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Operators and Maintainers Face Challenges Operating Across a Vast Nation

▶ **A HERCULEAN PROBLEM**

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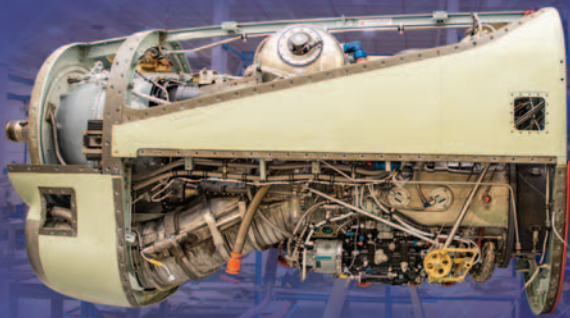




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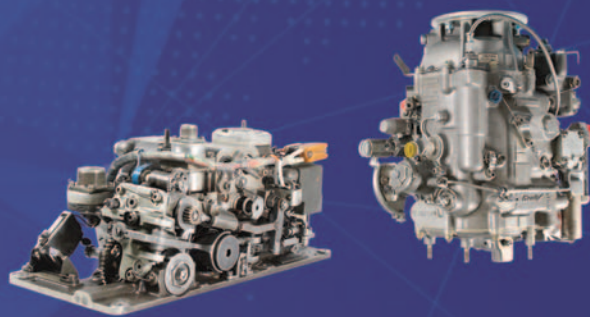
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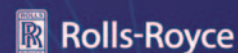
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Taking Care of Our Own

The F-35 Lightning is an amazing aircraft. It has the most advanced avionics of any fighter in history, featuring a state-of-the-art helmet and pilot interface, manned and unmanned teaming capabilities, and enhanced electronic warfare systems. This incredible machine can achieve speeds of Mach 1.6, its stealth capabilities ensure against enemy detection, and its low detection missiles can destroy a target 300 miles away. It is undeniably a remarkable and important asset.

Four years ago, the U.S. Department of Defense finalized an agreement to purchase an additional 478 of these aircraft for \$34 billion.¹ That deal averaged out to around \$71.13 million per aircraft.²

The Case

Here is something to think about: What if the number of aircraft in the current order were reduced by just 28 F-35s, to 450 instead of the planned 478? At \$71.13 million per aircraft, that reduction would bring about a savings of just under \$2 billion.

That money could be reappropriated to the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide increased care for our veterans in need. The Veteran's Health Administration (VHA) currently provides care at 172 medical centers and 1,138 outpatient facilities. With approximately \$2 billion to reinvest, each medical center could receive an additional \$3 million in funding, and each outpatient facility be granted about \$1.3 million.

Those VHA facilities could use those increased budgets to hire staff and shorten wait times for appointments. More important, such funds could be used to shore up mental health assistance for veterans. Studies show that we lose 20 veterans a day to suicide.³ Twenty every day.

The Objections

It has been said that reducing the number of F-35s will impact our technological lead over the rest of the world. Logic dictates just the opposite. Usually, significant sales of existing technology, filling the foreseeable demand in the marketplace, has the short-term effect of reducing the drive for new innovation.

It also can be argued that reducing production of F-35s will affect domestic manufacturing jobs. To balance that out to some degree, as stated above, a good portion of the reallocated funds would be put toward increasing staffing levels at VHA facilities around the country.

We here at Aviation Aftermarket Defense are major supporters of readiness, the defense aviation industry overall, and especially military aircraft sustainment and modernization. In that context, I still pose this question: Will reducing the number of F-35s deleteriously affect readiness and capacity levels?

Conclusion

The Government Accounting Office recently concluded that maintenance challenges are the real issue negatively affecting F-35 aircraft readiness⁴. Based on that report, that ongoing shortfall appears to be a far more pressing challenge to mission fulfillment than marginally reducing the expansion of the nation's F-35 fleet. The U.S. armed forces plan to purchase an additional 2,500 of these aircraft, but in 2024, the average price of each F-35 is now \$80 million. Assuming that price holds—though I think we can agree it will not—if the Department of Defense were to adjust the number of this total order down by 10% to 2,250 aircraft, over time the savings would total \$20 billion.

Buying 28 fewer F-35s with the reduction in spending on new aircraft of \$2 billion may sound like a lot, but it is in essence just a drop in the bucket. The annual U.S. Department of Defense budget is now \$1.52 trillion. Granted, there are many buckets involved in national defense. Taking that into account, the opportunity is upon us to take action and reallocate some of those droplets into other essential buckets.

Richard Greenwald

Richard Greenwald

Publisher

¹ "DOD Finalizes Purchase Plan for F-35 Aircraft" U.S. Department of Defense report, October 2019, www.defense.gov

² The F-35 now has an average fly away cost of \$82.5 million. Most estimates have it closer to \$100 million per aircraft.

³ "Suicide Among Veterans and Other Americans 2001–2014." U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, report, August 2016, Mentalhealth.va.gov.

⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, Sept 2023, www.gao.gov.



8



16



24



33

DEPARTMENTS

- 1 **Taking Care of Our Own**
Letter from the Publisher
Richard Greenwald
- 4 **News Briefs**
What You Need to Know,
Quickly and Accurately
By Tracy Martin

FEATURES

- 8 **Helicopter Maintenance in Canada**
Operators and Maintainers
Face Challenges Operating
Across a Vast Nation
By Jeff Blundell
- 16 **A Herculean Problem**
MRO Facilities Face Nationwide
Shortages of Skilled
Technical Labor
By Paul McDonnold
- 24 **Lockheed Martin C-130
Authorized Service Centers**
Filling the Needs of Today
and Looking toward
Tomorrow
By Donna J. Kelly

CONTACT!

Firms that specialize in aftermarket aircraft parts distribution, manufacturing, and repairs

- 33 **Transports Company Profiles**
- 53 **Fighters Company Profiles**
- 66 **Rotorcraft Company Profiles**

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By Tracy Martin



Air Force and South Korean F-35A Lightning II stealth fighters fly alongside each other over the Yellow Sea, July 12, 2022. (Photo Trevor Gordnier/U.S. Air Force)

South Korea to Spend \$5 Billion on F-35 Fighters

The U.S. State Department has approved the sale of 25 additional F-35A Joint Strike Fighters, alongside 26 Pratt & Whitney F135-PW-100 engines and a host of other equipment, for an estimated total of \$5.06 billion. The first fighters from the initial contract were delivered in 2019, and this new contract announcement came just after a major meeting between Japanese, South Korean, and U.S. military leaders.

The U.S. Department of Defense’s Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) posted a statement from the Biden Administration stating that this deal “will improve the Republic of Korea’s capability to meet current and future threats by providing credible defense capability to deter aggression in the region and ensure interoperability with U.S. forces.”

With a standing order for 40 F-35A conventional take-off and landing models, this new buy will increase South Korea’s fifth-generation fighter fleet by over 50 percent. Per a statement by prime contractor Lockheed Martin, the F-35A is considered a fighter jet of choice for key allies across the Indo Pacific region requiring interoperable deterrence.



U.S. Marines conduct a CH-53K test flight at Sikorsky in Stratford, Conn. The heavy lift helicopter will be based at Marine Corps Air Station New River in Jacksonville, North Carolina. (Photo courtesy of Sikorsky, a Lockheed Martin company.)

Sikorsky Wins \$2.7 Billion U.S. Navy Contract

In 2022, the Sikorsky C-53 King Stallion heavy-lift helicopter entered full-rate production (FRP) in its deployment phase. FRP is an important milestone to the H-53 Heavy-Lift Program Office (PMA-261), as it allows the program to proceed beyond low-rate initial production and begin increasing procurement quantities to gain production efficiencies and reduce unit costs.

In August, Lockheed Martin’s subsidiary Sikorsky was awarded a \$2.7 billion contract by the U.S. Navy to build 35 additional CH-53K helicopters. The agreement includes 12 U.S. Marine Corps Lot 7 and 15 U.S. Marine Corps Lot 8 aircraft.

The contract also includes eight additional aircraft for the Israeli Air Force and follows the initial production announcement in 2022 for the first four aircraft under a U.S. Navy Foreign Military Sales (FMS) agreement. The multi-mission CH-53K will support Israel’s special operations programs, as well as provide the Israeli Defense Forces with a platform that has the speed, safety, survivability and gross weight capability to support its varied missions, including troop and cargo transport, and search and rescue.

Offering three times the carrying capacity of previous models, the CH-53K is designed to be intelligent, reliable, low-maintenance, and survivable in austere and remote forward operating bases. It is built to deploy from naval vessels and thrive on the modern battlefield.



The KC-46A Pegasus is a wide body, multirole tanker that can refuel all U.S., allied and coalition military aircraft compatible with international aerial refueling procedures. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Joseph Morales)

KC-46 Fleets Support and Services

AAR Government Services and other companies received a \$1.9 billion dollar contract, issued by the U.S. Air Force Life Cycle Management Center at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, to provide support services for the Boeing KC-46A aerial refueling tanker.

