USAF Retires Last Lockheed Martin C-141 StarLifter; World's First Jet-Powered Airlifter Completes 43-Year Career

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WRIGHT-PATTERSON AFB, Ohio

The U.S. Air Force retired the last Lockheed MartinC-141 StarLifter airlifter to the National Museum of the United States Air Force in ceremonies here this morning, closing out the transport's 43-year career.

The C-141 was the world's first turbofan-powered transport and it served as a major component of the U.S. strategic airlift force since it entered operational service in 1965. The aircraft recorded more than 10.6 million operational hours in over four decades of service.

"The C-141 has a noble record of achievement in its support of the U.S. military. Participating in every military operation from Vietnam to Iraqi Freedom, StarLifter crews have also performed humanitarian relief flights to nearly 70 countries on six continents," said Ross Reynolds, Lockheed Martin's vice president of Air Mobility. "Most recently, the StarLifter served those affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The aircraft has served NASA, conducted Antarctic resupply flights for nearly three decades and has been a key asset for flight research serving science for two decades."

The last C-141 aircraft in Air Force inventory (Air Force serial number 66-0177), a C-141C known as the Hanoi Taxi, was flown by a 445th Airlift Wing crew from the unit's base on the Patterson side of this 8,300 acre installation to the Wright Field side of the base where the National Museum of the United States Air Force (formerly known as the Air Force Museum) is located. The final flight lasted about an hour and included several passes over the museum.

On February 12, 1973, this particular aircraft, then 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. There were 40 former POWs on that first flight, many of whom were in Dayton for a reunion in conjunction with the C-141's retirement. On May 5, the POWs flew once again on the Hanoi Taxi in a re-creation of that historic flight.

"This last aircraft to be retired has a particularly poignant past since this is the aircraft that carried out the first Operation Homecoming," said Reynolds. "With the retirement of this aircraft, we remember and commemorate that important flight with great respect for all the missions of the aircraft, the crews who have flown it and the treasured passengers and cargo it has transported. Our company and employees salute all who have flown the C-141 serving our country and the Air Force, Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve Command, Air Education and Training Command and Air Force Materiel Command with such distinction."

The aircraft was first flown in 1967 and went through two major modifications. It was first brought up to C-141B standards in the late 1970s. In the early 1990s, the aircraft was equipped with digital avionics and became a C-141C. The aircraft retires with approximately 39,470 flight hours and 10,900 landings over its career.

After several weeks of preparation and preservation, the Hanoi Taxi will go on public display this summer in the museum's outdoor airpark. Counting the Hanoi Taxi, a total of 13 StarLifters are preserved as static displays at bases where the aircraft were formerly stationed or in museums around the country.

"The StarLifter was the first production aircraft to be completely designed by engineers at the company's division in Marietta, Ga.," added Reynolds. "At the rollout ceremony in August 1963, President John Kennedy pushed a button at the White House that sent signals to open the hangar doors in Marietta. Today, this division of Lockheed Martin continues the company's air mobility legacy with ongoing production of the new C-130J air mobility aircraft and modernization of the C-5 Galaxy, the largest transport aircraft supporting the needs of the U.S. military."

The 445th Airlift Wing, an Air Force Reserve Command unit, is now converting from the C-141 to the C-5A Galaxy strategic transport. The 445th AW will eventually receive 11 aircraft. Eleven major military construction projects, valued at $62.8 million, are under way or planned through FY'07 to accommodate the C-5s at Wright-Patterson.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin employs about 135,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture, integration and sustainment of advanced technology systems, products and services. The corporation reported 2005 sales of $37.2 billion.

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ADDITIONAL C-141 STARLIFTER BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

A total of 285 C-141 aircraft were built at Lockheed Martin's Marietta, Ga. facility, from 1963 to 1968. Peak year for production was 1967, when 107 C-141s came off the assembly line. The military C-141 fleet (284 aircraft) recorded a grand total of 10,645,726 flight hours, or an average of approximately 39,465 hours per airframe. The military fleet tallied 1,026,695 full-stop landings. One StarLifter was delivered as a commercial L-300 transport and was used as a company demonstrator. It was later used by NASA as an airborne observatory.

A total of 251 C-141s have been retired to the Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Center at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., where they eventually will be dismantled.

The first flight of the first C-141A (there was no prototype) came at Marietta, Ga., on December 17, 1963, the 60th anniversary of the Wright Brothers' first powered flight. That aircraft (Air Force serial number 61- 2775) is now on display at the Air Mobility Command Museum at Dover AFB, Del. The StarLifter entered operational Air Force service at Tinker AFB, Okla., in April 1965 and since that time more than 30 squadrons with 15 active duty Air Force, Air Force Reserve Command, Air National Guard, Air Education and Training Command, and Air Force Materiel Command units flew the aircraft.

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 what had been a 72-hour trip with stops from Travis AFB, Calif., to Tan Son Nhut AB, South Vietnam in a C-124, the C-141's piston-powered predecessor, to 36 hours. 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.

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. In October 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.

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 could carry 200 troops, 155 paratroops, 14 aeromedical attendants and a maximum of 103 litters -- although the usual load was 76 ambulatory and litter patients when comfort pallets (a cargo pallet-mounted lavatory and kitchen combination) were used, or 68,725 lbs (31,239 kilograms) of cargo. Aeromedical crews considered the C-141 a nearly perfect long-range evacuation platform, as the injured could be loaded directly from ambulance busses, the aircraft had its own patient oxygen lines, and carried its own stanchions. No special pallets or floor-loading of patients was required.

StarLifter crews conducted Antarctic resupply flights for nearly three decades, landing directly on the ice without skis at McMurdo Station. C-141s were also used for flight research, including serving as the tow aircraft for an F-106 and as an advanced radar test bed aircraft. The NASA aircraft, based at Ames Research Center in California, was christened the Kuiper Airborne Observatory. It had a 36-inch infrared telescope that weighed 7.5 tons mounted in a hatch in the forward fuselage. It served science for two decades.

Most recently, StarLifter crews flew suspected terrorists to the detainment facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

From 2003 until the StarLifter's last combat mission in September 2005, C- 141 crews flew more than 70 percent of the aeromedical evacuation flights from points in the Middle East and Iraq. From 2002 until 2005, C-141 crews flew more than 2,000 combat sorties and moved more than 70 million pounds of equipment and materials in theater.

SOURCE: Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Company

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