



Tech. Sgt. Michael Scott, 747th Aircraft Maintenance Unit, prepares a C-130J for its final sortie in the AOR.

Photo by Tech. Sgt. Stephen Staedler

C-130Js came, saw, conquered

by Tech. Sgt. Stephen Staedler
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What started out as a four-month test program ended up lasting two years — with outstanding results.

The first ever deployment of the Air Force's new C-130 J model came to a close Thursday as the fleet returned to their Air National Guard bases in California, Maryland and Rhode Island.

"I think we'll be missed here," said Lt. Col. M. Cory Lunt, assistant director of operations for the 746th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron. "I've been told by many people that they appreciated the J models quite a bit, and the added capabilities of the stretch model have been very useful."

Although they look alike, the J model has two features distinguishing it from its predecessors: six props instead of four, and a stretch version measuring an extra 15 feet in length.

The J model arrived here in December 2004 to start a four-month testing period. Since this was its first deployment, many, including Air Mobility Command and

Lockheed, the aircraft's manufacturer, were interested in how the new airframe would operate in the desert environment. The results were so well received that the aircraft stayed, and Airmen from the three Guard bases began 60-day rotations in June, 2005.

Throughout the next 18 months the J model performed exceptionally well, with mission-effective rates above 95 percent. Such a high percentage means cargo and passengers are arriving on time — every time.

"When a mission here doesn't go, it's a much bigger deal than when a training mission back home doesn't go," said Lt. Col. Michael Donnelly, officer in charge of the 379th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron's 747th Aircraft Maintenance Unit. "People here and up range are counting on us, so we're going to work harder to make sure our aircraft are ready to fly.

"This is where it counts. You don't cancel missions here. If you show up late or miss a leg it means somebody isn't receiving their cargo or not getting into or

out of theater when they planned."

Colonel Donnelly, deployed from the 143rd Airlift Wing in Rhode Island, and Colonel Lunt, deployed from the 135th Airlift Wing in Maryland, say the mission here proved to be a great learning tool for the Air Force as to how the J model operates in a variety of weather conditions throughout the AOR.

As the J model bids farewell to the desert, and is replaced with H models, Guard Airmen are taking great satisfaction in knowing they helped launch the first deployment.

"Everyone worked together to put the airplanes in the air," said Senior Airman Spence McIntyre, a crew chief from the 747th AMU and a Guardsman from the 135th AW in Maryland. "Knowing we were the ones who first tested the airplane is a good feeling."

"You hear total force a lot," Colonel Lunt said. "We feel we've been able to stand together with our active duty brothers and sisters and match them toe-to-toe with our capability to provide a good service for the CENTCOM folks here. We're proud to serve our country just like they are."