Awarded following a competition, this contract provides for several initial spare parts to support U.S. Air Force and foreign military sales KC-46 fleets. The contract also includes upgrades and other work, to be performed at a number of locations, with completion currently estimated by October 2027.



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Danielle Qualls, 3rd Battalion, 238th Aviation Regiment, Michigan Army National Guard, repairs a T700 engine for a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter at the Aviation Support Facility, Grand Ledge, Michigan, Sept. 21, 2021.(photo by Master Sgt. David Eichaker, Michigan National Guard)

Blackhawk T-700 Engine Repair, \$13 Million

A \$13 million dollar contract was awarded to AAR Allen Services, located in Garden City, New York, for the overhaul of the anti-icing start bleed valve used on GE Aerospace’s T-700 turboshaft engine. The U.S. Army Contracting Command, Redstone Arsenal, in Alabama, awarded the contract for its fleet of Sikorsky Black Hawk helicopters. The estimated completion date for this work is mid-2026.

The T-700 engines were created using a modular design to reduce the maintenance footprint during missions and are mounted to the Black Hawk airframe on both sides of the main transmission. The mechanical link between the engines, the main rotor system, and cockpit indications is the power turbine connection to the main rotor system through the drive shafts and gearboxes.



A new C-130J Super Hercules aircraft arrives at the Kentucky Air National Guard Base in Louisville, Ky., Nov. 6, 2021, ushering in a new era of aviation for the 123rd Airlift Wing. (photo courtesy Kentucky Air National Guard)

Four Air National Guard Locations Chosen for C-130J Upgrades

The U.S. Air Force selected four U.S. National Guard Airlift Wings as preferred locations to receive C-130J Super Hercules to replace their aging C-130Hs. These include the 103rd Airlift Wing in Hartford, Connecticut; 120th Airlift Wing, in Great Falls, Montana; 133rd Airlift Wing, in Minneapolis, Minnesota; and the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois.

The Air National Guard will examine each individual unit receiving the upgraded airframe to assess when they can begin to receive the new platform. The U.S. Air Force also will conduct environmental impact analyses at these locations to be completed in 2025.

Ultimately, eight C-130J aircraft will be used to recapitalize the C-130H fleet at each location. Because the C-130Js are considered a new aircraft for these units, pilots and loadmasters will need new flight qualification requirements. Any extra manpower due to this shift will be repurposed through the U.S. Air National Guard corporate process.



Aerojet Rocketdyne RS-25 Engines ready for shipment. (Aerodyne Rocketdyne Photo)

Aerojet Rocketdyne Acquired by L3Harris Technologies

This past July, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission granted approval for L3Harris Technologies to complete its acquisition of Aerojet Rocketdyne. The \$4.7 billion deal is the result of more than two years of negotiations

involving the U.S military and critical NASA suppliers. The acquisition will allow L3Harris, a leading manufacturer of propulsion systems and rocket engines, to expand its footprint in strategic defense systems, precision munitions, and civil space.

“I’m thrilled to welcome more than 5,000 employees to the L3Harris team today,” stated Christopher Kubasik, Chair and CEO of L3Harris. “With national security at the forefront, we’re combining our resources and expertise with Aerojet Rocketdyne’s propulsion and energetics capabilities to ensure that the Department of Defense and civil space customers can address critical mission needs globally.”

The approval came after the Federal Trade Commission previously blocked Lockheed Martin’s attempt to acquire Aerojet Rocketdyne for \$4.4 billion. In 2022, regulators argued that, as a major tactical missile supplier, Lockheed Martin’s owning a critical component provider for missiles would give the company an unfair advantage over competitors.





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A group of airmen at Aviano Air Base in Italy are pitching an idea for a folding boarding ladder that F-16 pilots can stow in the map case in the jet's cockpit. (photo courtesy U.S. Air Force)

Airmen Design Integral F-16 Boarding Ladder

The U.S. Air Force is gearing up to operate fighters in forward, remote locations where there is limited support. A problem to be solved is how to get pilots in and out of fighter aircraft. Some fighters currently serving the Air Force, including F-35As, F-15s, and A-10s, include integrated boarding ladders. However, the F-16 Viper not having a built-in ladder poses remote operations challenges.

During a "Spark Tank" competition at Aviano Air Base in Italy, U.S. Air Force Major Nicholas "Trapper" Atkins, an F-16 pilot with the 31st Fighter Wing, submitted the idea for an internally stowable F-16 boarding ladder, designed to fit inside the map case in the cockpit. Construction would be significantly cheaper than the external ladders now in use, each one of which costs \$5,200. The folding ladder weighs 6 pounds and would cost \$1,800 to manufacturer.



Airmen and riggers with the 1st Special Operations Squadron Logistics Readiness Squadron load a Rapid Dragon palletized weapon system aboard an MC-130J at Hurlburt Field, Florida in December 2021. (US Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Brandon Esau.)

Rapid Dragon: the US military game-changer

The U.S. Air Force recently announced the successful test of its Rapid Dragon system in the 2023 Mobility Guarding exercise. Rapid Dragon is a palletized munitions experimentation campaign exploring feasibility and operational advantages of airdropping long-range palletized munitions from existing airlift platforms. The concept is to convert transport aircraft into weapons carriers that can deploy cruise missiles (and potentially other standoff or self-defense weapons) by releasing the munitions on pallets via the planes' rear cargo ramps.

Currently, cruise missiles, which fly to targets thousands of miles away, generally are deployed by large bombers, such as the B-1 or B-52. Rapid Dragon could turn transports like the MC-130J and C-17 Globemaster III into the equivalent of a cruise missile platform. The weapons load would be limited only by how many pallets fit into the aircraft's cargo bay. With more than 2,500 C-130s operated by 63 U.S.-friendly nations, the Rapid Dragon program could play a significant role in the balance of airpower worldwide by providing the capability for allies to use aircraft for defense that might not be readily recognized as a threat.



The B-21 Raider has begun ground testing. Designed to operate in tomorrow's high-end threat environment, the B-21 will play a critical role in ensuring America's enduring airpower capability. (U.S. Air Force photo)

B-21 Raider Has Begun Taxi Tests

Taxi testing is underway for the U.S. Air Force's first, pre-production B-21 stealth bomber at Plant 42 in Palmdale, California, marking the latest development for this aircraft as it moves closer to its first flight. There are five other B-21 aircraft in various stages of production in Palmdale, and six pre-production B-21s are expected to form the core of a test force at Edwards Air Force Base in California.

The B-21's manufacturer, Northrop Grumman announced initial engine test runs in September, following first power-up of the aircraft's systems earlier in the year. The schedule for the B-21's first flight has been delayed numerous times due to various issues, including the COVID-19 pandemic. The first operational B-21s should enter service around the mid-2020s.

US Air Force Activates Units Dedicated to Electronic Warfare

The U.S. Air Force, like the U.S. Army and the U.S. Navy, is reinvesting in electronic warfare and the related domination of the electromagnetic spectrum. The U.S. Air Force has activated two detachments at Robins Air Force Base in Georgia dedicated to electronic warfare and its future applications. In a ceremony in October, the 950th Spectrum Warfare Group was tasked with assessing the effectiveness of electronic warfare across dozens of aircraft, with the goal of improving jamming and spoofing capabilities in military exercises.

Colonel Josh Koslov, Commander of the 350th Spectrum Warfare Wing at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida said, "Our enemies right now are looking at developing countermeasures as they shore up their capabilities against us. Our team here at Robins will identify what our weak points are, and be able to point us in the direction we need to go."

Lockheed Martin Secures Contract to Aid F-35 Fighter Jet Program

LMT Aeronautics, Lockheed Martin's business segment, was awarded a \$98 million contract by the U.S. Naval Air Systems Command, at Patuxent River, Maryland, for F-35 fighter program support, with the primary work to be completed by February 2026. The terms of the contract include retrofitting engineering release reports, development of production engineering change proposals, and subcontractor support for investigations and qualifications to increase the life span of F-35 aircraft parts. The majority of these tasks will take place in Fort Worth, Texas, and will serve the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Marine Corps, and U.S. Navy, as well as non-Department of Defense participants.

The F-35 program remained the largest revenue generator for LMT Aeronautics. It also accounted for 66 percent of the segment's net sales in 2022. To date, Lockheed Martin has reportedly delivered 944 F-35 aircraft since the program's inception. At the time of this writing, the company projected delivering 97 F-35s by year-end 2023, an estimated 147 to 153 in 2024, and potentially 156 in 2025.



XQ-58A Valkyrie stealth drone in flight. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Master Sgt. Tristan McIntire, 96th Test Wing, 40th Flight Test Squadron/Released)

XQ-58 Kratos Valkyrie Is Now Flying with the Marine Corps

Following the U.S. Air Force's move in 2019, the U.S. Marine Corps has now become the second operator of the Kratos XQ-58A Valkyrie stealth drone. The Marines plan to evaluate the drones as highly autonomous surveillance and reconnaissance assets, electronic warfare platforms, and wingmen for crewed fighters, including in kinetic roles.

