

# C-5 Galaxy adds another first to its distinguished history

## Largest aircraft in Air Force inventory makes its debut at Kandahar, Afghanistan

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OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM — C-5 crews from Travis Air Force Base, Calif., and Dover Air Force Base, Del., are flying "down range" into the rugged and unforgiving terrain of Afghanistan to extract Canadian forces and equipment from the international airport at Kandahar.

It takes a cohesive team of mobility warriors to accomplish a mission of this magnitude. From maintainers and aerial porters, to flight crews and life-support specialists, the total team is working around the clock to make sure nothing stands in the way of mission accomplishment.

The teams, which are staged at a forward operating location, are eager to prove the C-5 Galaxy can deploy into a combat environment — for the first time. According to the 782nd Expeditionary Airlift Squadron Commander, Lt. Col. Mark "Marshall" Dillon, this first-ever deployment of the C-5 has sports parallels to the Super Bowl.

"Sure it's nice to say you played in the Super Bowl," Dillon said during a pre-mission briefing. "However, as warriors, we must not be satisfied with that — we must plan on taking home the ring."

To achieve victory, the crews and maintainers are counting on the C-5 Galaxy to get the job done — and it's not letting them down. Despite a reputation as being "mechanically challenged," this mobility force multiplier is proving to be worth its weight in gold. The 100 percent on-time departure rate is impressive for any airframe, but for an airframe as seasoned and war-proven as the C-5, it's remarkable.

"It's almost impossible to compare the C-5 to any other aircraft in the Air Force inventory," said Staff Sgt. Bill Hoeft, a flight engineer with the 782nd EAS. "Fred [as the C-5 is affectionately known to aircrews and maintainers alike] can haul more cargo and go further than any aircraft on a single load of fuel," Hoeft said. "We're not an intra-theater airlifter, we're a strategic airlifter capable of global reach. That's why we've been invited to the game —

because no other aircraft does it better."

### Get the game on

It's four hours and 15 minutes until launch, and one of the crews from the 782nd EAS has just been alerted. It's their turn to step to the jet, and everything is running as smooth as a finely tuned Swiss watch.

As the two flight engineers accomplish their preflight, the loadmasters are going over the load plan and making sure the weight and balance are squared away. The team is ready and could probably accomplish the mission without saying a word to each other.

As takeoff time approaches, all checklists are repeated. The engineer orchestrates the requirements to the pilots, and each answers they're ready to roll.

Rolling down the runway, the anticipation builds as the crew prepares to head into the blue sky. Years of training for the crew and hundreds of hours of "sweat equity" for maintenance, aerial port and life-support warriors culminate as Fred departs on another on time take off.

### Into the box

Hours of long-range cruise are behind the crew as each member dons his body armor and survival vest. They're just minutes away from the airfield which lies in some of the most austere conditions on earth. Guided by the aircraft's Global Positioning System and a navigator from Dover's elite Special Operations Low Level team, the completely blacked out aircraft prepares to descend into Kandahar.

"At this point it's a real adrenaline rush," said Tech. Sgt. Miroslav Nerad, Jr. a flight engineer assigned to the 782nd EAS, who is deployed from the 9th Airlift Squadron at Dover Air Force Base, Del. "We know what we have to do. You get in, you get out and you get the job done. It's a rush to be able to do what we've been trained to do in an operational environment."

It's dark, treacherous and dangerous, and this is where the navigator comes into play.

"What we bring to the fight is total situational awareness," said Capt. Keith Nelson, a SOLL II navigator from Dover AFB who is assigned to the 782nd EAS. "We're trained to use night vision goggles so we can relieve the pilot from the majority of his navigational duties and allow him to just fly the aircraft. Field acquisition, terrain avoidance, threat avoidance and tactical mission planning are our specialties — specialties that make sure Fred gets in, out and home safely."

Although the airfield can easily handle the C-5, its condition leaves much to be desired. When the venerable workhorse touches down in complete darkness, it feels more like an afternoon in the four-wheel drive than the usual smooth surface, but as every C-5 crew knows, the beloved C-5 Galaxy easily adapts without incident.

