VAYU
Aerospace & Defence Review

AERO INDIA 2015
Show Daily
19th February 2015 (Day – 2)

C-130 Hercules Diamond Anniversary

An IAF Hercules (photo : Angad Singh)

The Lockheed Martin C-130 Hercules tactical transport aircraft achieved a milestone on 23 August 2014, which marked the 60th anniversary of its first flight at Burbank, California in 1954.

The C-130 Hercules was conceived out of a need to provide the US Air Force a tough, versatile heavy lifter with plenty of 'trunk' space to haul troops, supplies and equipment; and have tremendous lift capacity, long range and austere landing field capabilities. It had to be a versatile transport aircraft which was "at home in the dirt, comfortable in the cold and in its element in dusty, hot environments". In effect, the Hercules was to offer something that had not previously existed: a tactical airlifter with inbuilt potential and flexibility.

The focus on flexibility and multi-role, multi-mission capabilities can be traced to the original C-130A, which featured a large, unobstructed, fully-pressurised cargo hold, and could be reconfigured for the carriage of troops, cargo, special stores, for casualty evacuation. The C-130's combination of a cargo floor at truckbed height and rear loading ramp provided ease of loading and unloading with true roll-on/roll-off (or RORO) capability.

Since its debut, the C-130 Hercules has exhibited "a combination of tenacity, flexibility and innovation that makes it the world's most prolific airlifter." In fact, the C-130 has had the longest, continuous military aircraft production run in aviation history. To date, more than 2,500 C-130s have been ordered or delivered, the type operating out of 70 countries and produced in more than 70 variants. All C-130's production models have been built at the Lockheed Martin Aeronautics' Marietta facility.

It is hardly an exaggeration that the Hercules has been everywhere and is known for its ability to tackle "any mission, anywhere, at any time". Aircrews have flown it to both poles, landed or airdropped military supplies to combat zones and performed countless relief operations around the globe. From the highest airstrips in the Himalayas to landing on an aircraft carrier in the middle of the ocean, the C-130 regularly defies expectations. A ski-equipped version of the Hercules resupplies Distant Early Warning radar sites in the Arctic, and in many of the special mission C-130s that followed, the special equipment was removable, thus permitting the aircraft to revert to transport, combat delivery, or medical evacuation tasks. Legacy C-130s and C-130Js also operate for VIP transport; fire-fighting (Modular Airborne Fire Fighting Systems or MAFFS); medevac or as a flying hospital; oil/herbicide dispersion, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) and armed ISR signals intelligence (SIGNIT), search and rescue and as an aerial refueller.

The latest Hercules model, the C-130J Super Hercules, which is also operated by the Indian Air Force, incorporates the advantages of new technology built on the inherent strength of the aircraft and its design. "The Hercules has been reinvented again and again, and its continuous improvements have created virtually unlimited flexibility."