A test flight was performed in cooperation with the U.S. Air Force's 40th Flight Test Squadron, part of the 96th Test Wing at Eglin Air Force Base, and the U.S. Navy's Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division (NAWCAD), part of Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR).

According to manufacturer Kratos Defense & Security Solutions, the Valkyrie is 30 feet overall in length, has a 27-foot wingspan, a maximum range of around 3,000 miles, and a maximum launch weight of 6,500 pounds, including up to 600 pounds in its internal payload bay and another 600 pounds under the wings. Its top subsonic cruising speed is Mach 0.72, and it can reach Mach 0.85.



A Norwegian F-35A fighter jet takes off after a touch-and-go landing on a highway in the Finnish forests. Immediately after landing, so-called "hot pit refueling" was carried out – a technique in which the motor runs while the fuel tank is being filled in order to reduce downtime. (Photo: Ole Andreas Vekve/the Norwegian Armed Forces)

F-35s Landing on European Highways and Buzzing Britain

The Royal Norwegian Air Force reported that after training with Finland's F/A-18 Hornets, two of its F-35A fighters landed for the first time on a Finnish highway in September. Located in central Finland, Tervo, North Savo roadway became a temporary runway for the F-35A aircraft. Immediately after landing, refueling was carried out with the engines running, in a procedure known as "hotpit refueling," before the planes took off again. Military officials hailed the development as a step that could increase survivability during conflicts by decentralizing airlift locations and reducing vulnerable time spent on the ground.

Also in September, U.S. F-15E Strike Eagles engaged in low-level flights over the English countryside as part of an exercise. Flying as low as 500 feet, at over 500 mph, fighters took off from the Royal Air Force station at Lakenheath in Suffolk, England. The U.S. Air Force-operated base there is the largest in England and home to the only fighter wing with F-15 and F-35 jets in the region.



U.S. airmen salute a KC-10 as it begins to depart after conducting the final Extender combat deployment at Prince Sultan Air Base (PSAB), Saudi Arabia, Oct. 5, 2023. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Alexander Frank)

KC-10 Extender Has Flown Its Last Combat Mission

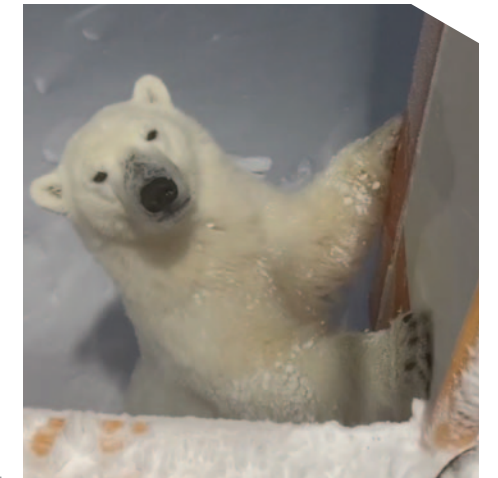
Serving the U.S. Air Force for more than 40 years, the KC-10A Extender flew its last combat mission in October 2023 from the Prince Sultan Air Base (PSAB) in Saudi Arabia. The Air Force began the process of sending KC-10s to the aircraft graveyard in 2020, and this last flight signals the fleet's retirement. The Air Mobility Command (AMC) confirmed that this was the last combat deployment of the KC-10 anywhere in the world, not just in the Middle East.

AMC spokeswoman Jessican Brown said, "For nearly four decades, the KC-10 has helped secure global reach for America. It's expected to redeploy to its home station soon." The KC-10 played a critical role in supporting military operations within the U.S. Air Forces Central area of responsibility, including Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. The Air Force's future replacement for the tanker fleet is speculative at this time.



▲ Signs like this are seen frequently in the Canadian Arctic. (Photo by Ed Bergnach, courtesy of Canadian Helicopters.)

Polar Bears may look cute and cuddly, but they can be very dangerous when hungry or guarding their young, and can pose a threat to aircraft crews and maintainers operating in the Arctic. (Photo by Ed Bergnach, courtesy of Canadian Helicopters.) ▼



▲ Many of NORAD's radar stations have custom-designed helicopter landing pads. (Photo by Darren Keast, courtesy of Canadian Helicopters.)

HELICOPTER MAINTENANCE IN CANADA

Operators and Maintainers Face Challenges Operating Across a Vast Nation
By Jeff Blundell

At every North Warning Radar site, there is a sign on the inside of the door. It is there to alert anyone about to walk outside that they need to be constantly vigilant. Since many of NORAD's stations are unmanned, this warning is mostly directed at visitors, such as service technicians and the helicopter

crew members who transported them there.

The signs read: "WARNING: Bear Activity is High—Stay Alert!" It is a tangible reminder that flying helicopters in the Canadian Arctic involves a vast array of challenges: weather, remoteness, and yes... wildlife.

"There's a lot of polar bears up north, and they like to check out the aircraft in search of food. We've got to be cautious with that," Ed Bergnach explains. Bergnach is the Vice President and Director of Maintenance for Canadian Helicopters. While he spends most of his time based in Montreal, he is responsible

for more than 100 helicopters spread across the country, including quite a few flying in the upper northern regions.

"We've had a couple polar bear incidents where they'll knock a window out of an aircraft, or they'll chew up the emergency floats, and we've got to deal with that. Thankfully, that's a rare occurrence, but it does happen."

LONG-DISTANCE CHALLENGES

Most days, the biggest challenges of maintaining the fleet are not the result of wildlife, but rather, geography. Canada is the second-largest country in the world (after Russia), but it is only the thirty-seventh most populous. The result is a landscape that, other than the densely populated Great Lakes region, is mostly empty. The Rocky Mountains and the vast wheat fields appear frequently on

postcards, but approximately 40 percent of the nation is covered in forest. That does not leave a lot of open space for unplanned landings. And then, there are the massive distances you have to travel to get from point A to point B.

"If you look at Canada, flying from one coast to the other is a long way. You could fly to Europe quicker than you could fly across the country," Bergnach notes. "The vast majority of Canadian population lives within 100 miles of the Canada–United States border, so the northern areas are very sparsely populated. That means there aren't a lot of airports." For helicopter operations, that extra distance demands a heightened level of preparedness.

"We've got to bring a lot of spares, a lot of tools, and be ready for anything that could happen, since sometimes it

"There's a lot of polar bears up north, and they like to check out the aircraft in search of food. We've got to be cautious with that," ...



▲ The Bell CF-146 Griffon is used by the Royal Canadian Air Force to transport troops in a wide array of conditions. (Photo by Corporal Antoine Brochu, courtesy of the Royal Canadian Air Force.)



◀ Canadian Helicopters specializes in airlift transportation to extremely remote locations. (Photo by Alexander Ahnert, courtesy of Canadian Helicopters.)

could take several days to get parts. And larger parts, of course, we may have to charter an aircraft, because there's no scheduled flight that's going to take it up there."

That has created an interesting dynamic between the various companies flying helicopters in the region. Bergnach explains that despite being direct competitors, there is a level of cooperation between operators and maintainers that you do not normally see in southern regions—or in general, for that matter.

"We may lend a part or a tool to a competitor if they're stuck. We know that one day the tables will be turned, and we might need their help," says Bergnach. "We all realize that these are pretty difficult environments to work in, and nobody wants to see anybody get into trouble or have a life-threatening situation. So, most people are willing to help if you get stuck."

Then, there is the weather. "If you take a warm aircraft, push it out into minus 40 degrees (the same degree of frigidness, whether expressed in Celsius or Fahrenheit), you may have some issues," he points out. "You have condensation that may be building



▲ Canada's fleet of Augusta Westland CH-149 Cormorant helicopters is scheduled for a mid-life upgrade. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Coast Guard District 13.)

up in the aircraft while it's in a hangar overnight. So, you've got to be careful on how you bring it out. And you don't even have to go that far north. I mean, we've had operators here in the Montreal area that have their aircraft in a hangar at night and bring it out in the morning, and it's minus 25 degrees Celsius (minus 13 Fahrenheit) and the windshield cracks just because the aircraft is contracting."

As a general rule, they will not launch a helicopter if its less than minus 40

degrees, but occasionally the temperature can be even colder at their destination. According to Bergnach, "If it's very cold, they won't shut down. They'll sit running at idle, while they unload, or the crews we're transporting do their work."

"The last thing you want," he continues "is for the aircraft to not start due to it being cold soaked, or you have a mechanical issue at the worst possible moment." That is often the case when they visit the NORAD North Warning

Radar outposts. Canadian Helicopters uses their fleet of Bell 212 helicopters to provide transportation for the periodic maintenance teams who need to visit the stations. But it can happen at all sorts of work sites.

JACK OF ALL TRADES

The boom in oil exploration has created a need for transporting drilling equipment and crews to remote locations. But that is just a fraction of the diverse array of work Canadian Helicopters facilitates.

"We have a lot of work for mining and exploration companies up there," says Bergnach. "This past year, of course, there were a lot of wildfires, so we were involved with the provincial forestry departments—moving crews, equipment, and dropping water on fires."

