Last Lockheed Martin C-141 StarLifter In Active Duty Air Force Service Retired After Nearly Four Decades Of Service

The last two Lockheed Martin C-141 StarLifters assigned to the 305th Air Mobility Wing (AMW) were retired in ceremonies here this morning, closing out the turbofan-powered airlifter's historic 39-year career with the active-duty component of the U.S. Air Force.

Crews from two Air Force Reserve Command units, the 452nd AMW at March Air Reserve Base, Calif., and the 445th Airlift Wing at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio, will continue to fly the C-141 until the summer of 2006, when the very last StarLifter is scheduled to be retired. A total of 285 StarLifters were built between 1963 and 1968, and 20 aircraft remain in service.

"The C-141 was the world's first jet transport, and it has served as the backbone of this country's strategic airlift force since 1965," said June Shrewsbury, Lockheed Martin's vice president of Strategic Airlift. "In every conflict, every disaster, every contingency anywhere on the globe, StarLifter crews have been the first responders. The C-141 has quite a record of achievement."

The first flight of the first C-141A (there was no prototype) came at the then-Lockheed-Georgia Co. facility in Marietta, Ga., on Dec. 17, 1963, the 60th anniversary of the Wright Brothers' first powered flight. The StarLifter entered Air Force service at Tinker AFB, Okla., in April 1965.

Recognizing that the C-141 often filled up well before its max cargo capacity was reached, the Air Force had 270 C-141 aircraft "stretched" by adding two plugs in the fuselage, increasing usable volume by nearly 75 percent. The first modified aircraft, redesignated C-141B, was flown in 1977 from Marietta and the modification program, which also included provisions for aerial refueling, ran until 1983. The C-141B can carry 200 troops, 155 paratroops, 103 litters and 14 attendants, or 68,725 lbs (31,239 kilograms) of cargo.

Since the StarLifter entered service, more than 30 squadrons with 10 active duty Air Force, Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Command units have flown the aircraft. The C-141 fleet has accumulated more than 10.6 million flight hours since that first flight.

In August of 1965, the first C-141 missions were flown to Vietnam. The C- 141A aircraft were capable of carrying either 138 troops or approximately 62,000 pounds of cargo, reducing to 36 hours what had been a 72-hour trip with stops from Travis AFB, Calif., to Tan Son Nhut Air Base, South Vietnam, in a C-124, the C-141's piston-powered predecessor. On the return trip, the crews could carry up to 80 litters plus attendants on medevac flights. Some 6,000 medevac flights were flown on StarLifters from 1965 until 1972.

Three events in StarLifter history stand out.

* In 1969, a C-141A was used to fly the Apollo 11 astronauts and their special containment house trailer from Hawaii to Houston after the first moon landing mission was completed.
* On Feb. 12, 1973, a C-141A was flown to Gia Lam Airport, near Hanoi, North Vietnam in the first mission of Operation Homecoming, the repatriation of former American prisoners of war. That C-141, known as the Hanoi Taxi, is still in service. It has been modified to C-141C standard with digital cockpit instruments, and is currently scheduled to be retired to the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force (formerly the Air Force Museum) at Wright-Patterson AFB in early 2006.
* In Oct. 1973, StarLifter crews flew 421 missions and delivered more than 10,000 tons of equipment and supplies to Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Most recently, StarLifter crews flew suspected terrorists to the detainment facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and have borne the brunt of aeromedical evacuation flights from the Middle East and later Iraq since Operation Iraqi Freedom began last year.

The first C-141A (Air Force serial number 66-7947) for McGuire Air Force Base was delivered on Aug. 8, 1967. Nicknamed "Garden State Airlifter," that aircraft, now a C-141B, will remain at the base as a static display. Prior to the conclusion of C-141 operations at McGuire, the StarLifters were flown by active duty crews from the 6th Airlift Squadron and Air Force Reserve Command crews from the 514th AMW, the Reserve Associate unit there. Both

will convert to the C-17 airlifter. The last two C-141s at McGuire, serial numbers 64-0633 and 67-0012, were flown to the Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Center at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., where they will eventually be scrapped. Those aircraft, the 46th and 263rd aircraft off the assembly line, had recorded 40,792 and 39,193 flight hours (as of Sept. 13) respectively.

Lockheed Martin Background

Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Co., a business area of Lockheed Martin, is a leader in the design, research and 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, C-5, C-130, C-130J, P-3, S-3 and U-2. The company produces major components for the F-2 fighter, and is a co-developer of the C-27J tactical transport and T-50 advanced jet trainer.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin employs about 130,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture and integration of advanced technology systems, products and services. The corporation reported 2003 sales of $31.8 billion.

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