



PICS CORPORAL DAVID GIBBS

» Sets Alaska on Fire

Sparks flew in Alaska as an Australian C-130H Hercules from Number 37 Squadron, RAAF Base Richmond, released its flares during Exercise Red Flag Alaska.

Flares are a self-protect system fitted to most military aircraft, with the intent that heat-seeking missiles would be attracted to the heat of the white-phosphorous flare rather than the heat of the aircraft's engines.

Of course, they also make for great photos when fired during exercises.

Exercise Red Flag Alaska, led by the United States Pacific Air Forces Command, is a large-force-employment exercise designed to replicate a high-end combat environment.

The two-week exercise officially commenced on June 7.

Around 60 personnel from RAAF Williamtown's Number 2 Squadron and more than 70 personnel from RAAF Richmond's Number 37 Squadron participated.

This was the biggest exercise yet for Australia's E-7A Wedgetail aircraft operated by Number 2 Squadron.

A C-130H and C-130J Hercules transport aircraft from 37 Squadron also participated, practicing a variety of roles

including airdrop of cargo and landing at remote airfields.

Officer commanding Number 84 Wing Group Captain Donald Sutherland said this would be the last Red Flag the C-130H attended before being retired and officially replaced by the J model.

He said the RAAF was using the complex environment and scenarios on Red Flag to transfer some of the skills resident in the veteran C-130H workforce across to the newer C-130J workforce.

"Every time the H flies here, C-130J crew will fly with them."

The exercise saw participants from the US, Australia, Germany, Poland and Japan as well as a NATO E-3A component working together, while Russian and Bangladeshi officials observed.

» Indonesia bound

Australia and Indonesia signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the transfer of four RAAF C-130H-model Hercules to Indonesia on 2 July.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard offered the aircraft to Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in November last year and the MoU was signed during the president's visit to Australia in July.

Chief of the Australian Defence Force General David Hurley and Secretary General of the Indonesian Ministry of Defence Air Marshal Eris Herryanto actually signed the MoU on behalf of the two countries.

The aircraft will contribute to Indonesia's airlift capacity to support humanitarian-assistance and disaster-relief operations.

Indonesia will fund all refurbishment and ongoing maintenance costs for the aircraft.

Defence said the C-130H gifting reflected the strength of the bilateral Australia-Indonesia relationship and close ties between the Australian and Indonesian defence forces.



» Retirement

In the Federal Budget handed down in May this year, savings of \$250 million from the early retirement of the C-130H Hercules aircraft were earmarked.

The relevant statement said that as part of the Defence contribution to the government's return to surplus in 2012-13, the C130H would be retired early in order to minimise costs associated with maintaining and operating the ageing fleet.

Defence currently has 12 C-130H aircraft, introduced in 1978, which are based at RAAF Base Richmond, near Sydney.

Current activities undertaken by the C130H aircraft fleet will be redistributed across the remaining Air Force air mobility fleet, including C-130J Hercules and C-17 Globemaster III aircraft.

The process of retiring the fleet will take some time as disposal plans and a plan to redistribute the fleet's tasks are devised.

Four of the aircraft have already been gifted to Indonesia.

Also in May, the government announced a decision to purchase 10 Alenia C-27J Spartan battlefield airlift aircraft at a cost of \$1.4 billion.

The C-27J is the long-awaited replacement for Caribou, which retired in 2009 after a career spanning 45 years.

C-27J will complement the capabilities of the C-130J and C-17 and will be based at Richmond.



Sergeant Matthew Long prepares for a parachute extraction from a C-130J Hercules as a C-130H follows.



PIC SERGEANT SHANE GIDALL