In such life and death scenarios, it is critical to have aircraft in ready-to-fly operational condition. For instance, in September 2023, a Canadian Helicopters crew performed a daring rescue of a

"...operators here in the Montreal area that have their aircraft in a hangar at night and bring it out in the morning, and it's minus 25 degrees Celsius (minus 13 Fahrenheit) and the windshield cracks just because the aircraft is contracting."

ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE HELICOPTER FLEET MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS

GRIFFONS CH-146



This Bell CH-146 Griffon is armed to provide support during combat exercises. (Photo by Marc-André Leclerc, courtesy of the Royal Canadian Air Force.)

CH-146 Griffons (85 in service): Made by Bell, this capable rotorcraft is used for armed support, transport, and search and rescue operations. Currently, the in-service support is conducted by Bell Helicopter Textron, headquartered in Mirabel, Quebec. The contract was awarded in 2011 for \$640 million Canadian (currently about \$465 million U.S.). The current contract end date is March 31, 2024.

CHINOOKS CH-147



Canadian troops deployed from a Boeing CH-147 Chinook during operations in the far north. (Photo by Dan Bard, courtesy of the Royal Canadian Air Force/Dan Bard)

CH-147 Chinooks (14 in service): This tandem-rotor Boeing aircraft can carry more than 50 troops. The in-service support is conducted by the Boeing's Vertical Lift division, based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with support provided in Petawawa, Ontario. The contract was first awarded in 2009; the latest contract amendment was in 2013 for \$2.7 billion Canadian (about \$1.96 billion U.S.) and spans more than 20 years.

CYCLONES CH-148



A Sikorsky CH-148 Cyclone on the deck of the frigate HMCS Vancouver. (Photo by Alisa Strelley, courtesy of the Royal Canadian Air Force.)

CH-148 Cyclones (25 in service): These twin-engine, multi-role shipborne marine helicopters come from Lockheed Martin's Sikorsky. Currently, in-service support also is conducted by Sikorsky, based in Stratford, Connecticut, with support provided at the Canadian Operating Bases in Shearwater, Nova Scotia, and Pat Bay, British Columbia. The contract was first awarded in 2004 for \$5.8 billion Canadian (about \$4.2 billion U.S.), and it runs until 2038.

CORMORANTS CH-149



Canada currently maintains a fleet of thirteen Augusta Westland CH-149 Cormorant helicopters for search and rescue operations. (Photo courtesy of the Royal Canadian Air Force.)

CH-149 Cormorants (13 in service): Built by AgustaWestland, Cormorants are used for search and rescue. Currently, the in-service support is conducted by IMP, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and at three main operating bases in Gander, Newfoundland, and Comox and Greenwood, British Columbia. The contract was first awarded in 2000 for \$184 million Canadian (about \$133.7 million U.S.). Subsequent amendments have brought the current value to about \$2.5 billion Canadian (about \$1.82 billion U.S.). The current contract end date is July 31, 2024.



Major Mary Jo Aquilina is an Aerospace Engineering Officer with the Canadian Department of National Defence. (Photo by Paméla Diegel-Bussiére, courtesy of the Royal Canadian Air Force.)

A Bell CH-146 Griffon during winter operations near Quebec City, Quebec, Canada. (Photo by Nédia Coutinho, courtesy of the Royal Canadian Air Force.)

stranded hiker. A 66-year-old man, in the final days of his 3-week-long, solo backcountry trek, suddenly found himself surrounded by a raging wildfire. Fortunately, he had a radio and was able to transmit his GPS coordinates. The crew from Canadian Helicopters landed their Airbus AS355N nearby and extracted him before the flames closed in.

Bergnach explains that such a wide range of missions requires a fleet of helicopters of all sizes and abilities. "The aircraft types include Airbus AS350 (B2s and B3s) and 355Ns. We have Sikorsky S-76 series and S-61 series, as well as Bell 212, 412, 206L series, 407s, and a couple of Eurocopter EC120s."

Having so many different types of aircraft under his supervision means Bergnach must stock an enormous supply of soft materials (oils, lubricants, hydraulic fluids, and so on) and also hard parts and components (moving and key static parts likely to need replacing) to ensure his team can perform any and all necessary maintenance tasks. On the plus side, he always has the right helicopter for the job at hand.

ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE ON DUTY

Meanwhile, the Royal Canadian Air Force also maintains a diverse rotorcraft fleet. They have four types of helicopters in service, as well as key maintenance, repair, and overhaul services contracts in place (see sidebar).

Major Mary Jo Aquilina is the maintenance officer for two of those Royal Canadian Air Force fleets. "We have eighty-five CH-146 Griffons and fourteen CH-147 Chinooks," she says. Those assets are deployed at a dozen different locations across the country. "They are both multi-mission helicopters used to transport





Boeing's CF-147 Chinook can be used for deploying heavy equipment, mass evacuations, or delivering troops and supplies. (Photo by Kelly-Ann Lepage, courtesy of the Royal Canadian Air Force.)

equipment and personnel during domestic and deployed ops. The Griffons are also used for search and rescue, and helping with evacuations."

Major Aquilina has never personally had to deal with polar bears. Her primary wildlife problem is somewhat less dramatic.

"I would say the biggest concern that we have is geese," she notes. "Bird strikes are a concern. We don't want them to hit the rotors during flying operations." Such bird strikes have been known to cause equipment damage, potentially leading to flight failure.

She continues, "They can also create nests that we have to watch out for. We don't want those covering up the exhaust areas." Additionally, Canadian geese and other large waterfowl have a nasty habit of leaving a lot of organic debris on the tarmac—a particularly unpleasant form of foreign object debris (FOD).

LONG WINTER NIGHTS

Like their civilian counterparts, the Royal Canadian Air Force helicopter fleet has to deal with extreme temperatures.

"I recall when I was a young lieutenant and on my first winter exercise. It was minus 40 Celsius. It was terrible," Aquilina recalls. "The intent of the exercise was to verify our capabilities for Arctic operations. As part of the exercise, we were required to install antennas on the aircraft, while in a remote location. But that requires an adhesive, and most adhesives won't cure at minus 40."

That meant that the team had to improvise. They used a parachute to build a tent over the section of the helicopter they were working on. Then, they placed a heater under the canopy to warm the area sufficiently to complete the

installation. "Sometimes, you don't have facilities available, so you have to have some ingenuity," she adds. "That said, ingenuity never replaces the necessity to perform vital maintenance procedures. In addition, important airworthiness policies must always be adhered to."

That kind of ingenuity needs to be partnered with some serious determination. "Remaining optimistic in the cold is a challenge, because it's so easy to shut down. If you've worked on any kind of vehicle in the cold, you'll know that it's just not always pleasant. You must wear extra clothing when working on aircraft in the cold, because

"If you've worked on any kind of vehicle in the cold, you'll know that it's just not always pleasant. You must wear extra clothing when working on aircraft in the cold, because touching metal with exposed skin can create frostbite."



Canadian troops deployed from a Boeing CH-147 Chinook during operations in the far north. (Photo by Dan Bard, courtesy of the Royal Canadian Air Force/Dan Bard)

touching metal with exposed skin can create frostbite. All the extra gear can cause a person to lose some dexterity, which means that tasks often take longer. Everything just gets a little bit more demanding."

In any kind of extreme conditions, whether deep cold, torrential rain, or gale-force winds carrying blown debris, protection for those performing maintenance and repair procedures is always desirable, but not always feasible. As Major Aquilina concludes, "Ideally you have a hanger available. That's what we're always hoping for. It's better for the aircraft and for the crew. A happy tech is what you want when they're conducting maintenance."

OUTSOURCING MRO

Aquilina's capable team looks after the majority of routine support tasks, doing all they can to ensure that the fleet is air-ready as much as possible. However, there are maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) jobs that require outsourcing.

"For the CH-146 Griffons, we have a point in the inspection cycle that we call 'third line inspection,'" says Aquilina. "That is when the aircraft goes in for its 3,000-hour inspection. It's conducted by Bell Helicopter Textron Canada in Alpine, British Columbia. They will disassemble the aircraft and put all the components back together."

Meanwhile, the CH-147 Chinook fleet has Boeing assist them with their larger inspections. This arrangement is based on performance-based logistics. Unlike traditional contracts, where the user pays for specific parts and labor, this is an agreement wherein the Royal Canadian Air Force pays for a support package, and Boeing guarantees a certain level of readiness. The goal is to increase availability, while decreasing maintenance cycles and overall ownership costs by capitalizing on the efficiencies of predictive maintenance.

Some Canadian military helicopters go even farther to have work done. Canada's CH-149 Cormorant fleet, which primarily conducts search and rescue operations, is due for an upgrade.

"This Mid-Life Upgrade program will deliver a greater level of high technology to support the all-weather SAR capability that the country deserves," says Gian Piero Cutillo, Managing Director of Leonardo Helicopters, which was awarded a \$1.2 billion Canadian (about \$870 million U.S.) contract to perform the work. "We're excited to execute this program. This will reduce the cost of fleet ownership, while further increasing reliability, capability, and safety for Canadians."