### Time to get to work

Capt. Keith Nelson, a Special Operations Low Level navigator assigned to the 782nd Expeditionary Airlift Squadron, deployed from Dover Air Force Base, Del., is donned in his night vision goggles in preparation for arrival into the international airport at Kandahar, Afghanistan. C-5 crews from Dover and Travis Air Force Base, Calif., are deployed to a forward operating location and flying into Afghanistan to extract Canadian forces from the Princess Patricia Light Infantry unit out of Edmonton, Canada. The Canadians have been serving in Kandahar for eight months and are going home via the C-5 Galaxy.

Almost instantly the crew's scanner steps out of the Galaxy into the black hole to prepare for the upcoming load. It's serious business, and everything is accomplished in double time. The giant's visor comes open, and the aircraft is simultaneously knelt to accommodate the thousands of pounds of rolling stock, pallets and passengers.

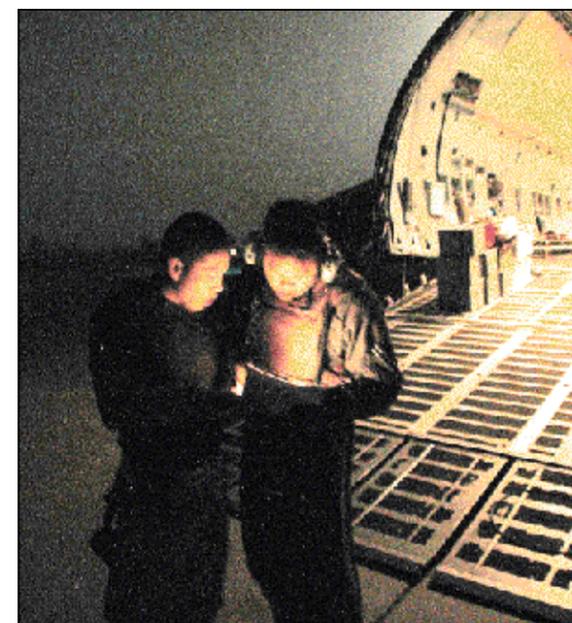
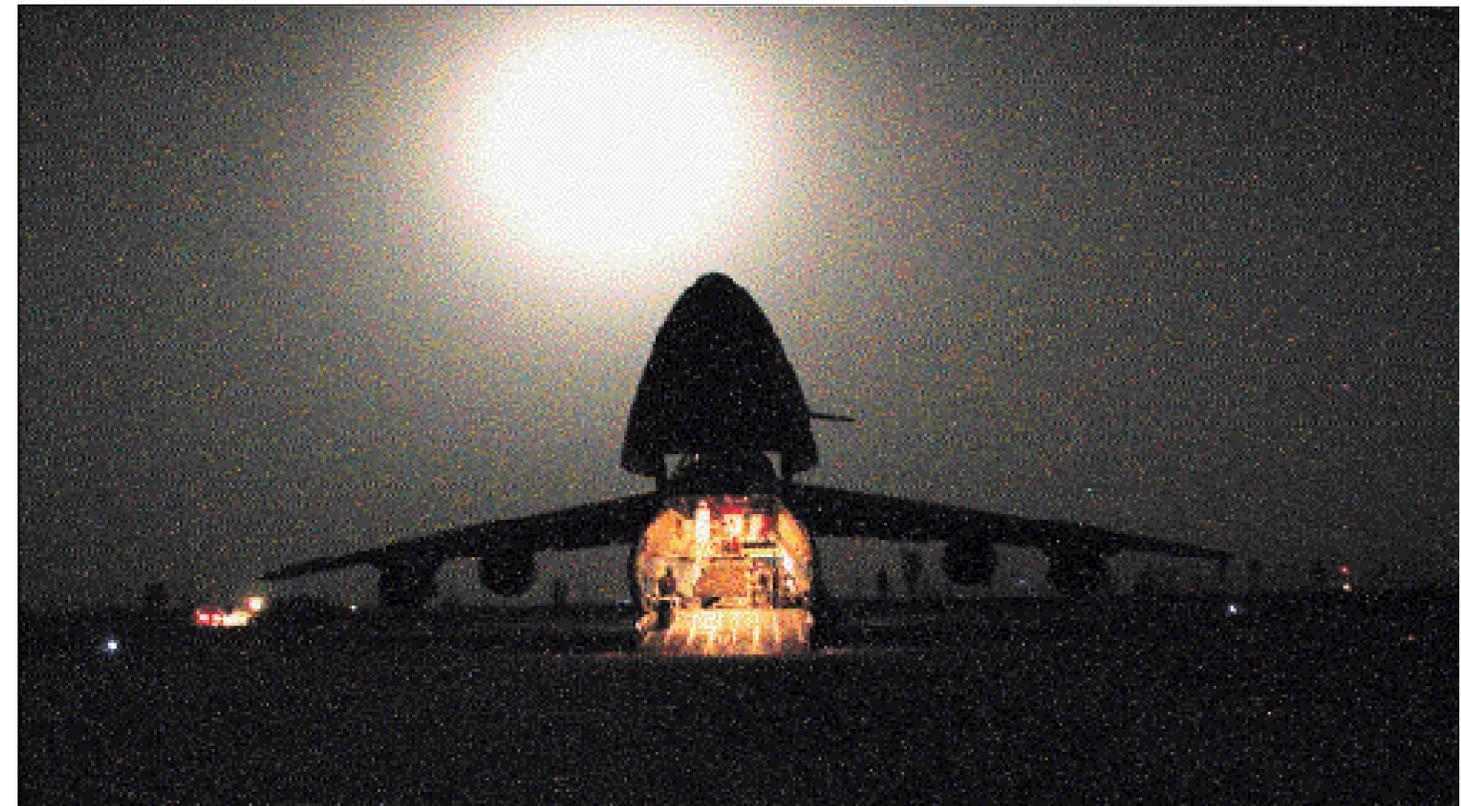
With engines running, air terminal specialists appear out of the darkness. All equipment has been checked and rechecked to make sure it's safe to upload. In a blink of an eye, the entire team has the aircraft fully loaded. It's now time for the Galaxy to accept the most important cargo — Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Regiment soldiers who have spent eight months defending freedom and the war on terrorism.

