out of three of the C-130s that came into the hangar for repairs.

Managers in the aircraft division of MA were concerned about the safety of their employees. "A PIP team was established with employees working together as a team to look into the problem," Mr. Baker said.

"The team did a series of tests to find out the major contributing factors that cause fumes to build up," he said.

They gathered and researched information from other bases that had experienced the same problems.

From other bases they learned that a special vent could be installed over the cells—like a chimney—that would allow the problem-causing vapors to dissipate into the air and prevent build-up.

"The team was able to identify where the problems were while providing process technicians with control charts to visually show if their individual process is in control and when they need to make adjustments before the process strays out of the limits," Mr. Baker said.

A purge fluid conductivity meter was purchased to perform on-site testing by the process technicians. They analyze the make-up of the purging fluid to make sure it is up to standards. By conducting the tests themselves, they save the aircraft division around \$20,000 per year.

The winged workhorses can finally be fixed up, saddled up and sent back into that great big work field in the sky without the time-consuming vapor complications.



U.S. Air Force Photo by Donna Brown

## 'Fume-igating'

Dennis Jacobson, an aircraft technician in the aircraft division of the Directorate of Maintenance, uses a lower explosive level meter to check the explosive level of fumes inside a C-130 Hercules cargo aircraft fuel cell.

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