The program has been designed to take advantage of Leonardo's expertise, but it also is intended to maximize the amount of work done domestically. The

first three helicopters will be upgraded at Leonardo's facility in Summerset, England. This phase also will be used as an opportunity to train the Canadian crews from IMP Aerospace for the task. IMP Aerospace will then proceed to upgrade the rest of the fleet at their facility in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The scope of this project additionally includes three entirely new builds, which will increase the Royal Canadian Air Force's Cormorant fleet from 13 to 16 helicopters. Delivery is expected to begin in 2026 and to be completed in 2030.

DIVERSE SOLUTIONS

Clearly, cold weather and huge distances are major considerations for helicopter maintenance in Canada. But on top of those conditions, crews in the Great White North also have to deal the same challenges maintenance crews around the world deal with every day. Staffing, supply chain interruptions, and budget restriction are constant considerations.

Nevertheless, in a country with so much terrain that is not accessible by road or fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters continue to provide essential services every day. And what keeps them flying is the expertise and effort of the dedicated men and women who work so hard to keep them in service.





A HERCULEAN PROBLEM

MRO Facilities Face Nationwide Shortages of Skilled Technical Labor
By Donna J. Kelly

In the foothills of North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains, the Piedmont Triad International Airport is home to more than 50 companies employing over 8,600 people in aviation-related jobs. In early 2025, these numbers will likely grow, when U.K.-based Marshall Aerospace opens a new maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) facility focused on the C-130 Hercules—just one part of a North American growth strategy that Marshall itself has termed “ambitious.”

A looming complication is that the surrounding Piedmont Triad region, often simply called “the Triad” for the three cities (Greensboro, Winston-Salem, and High Point) that comprise it, is experiencing an acute shortage of technical aviation labor, like many other parts of the United States. For decades, American culture has pushed young people toward 4-year college degrees, even ones that may not lead to employment prospects in the current job market. And with many older technically trained workers reaching retirement age, defense aviation manufacturers, parts and service providers, and fleet operators are among those facing a lack of qualified applicants for skilled positions.

Whether in expansion mode or simply seeking to maintain current production, service, and fleet readiness levels, Marshall and others in the industry are working on creative approaches and investing in workforce development to solve this problem.

▲ A U.S. Air Force C-130 Hercules parked for maintenance in June 2023. Marshall Aerospace's planned MRO facility in Greensboro will support the C-130 fleet. (Photo by Staff Sergeant Paul Helmig, courtesy of the U.S. Air Force.)

A BRITISH INVASION, AVIATION-STYLE

On September 15, 2023, a group of men and women in business suits stood on a platform at the Piedmont Triad International Airport and plunged shovels into a long container of soil. This ceremonial groundbreaking of Marshall Aerospace's planned new MRO facility was just the first stage of a strategy aimed at giving the company a larger presence in the U.S. market.

Fortunately, Marshall USA—Marshall Aerospace's subsidiary which will operate the facility—is already busy planning for the workers the facility will need. A tight market for skilled technical labor is nothing new to its U.K.-based parent.

Ken Loy, President of Marshall USA, calls the shortage of trained aviation technicians a “truly global problem.” He believes that simply trying to “find” workers is not enough, declaring, “We have to nurture that talent ourselves.”

In the U.K. and Canadian markets, Marshall Aerospace has been training apprentices both to build its own team and for external customers through its Marshall Skills Academy. For over more than a century, this training center has



▲ Ken Loy, President of Marshall USA, is overseeing Marshall Aerospace's expansion in the U.S. market. (Image courtesy of Nicholas Maxfield, Marshall Group.)

“We want to help grow that pool of talent over the coming years, raising the (Greensboro) area's status as a top destination for technical training and high value employment,”



▲ President of Guilford Technical Community College Anthony J. Clarke seeks to inform young people and their parents of the advantages of technical careers. (Image courtesy of Erin McCloskey, Guilford Technical Community College.)

prepared more than 21,000 apprentices for careers in aviation and engineering in the United Kingdom alone. Marshall USA plans to adapt this approach to expand the skilled workforce in the Piedmont Triad region. Loy says they are already working with nearby Guilford Technical Community College and in discussions with North Carolina A&T to develop a training pipeline to help supply the new facility with workers.

“At the same time, we will also open a recruitment program specifically for ex-military personnel and the veteran community, many of whom will have familiarity with the aircraft we will be working on and the U.S. armed forces branches we will be supporting.” Loy, a former U.S. Marine helicopter pilot, adds that the area’s existing aerospace community was one of the main reasons behind the selection of this location for the new facility. “We want to help grow that pool of talent over the coming years, raising the (Greensboro) area’s status as a top destination for technical training and high value employment,” he says.

Dr. Anthony Clarke, President of Guilford Technical Community College (GTCC), and his colleagues are also hard at work trying to expand the region’s talent pool. He says GTCC is already filling 50 slots in a new training program for Marshall USA’s planned facility. And the

college’s efforts to provide a steady supply of workers for the area goes well beyond its partnership with Marshall USA.

“We are having a boom in employers,” Clarke says, noting that GTCC has developed partnerships not only with aviation-related firms such as Marshall USA, Boom Supersonic, FedEx, HAECO Americas, and Honda Aircraft Company, but also is working with non-aviation-related companies with a presence in the area, such as Toyota, that need their own skilled technical workers.

“It’s a good challenge to have,” he says, noting that one part of creating a talent pipeline sufficient to the rising demand involves waging an information campaign to ensure that young people and their parents are aware of the opportunities available. “It requires getting the word out. You have to sell it to them,” Clarke says. He notes that, in addition to the high employment rate in the aviation aftermarket sector, these technical careers have the advantage of requiring specialized training during or after high school but not a traditional 4-year academic degree.

Among its multiple programs and industry partnerships, GTCC is also among a group of community colleges across the country selected to offer a “Metallica Scholarship” for students pursuing a technical education. This multi-million-dollar program is funded by the heavy metal band’s All Within My Hands foundation, founded in 2017, which among its cross-section of charities invests in critical workforce programs.

Clarke says that corporate apprenticeships, in which students are paid while pursuing a schedule divided between instruction and supervised work



▲ U.S. Air Force technicians work on the rear spinner of a MC-130 H. While ex-military technicians make highly desirable employees for aftermarket MRO firms, their numbers are not equal to the industry’s current need for workers. (Photo by Airman 1st Class Hussein Enaya, U.S. Air Force.)

“The more funding there is for apprenticeships, the better off we are going to be,” ...

for a participating company, are another critical piece of the puzzle (see sidebar). He notes that the majority of these apprenticeships turn into full-time positions. “The more funding there is for apprenticeships, the better off we are going to be,” he points out.

NATIONWIDE BATTLE

Krista Stafford is the Chief Human Resources Officer for VSE Corporation,

which operates an existing multi-hangar MRO facility in Greensboro. VSE’s national and global footprint gives Stafford a familiarity with the scale of the skilled labor shortage. She talks about the challenge of facilities in different regions having to confront varying aspects of the same problem.

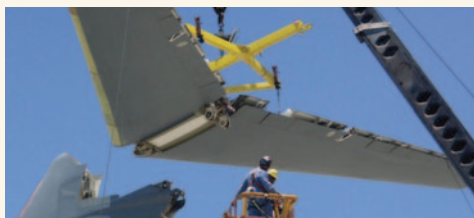
For example, VSE’s Independence, Kansas, facility is in a rural area that does not have a large technical talent pool.

Stafford says it has had success hiring employees from outside the industry and training them on the job.

“We’re pulling in people who have been, for example, a cashier somewhere and training them in every skill that they need,” she says. “The internal development is critical for us, as is finding that external talent that we can bring in and continue to develop as well.”

VSE’s facility in Miramar, Florida,

A SAMPLING OF APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS



Boeing employees work on the T-tail of a C-17 Globemaster III. Boeing’s Technical Apprenticeship Program teaches technical skills that can lead to such rewarding jobs. (Image courtesy of Boeing.)

As mentioned, a number of aviation defense manufacturers and parts and service providers have developed attractive apprenticeship programs, offering teaching and training in key technical skills, with the goal of participants stepping right into new or upgraded careers. As examples,

here are a few such opportunities:

Aviation Technical Services’s Matt Yerbic Apprenticeship Program is named for the firm’s former CEO and current Executive Chairman. It offers full-time, paid technician apprentices 2 weeks of initial training, followed by approximately 18 months in which

participants can progress through three levels of apprenticeship working under experienced supervision.

The *Boeing Technical Apprenticeship Program* awards apprenticeships to applicants who complete a series of steps, including skill challenges, a writing sample, and interviews. The paid, 12-

month program can result in both industry-recognized and U.S. Department of Labor registered credentials.