### Heading home

Stirring up the dust, the fully loaded, yet nimble C-5 does a 180-degree turn and prepares to depart Kandahar. Once again, it's nearly a lights out operation due to the unknown threat just outside the airfield's perimeter.

Fred traverses its way down the virtual gravel back road that's been termed a runway. Throttles to take-off power then brakes released, and the magnificent marvel of 1960s technology disappears into the darkness. Darkness that resembles a black hole — darkness that represents a light at the end of the tunnel for the Canadians who are finally heading home.

"This is a once in a lifetime opportunity," said Capt. Gary Goosen, an instructor pilot assigned to the 782nd EAS, who is deployed from Travis. "It's exciting to prove to the world the remarkable capabilities of the C-5 Galaxy. This is a mission America's C-5 crews are ready for, and it's a mission the C-5 Galaxy can do over and over again."



(Left), Staff Sgt. Malcom Mercado, a loadmaster with the 782nd Expeditionary Airlift Squadron, deployed from Travis Air Force Base, Calif., (right) discusses a load plan with an aerial porter under the cover of darkness at the international airport in Kandahar Afghanistan. Crews and aircraft from Travis and Dover Air Force Base, Del., continue to go down range into war-torn Afghanistan to extract Canadian forces and equipment. (Below), Under the light of a full moon and the cover of darkness, a C-5 Galaxy is prepared to take a load of Canadian forces and equipment out of the international airport in Kandahar, Afghanistan. The C-5 crews are extracting Canadian forces from the Princess Patricia Light Infantry unit out of Edmonton, Canada. The Canadians have been serving in Kandahar for eight months.

