# Performance Of Lockheed Martin C-130J Airlifter Highlighted In Italian Air Force Operations In Afghanistan

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Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi recently presented the Aeronautica Militare Italiana's (AMI, the Italian Air Force) C-130 unit with the Knight's Cross of the Military Order of Italy. The presentation was for the unit's highly successful combat debut with its Lockheed Martin C-130J Super Hercules airlifters during Operation Enduring Freedom missions in Afghanistan.

"The AMI crews set the tone for the success with the C-130J in Afghanistan early on," said Ross Reynolds, Lockheed Martin C-130J Program vice president. "In April 2002, the AMI chose a C-130J to transport Afghanistan's exiled leaders back to Kabul. The J was selected because of its advanced defensive systems and its ability to perform in the harsh operating conditions in Afghanistan."

Operating from Khowst Air Base near the Pakistan border southeast of Kabul, AMI's 46th Air Brigade crews flew more than 1,400 hours during a 12-month period, carrying 1,200 tons of supplies and more than 5,400 passengers. The unit also carried out three medical evacuation missions.

More than 70 of those hours came on night missions with the crew operating on night vision goggles. In Afghanistan, the Italian C-130J crews were the first in the world to land on semi-prepared, reduced dimension runways at night. Because of the need to avoid shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles and other ground threats, and because of the additional power the C-130J has over previous models, crews opted to use an unusual landing technique at these airfields.

The crews approached the landing field at altitude, lined up on the runway and put the aircraft into a near vertical descent at the end of the runway. At the last minute, the pilot then flared out and touched down. The cargo was unloaded in less than 30 minutes to minimize exposure of the aircraft to enemy ground threats, and then the crew would take off again, rapidly climbing to a safe altitude.

During the awards ceremony, held in Rome, the unit's newest decoration was accepted by Brigadier General Walter Mauloni, the wing commander. The award citation reads in part: "Engaged in the far off skies of Afghanistan, [this unit] faced many difficulties caused by complex and dangerous, often prohibitive, environmental conditions and operated with unquestionable capacity and value. The praiseworthy commitment and the very high sense of responsibility shown are clear witness of the professionalism and courage of all the members of the 46th Brigata Aerea whose operations contributed to the prestige of the Air Force and of the nation during an international crisis."

The AMI has a total of 22 C-130J transports on order, including 12 C-130Js and 10 longer fuselage-length C-130J-30 aircraft, which will be used as aerial tankers. These are the first Hercules aircraft to be configured to both refuel other aircraft in the air and be refueled themselves. Seventeen aircraft have been delivered to the AMI to date.

A total of 179 C-130Js and C-130J-30s are on order, and 106 have been delivered. In the U.S., Air Force Reserve Command and Air National Guard units fly C-130Js, C-130J-30s and two specialized C-130J variants; the Marine Corps operates KC-130J tankers; and the Coast Guard recently received its first HC-130J aircraft. Other current international C-130J operators include the Royal Air Force and Royal Australian Air Force. The Royal Danish Air Force will receive its first C-130J-30 next year. The capabilities and performance of the Super Hercules in supporting light, fast and lethal combat operations make it a true transformational asset.

Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Co., a business area of Lockheed Martin, is a leader in the design, development, systems integration, production and support of advanced military aircraft and related technologies. Its customers include the military services of the United States and allied countries throughout the world. Products include the F-16, F/A-22, F-35 JSF, F-117, T-50, C-5, C-130, C-130J, P-3, S-3 and U-2.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin employs about 125,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture and integration of advanced technology systems, products and services. The corporation reported 2002 sales of $26.6 billion.

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