Lockheed Martin offers a broad range of apprenticeships for positions including maintenance, assemblers, software and cyber security, and engineering. Health insurance and paid time off are part of

the program. A separate, Chapter Next program, which the company refers to as “Returnships,” is designed for those with industry experience who have been away for two years or more and want to return.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM AN INDUSTRY STUDY

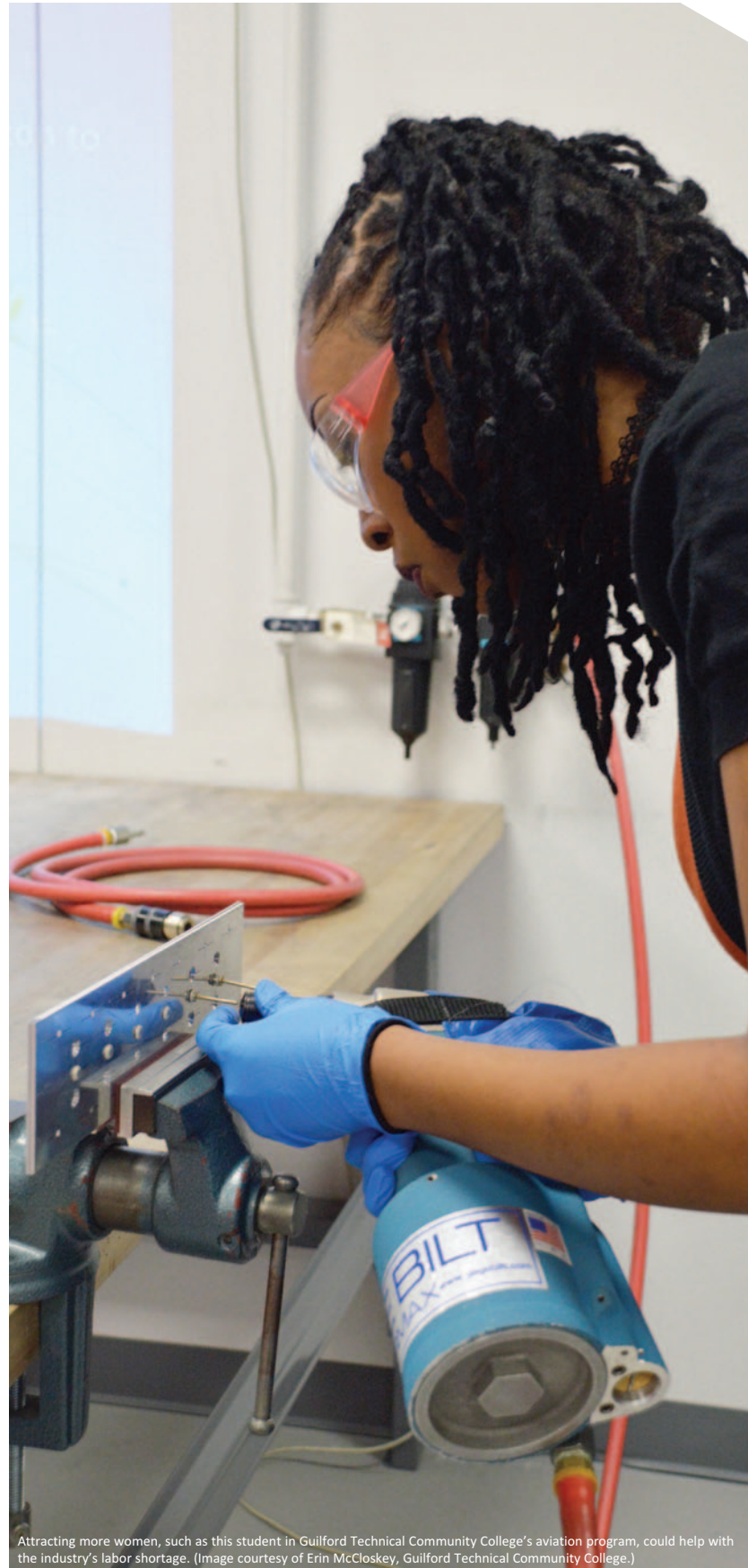
A joint study by management consultancy PwC and the Aerospace Industries Association (AIA) released in May 2023 takes a look at workforce-related trends in the aerospace and defense sector. The authors of the study spoke with a group of industry business leaders and executives, finding that attraction and retention of workers remains a primary risk area for firms. Drawing on a separate PwC study, the authors also note that globally some 50 million people left jobs in 2022 for better pay or more flexible positions.

The study offers these recommendations for employers in this tight market:

1. "One-size-fits-all" compensation is no longer enough. Since skilled employees may have multiple options, firms should adapt compensation packages to the individual and life-stage needs of its workers. Employers need to offer comprehensive packages that take account of applicants' desires for such benefits as flexible work arrangements, robust healthcare, educational support, work-life balance, and a positive workplace culture.

2. Hire and manage talent through a skills-based lens. Rather than traditional educational or experience pre-requisites, employers should focus on the specific skills a position calls for. This allows companies to "open the aperture" of recruiting to locate nontraditional candidates who with training may be a good fit for an opening.

3. Articulate a sense of "mission and purpose." It is key to attract and foster employees who are excited and engaged with their work. This is not easy, as what will resonate with one applicant or employee may not with another. Though the field may not appeal to everyone, aviation and defense firms can draw a connection between their team members' daily work and the challenge of addressing growing threats to freedom in the world. They play an important role in supporting aviation defense forces.



Attracting more women, such as this student in Guilford Technical Community College's aviation program, could help with the industry's labor shortage. (Image courtesy of Erin McCloskey, Guilford Technical Community College.)

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presents a different set of challenges. While the local talent pool is deeper, there are also more firms trying to draw from it.

"It's extremely competitive in Miramar," Stafford says. "Smaller competitors are not afraid to call up prospects and say, 'We'll give you \$10 an hour more.'" Her team is responding with outside-the-box ways to attract and retain workers who may have their pick of companies to work for. Production and referral bonuses, a 401K match, and generous paid time off are all part of the strategy.

Establishing an enviable workplace culture is another way to attract and keep team members. "We do quarterly celebrations, community events. We think the environment we create is having an impact on retention."

Nationwide and industrywide, Stafford sees some benefit in rising salaries, which may attract more people to the field of aviation MRO. Higher salaries and better benefits also might help retain seasoned employees with valuable industry experience and influence those who may be considering leaving the field or retiring to consider staying. At the same time, programs are expanding and new technical schools are opening to provide more of those who are interested in starting or returning to aviation careers with a path to the opportunities, which are currently plentiful.

"If you are trained in this area, you can find work," she says. And between advances in technology keeping aircraft in the air longer (therefore needing maintenance, repairs, and upgrades that much longer) and expanding fleet sizes (again, expanding the need for the same services), she does not see that situation changing anytime soon.

"As long as planes are flying, we are going to be okay." In other words, the demand for skilled aviation labor is not disappearing.

THE MILLION-DOLLAR QUESTION

That brings us back to the million-dollar question every firm in this industry is currently dealing with: What about the supply of workers?

"There has to be a continued focus on building the skill set on the technical side and attracting people to the industry,"

Stafford says. "And not just men, but women as well. I think there is an untapped population of women out there. We need to figure out, how do we attract them to gain these skills?"

Continuing to draw on individuals coming out of the military is important. But this only helps to fill part of the workforce gap, as retirement of existing technicians continues to drain the industry of much-needed experience and capabilities. At the same time, industry demand continues to grow.

That being said, educational institutions, along with government and privately sponsored programs, focusing on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), are developing young minds and steering more potential males and females toward fields such as military aviation. National programs like SkillsUSA set students on a path to develop skills that will help them become career ready, so that, when it is their turn, they can take advantage of those job openings.

While the future is promising, employers serving the aviation defense industry, and all those requiring technical

"The internal development is critical for us, as is finding that external talent that we can bring in and continue to develop as well."

talent, still need to stay competitive. "We are cautiously optimistic," Stafford says, in looking ahead. "A new shop could always open around the corner and make a play for our employees. We will have to go back to the drawing board and figure out how we retain, how we get people back. It's a constant battle. We're seeing some positive results from our efforts of the last 18 months. But I don't think we can just sit on our laurels. We have to continue being proactive or it will just swallow us up."



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Krista Stafford, Chief Human Resources Officer for VSE Corporation, looks for outside-the-box ways to attract and retain workers. (Image courtesy of Michael Perlman, VSE Corporation.)

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LOCKHEED MARTIN C-130

AUTHORIZED SERVICE CENTERS

Filling the Needs of Today and Looking toward Tomorrow
By Donna J. Kelly



The Lockheed Martin C-130 Hercules is a reliable workhorse flown globally by a wide variety of operators, performing an even wider variety of missions. Accordingly, Lockheed Martin’s authorized service centers—run by an impressive roster of carefully chosen, highly qualified, officially sanctioned aftermarket partners—are strategically located around the world to most effectively meet the perpetual demand for C-130 inspections, maintenance, upgrades, structural repairs, lifespan extensions, and more.

SOLID SERVICE WHERE NEEDED Marshall Aerospace of Cambridge, England, is one of these authorized Lockheed Martin C-130 service providers. With branches in Canada, Europe, the Middle East, United Kingdom, and United States, Marshall Aerospace serves as a C-130 global authority for many international fleet operators.

In a recent conversation with Nick Maxfield, Senior Manager for Public Relations, we discussed Marshall Aerospace’s plans for the two new service centers being opened in Greensboro,

North Carolina, and Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada. Ground was broken on the North Carolina project in September. “The primary purpose of our new facilities in these two locations will be to extend the global footprint of Marshall’s core C-130 maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) offering,” says Maxfield. “Since North America is the world’s largest C-130 market, our ambition is to be able to provide seamless in-country support to both existing and new customers in the United States and Canada, supplementing our current offering.”

In June 2023, Britain bid farewell to Royal Air Force Hercules after 56 years of faithful service. (Freelance photos North Wales, courtesy of The Telegraph.)





▲ Representatives from the U.S. Embassy in the Philippines's Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group turn over the first of two C-130H Hercules Aircraft to be delivered under a recent transfer to Philippine Secretary of National Defense Delfin Lorenzana and the Philippine Air Force on February 18. (Image courtesy PACOM.MIL.)

An example of the kind of installation skilled technicians at one of these service centers might perform on a C-130 is the addition of the company's ARC-Radar system, introduced this past May. It is part of a modular sensor suite enabling operators of tactical transport aircraft to swiftly and temporarily outfit their Hercules for intelligence, surveillance, and/or reconnaissance operations. This radar system is the first of several such products in the Marshall Adaptable Role-fit Capability (ARC) family to be rolled out in the near future.

As with the other Lockheed Martin approved service partners, the teams at Marshall's maintenance repair and overhaul (MRO) centers have gained high levels of competency over the years, resulting in multiple accreditations and certifications. This includes Marshall being one of only three service center providers authorized to perform C-130J heavy maintenance.

In addition, Marshall's Aerostructures

facility has the capability to support military and civil aerospace customers, all the way from design and prototyping to manufacture, test, certification, integration, and support. In fact, the company's design and manufacture of auxiliary fuel tanks has been run so efficiently that it also has been recognized as one of Boeing's "Blue" suppliers.

Describing this robust supply chain, Maxfield says, "We are very proud of our in-house manufacturing support operation, which produces a wide range of certified parts for customer aircraft and allows us to turn aircraft around to industry-leading timescales. This is an unique and valuable capability that stands out as a real Marshall differentiator. Additionally, our advanced composites business produces the cockpit trim panels for C-130J aircraft, as well as a range of other bespoke parts and components."

Yet no matter how effective, comprehensive, or advanced the support and manufacturing services, not all



▲ In August 2023, U.S. Pacific Air Force, Philippine Air Force, and Philippine Disaster Management personnel participated in Pacific Airlift Rally, a biennial, multinational, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief exercise held at Clark Air Base. (Photo by Major Marnee A.C. Losurdo, courtesy of the U.S. Air Force.)

customer relationships, even longstanding ones, last forever. The Royal Air Force of Great Britain has partnered with Marshall Aerospace for more than half a century to keep their C-130s mission ready, however, the United Kingdom is transitioning from C-130s to Airbus 400s. Though saddened by this departure, those at Marshall Aerospace undoubtedly will keep a stiff upper lip and continue providing C-130 support to 17 other global air forces around the world, as well as developing their team's capabilities, skills, and resources.

MULTINATIONAL SERVICES HEADQUARTERED IN PORTUGAL
OGMA, GRUPO Embraer, of Alverca, Portugal, is another leading Lockheed Martin Service Center. With over 45 years of experience with C-130B-H aircraft, OGMA provides maintenance services to Hercules flying from more than 30 countries.

OGMA has modeled itself as a one-stop

shop for customers, since its various divisions can take care of almost any job a C-130 operator might need. This includes everything from flightline service, avionics upgrades, aircraft painting, and other surface work, to maintenance heavy checks, engine repairs and overhauls, and major structural modifications.

OGMA's extensive structural service and repair capabilities include multiple

processes to correct the C-130's problematic wing cracking problems. These important services include replacement of center and outer wing joint fittings (rainbow and corner fittings), outer wing spar cap repair and replacement, and aft fuselage lower longeron replacement (sloping longeron).

Recently, OGMA delivered a C-130H aircraft to Portugal as part of its current

“We are very proud of our in-house manufacturing support operation, which produces a wide range of certified parts for customer aircraft and allows us to turn aircraft around to industry-leading timescales.”

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 Contact: Steve Small, ssmall@ammroc.ae or commercial@ammroc.ae

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 Petaling Jaya, Malaysia
 Website: www.airod.com.my
 Contact: Pietro Amshah bin Mohd Isa, icp@airod.com.my

Cascade Aerospace
 Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada
 Website: cascadeaerospace.com
 Contact: Director, Business Development Jason Kenny, Jason.Kenny@impaad.com

Denel Aeronautics
 Bonaero Park, Republic of South Africa
 Website: www.denelaeronautics.co.za
 Contact: Mr. Dean Khumalo, DeanK@denelaeronautics.co.za

Empresa Nacional de Aeronautica
 Santiago, Chile
 Website: www.enaer.cl
 Contact: Rodrigo Olguin, rodrigo.olguin@enaer.cl

Fabrica Argentina de Aviones (FADEA)
 Cordoba, Republic of Argentina
 Website: www.fadeasa.com.ar/en/
 Contact: Guisto Martin Horacio, GIUSTO@fadeasa.com.ar

Hellenic Aerospace Industry
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 Website: www.haicorp.com
 Contact: Konstantinos Petratos, Petratos.Constantinos@haicorp.com

Marshall Aerospace
 Cambridge City Airport, Cambridge, England
 Website: www.marshalladg.com
 Contact: Neil Goulding, neil.goulding@marshalladg.com

OGMA
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 Website: www.ogma.pt
 Contact: Bernardo Silva c/o geral@ogma.pt

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 Main Email: customer@sabena-aerospace.com or
 Contact: Mr. Rik Van Den Haute, rik.vandenhautte@sabena-aerospace.com

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 Contact: Mr. Tan Chee Hong, Damien, cheehong@stengg.com

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 Website: cascadeaerospace.com
 Contact: Director, Business Development Jason Kenny, Jason.Kenny@impaad.com

Leonardo S.P.A.
 Venice, Italy
 Website: www.leonardo.com/en/home
 Contact: VP CSS&T Sales Luca Elio Nuzzo, lucaelio.nuzzo@leonardocompany.com

Marshall Aerospace
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 Contact: President/CEO Christo Kok, christokok@segers.aero

Vector Aerospace International
 Hampshire, United Kingdom
 Website: www.vectoraerospace.com
 Contact: Commercial Manager Neil Driscoll, neil.driscoll@vectoraerospace.c



contract with the Weapons Systems Maintenance Directorate of the Portuguese Air Force, for the maintenance and repair of the engines, components, and systems of the force's Hercules. This particular airframe underwent a "C Check," an intensive inspection that requires engine removal, as well as the removal of all extraneous components from the surface airplane, rendering it "clean."

Once the aircraft is stripped down, the goal of a C-check is to assess its functionality and serviceability at the time of inspection. Areas of concern include seals, lines, fittings, and more. Many inspections can be done visually, while others, such as examination of load-bearing components on the wings and fuselage, require special tools and equipment. This level of thorough inspection—and correcting any issues that are discovered—can take anywhere from weeks to months to complete.

OGMA also will be teaming up with Collins Aerospace of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to install next generation avionics in the Portuguese C-130 fleet. The Flight2 Integrated Avionics System is a suite of communications, navigation, and surveillance equipment that integrates with

legacy sensors, radios, autopilot, and aircraft systems. Since the Portuguese Air Force uses their C-130s for a wide range of missions, including transport of personnel and equipment, and even firefighting, upgrading to this modernized system will bring with it a welcome increase operational capability and situational awareness.

In another international collaboration, two C-130T aircraft of the Philippine Air Force recently returned home after undergoing required maintenance checkups and capability upgrades by OGMA. One of the Hercules received a new internal Special Airborne Mission Installation and Response (SABIR) System as part of a project funded by the U.S. government under the Military Sales Security Assistance Program. The second Philippine C-130T underwent repairs and overhaul at OGMA that included its 24th year Structural Maintenance Program (SMP) service. As a result of the work done at OGMA, both aircraft left with significant life extensions and increased capabilities.

TALES FROM THE FIELD

Being in the business for more than four decades has given OGMA some interesting

▲ Shown here is the cockpit of a Portuguese Air Force C-130H recently upgraded by Collins Aerospace of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, with the Flight 2 avionics upgrade. (Image courtesy of Rockwell Collins.)

▼ Certificates like this are awarded only to top Lockheed Martin Service Centers, such as OGMA in Alverca, Portugal. OGMA has more than 45 years of experience working with C-130B to H models. (Image courtesy of OGMA.)





▲ Master Sergeant Christopher May, serving with the Tennessee Air National Guard, helps restore one of Nigeria's C-130 transport aircraft to flying condition as part of an ongoing military-to-military engagement between 17th Air Force (U.S. Air Forces Africa), and the West African nation. Lockheed Martin's authorized service centers help support and reinforce such international collaboration. (Photo by Lieutenant Colonel David MacKenzie, courtesy of the U.S. Air Force.)

stories. OGMA Public Relations Officer João Santos related how they once were tasked with bringing a C-130 from Africa, a process that involved using trucks, ships, and barges. The aircraft first had to be moved approximately 30 kilometers over poor roads, pass under low bridges, and skirt around local obstacles. At that point, the technicians had to perform major disassembly of the aircraft in a location where there were few tools or mechanical resources. When they finally got the Hercules to an ocean-going ship, it sailed up the Atlantic to Portugal, where it was then moved to a barge to be pushed to the OGMA facility.

Recalling the scope and challenges of this project, Santos says, "This was not just a technical feat but also a logistic feat, where OGMA had to coordinate between engineering, production, planning, procurement and outsourcing teams and all the local authorities, customer and service providers."

Another major project that OGMA completed in conjunction with Lockheed Martin, was the stretching of a C-130H fuselage to increase its payload capacity. Says Santos, "It involved the separation of the aircraft in the FS245 and 737 production splices, inserting the 100-inch

and 80-inch plugs, and then making all the required electrical, mechanical, pneumatic, and hydraulic connections, as these are probably the most difficult part of the process."

He concludes, "Although this was accomplished in the early 1990s, this is still something that make us very proud today." The kind of pride his team takes in overcoming such challenges and achieve such success is emblematic of their and other authorized service providers' relationships with their all-important Hercules customers.

HEAVY SERVICE AND MORE

Leonardo Aerospace, Defense and Security of Venice, Italy, is another aerospace company certified by Lockheed Martin to perform C-130J heavy maintenance inspections. In January 2023, Leonardo



An Italian Air Force C-130J assigned to the 46th Air Brigade in Pisa, Italy, taxis on the runway of the Ciampino Airport in Rome. These Hercules are supported by Leonardo Aerospace, Defense and Security of Venice, Italy, which is certified by Lockheed Martin to perform C-130J heavy maintenance inspections and more. (Image courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.)

entered into a temporary business grouping with Avio Aero of Tetti Francesi, Italy, and Lockheed Martin, forging a 5-year agreement, worth \$416 million U.S. dollars, with the Italian Aeronautical Armaments and Airworthiness Directorate.

The work to be accomplished includes providing integrated logistical support (ILS), "in-house" engineering support and "on-site" support through operational technical representatives at the Italian Air Force's 46th Air Brigade in Pisa, Italy. Aircraft maintenance activities will be planned and managed by at the Air Force's Logistic Command's 11th Maintenance Depot in Sigonella, Italy. Maintenance activities will be conducted at the Leonardo plant in Tessera near Venice, and at the Avio Aero plant in Brindisi.

Repairs, spare parts, material logistics, inspection activities, software, and

technical publications maintenance and updates are all included in the contractual agreement. The project also will include implementation of a technical-logistical model, custom made to support Italy's C-130J fleet.

Pierfederico Scarpa, Vice President of Strategy, Marketing and Sales at Avio Aero commented, "This contract undoubtedly represents a further consolidation of our historic partnership with the Italian Air Force. The C-130J fleet is indeed one of the

most strategic of the whole armed force. Furthermore, under this agreement, Avio Aero will provide a 'Performance-Based Logistics' service to support the AE 2100D3 engines. This is an innovative and increasingly used model that, in this case, will allow Avio Aero not only to optimize performance, but also to implement ever more effective and functional solutions in response to the needs of the Italian Air Force."

An example of other upgrades that

Leonardo offers its C-130 customers is its Miysis DIRCM (directed infrared countermeasure) system. This high-power system provides protection exceeding that of traditional countermeasures such as decoy flares, instead using multi-band lasers. The design utilizes the latest open architecture concepts, allowing it to be installed on an aircraft as a standalone DIRCM or integrated as part of an existing defensive aids system. While small enough to be fitted to a lightweight helicopter, the

▼ The U.S. Africa Command works with local forces to combat terrorism. During a recent operation called Emergency Deployment Readiness Exercise (EDRE), U.S. forces joined with the East Africa Response Force (EARF) in conducting security operations at the U.S. Embassy, Mogadishu, Somalia. (Photo by Staff Sergeant Alysia Blake, courtesy of the U.S. Air Force.)



The design utilizes the latest open architecture concepts, allowing it to be installed on an aircraft as a standalone DIRCM or integrated as part of an existing defensive aids system.

This elite group of MRO providers form Lockheed Martin's C-130 brain trust and indeed comprises the manufacturers most trusted aftermarket partners.

system possesses "energy-on-target" capability sufficient to protect a wide-bodied transport as large as a C-130.

GLOBAL HERCULES SUPPORT

Sabena Aerospace, headquartered at the Brussels Airport in Zaventem, Belgium, also is a Lockheed Martin authorized C-130 service provider with locations in Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.

Recently, Sabena played an important role in an effort by the United States to develop the Nigerian Air Force (Armee l'Air du Niger) Hercules program. Beginning in 2015, the U.S. government initiated an investment of more than \$30 million in support infrastructure that included spare

parts, a training component, fuel supplies, and ground equipment. An additional \$17 million was allocated to renovating a hangar for the Hercules at Base Aérienne 201 in Agadez, Niger. In December 2022, the third and final U.S. C-130H was received by the Nigerian Air Force. It arrived fresh from an extensive 4-year overhaul at the Sabena facility in Brussels. The Hercules, a former U.S. Air Force WC-130H 65-0985 (c/n 382-4140), will become 5UMTU with the Niger Air Force.

Elsewhere, Sabena Aerospace, along with its subsidiary Sabca Maroc, and Lockheed Martin, signed a strategic partnership in April 2022 for the creation of a new maintenance facility to be called

Maintenance Aero Maroc (MAM) in Benslimane, Morocco. This facility will serve as a hub for maintaining Moroccan C-130 aircraft, and its MRO services will be made available to other friendly nations who operate the Hercules.

STATE OF INDUSTRY

The C-130 aircraft in all of its variations are flying all across the globe, and there are thousands of service centers wanting to fix and maintain them. But only a select few companies achieve the coveted designation of "Lockheed Martin Authorized Service Center."

This elite group of MRO providers form Lockheed Martin's C-130 brain trust and indeed comprises the manufacturers most trusted aftermarket partners. As such, they have the ability to foresee problems, devise ingenious solutions, create resolutions, and do what needs to be done to address any of the anticipated or unforeseeable situations that might develop with C-130 aircraft.





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(Photo courtesy U.S. Air Force. Photo by Yasuo Osakabe.)

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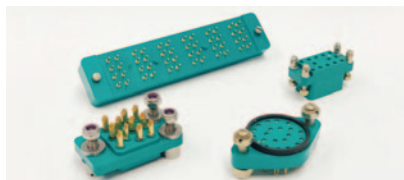
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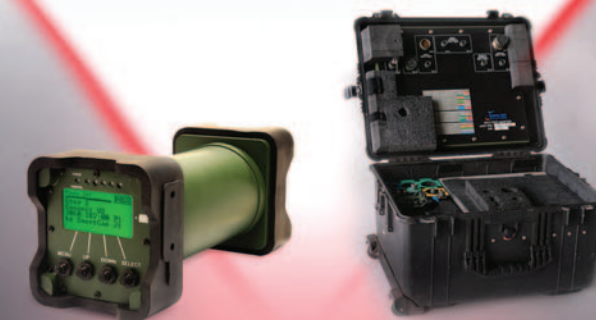


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WPI- Rubin Campus Center 508-831-6806
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American Valley Aviation, Inc. 530-283-0711
550 Orion Way, Quincy, CA 95971 U.S.A.

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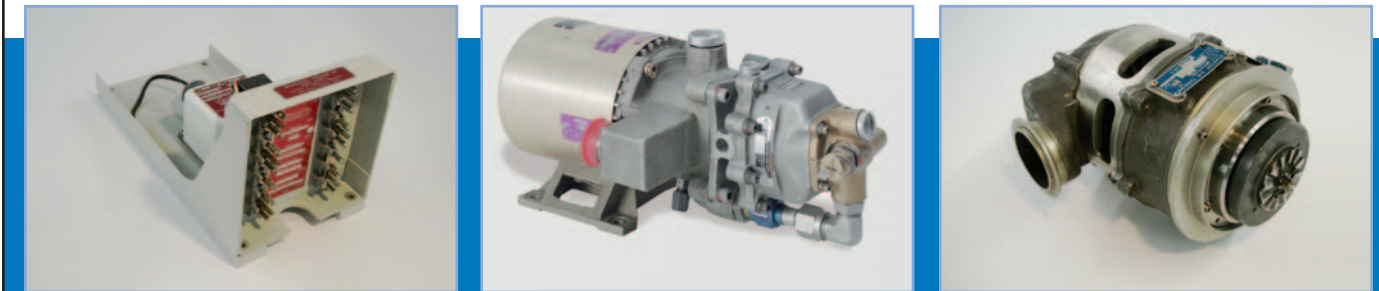
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