

'A walking, talking C-130'

Meet a San Antonio employee who brings a wealth of aircraft know-how, experience

BY DEBORAH VAN NIEROP

Reliable, dependable, an icon. You could use these words to describe the C-130, an aircraft that has been around for more than 40 years. But these are the words John Fulenwider's co-workers use to describe him—not just the aircraft he works on as a C-130 modifications specialist contractor in San Antonio.

Fulenwider embodies the experience and capabilities that Boeing brings to the C-130 Avionics Modernization Program. In this program, Boeing is upgrading more than 400 of the Lockheed-built, U.S. Air Force transport aircraft to common avionics. The upgrade will make the aircraft safer and extend its service life.

"John is basically a walking, talking C-130, to put it plainly," explained John Rush, C-130 Avionics Modernization Program (AMP) Quality Assurance manager. "He brings a depth of C-130 aircraft experience that is rarely found on any aircraft."

That may actually be an understatement when considering Fulenwider's background.

Fulenwider entered the aerospace industry in 1968 when he joined Collins Radio; this firm was eventually acquired by Rock-

well, and Boeing acquired parts of that company in 1996. "I worked on a lot of different things, but I ended up on a Navy tactical program working on C-130s," he said.

However, his introduction to the aircraft actually occurred in 1964, a fact that many of his co-workers may be surprised to learn. The soft-spoken Fulenwider doesn't talk much about the four years he spent in the U.S. Air Force as a C-130 crew chief or his year-long tour in Vietnam. "No stories to tell. I try not to remember that far back," he said.

Those four years, however, made an impact. "I came to this industry—to Boeing—because it was what I knew, what I had learned," Fulenwider explained. While he's always felt a sense of familiarity with the aircraft, he said he believes the C-130 also gives him some job security. "The military has wanted to replace the C-130 for 40 years and it's still here," he explained.

It's a somewhat ironic observation from a man who, like the aircraft, refuses to retire. Not that he hasn't tried. He retired from Boeing after 32 years of service, but realized after a year at home that standing around wasn't for him.

"My wife and I did some traveling and we had a great time, but when I got home I was bored. I'm not the sitting type, and I guess I don't have enough hobbies to keep me busy," he said.

It didn't help that he found himself answering questions and talking a lot about the C-130. "Co-workers would call and ask



RON BOOKOUT PHOTO

To his teammates, John Fulenwider, a C-130 modification specialist contractor, is known as a "walking, talking C-130." That honor refers to his decades of expertise on the aircraft.

A C-130 makes its first flight after upgrades Boeing performed under the C-130 Avionics Modernization Program. Boeing is upgrading more than 400 of these U.S. Air Force transport aircraft to common avionics.



RICH RAU PHOTO

C-130 all decked out

U.S. Air Force Col. Kevin Buckley and Boeing C-130 program manager Mike Harris couldn't have been prouder as they recently watched a C-130 aircraft take off from the runway at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

It was the aircraft's first flight following upgrades under the C-130 Avionics Modernization Program, in which Boeing is upgrading more than 400 of the U.S. Air Force transport aircraft to common avionics.

The upgrade not only is making the aircraft safer, but is preparing it for another 30 years of service.

The upgrades will increase situational awareness for the warfighter tenfold over old analog cockpits, dramatically increase information available to aircrews at a glance, simplify tasks and decrease workload. Commonality

will also allow the Air Force greater flexibility in assigning C-130 aircrews regardless of the model design type.

The aircraft's new avionics system features digital displays and the 737 commercial airliner's proven flight-management system, which provides navigation, safety and communication improvements to meet Communication Navigation Surveillance/Air Traffic Management requirements. With the CNS/ATM upgrade, C-130s can continue to be deployed worldwide.

Boeing test pilot Mike Leone, who helped conduct the flight, said it's been a great experience watching the aircraft evolve. "It's exciting to see a design we worked so hard to put together become a reality," he said, "and the graphics and displays are even better than I expected."

—Deborah VanNierop and Madonna Walsh

me about this or that, so I was never far away from what was going on with the program," Fulenwider said.

While the 60-year-old Fulenwider said he is surprised to be working again with Boeing, he's glad to be back around the people and the aircraft that he enjoys so much.

"The people here (in San Antonio) are very knowledgeable and easy to work with," he said. "I try to answer their questions, keep them calm when we hit a snag and get everyone moving in the right direction. I

think they appreciate my knowledge."

It's that modesty and his wealth of experience that make him a valuable asset to Boeing and the C-130 AMP team.

"John's interaction with the maintenance crew is a combination of coach and mentor. He has a strong work ethic and a calm-natured attitude that allows him to interact with anyone at their level, whether program director or shop mechanic," Rush said.

Fulenwider has watched the C-130 change over the years and is now involved in yet

another evolution of the aircraft. The C-130 AMP was initiated to simplify multiple C-130 fleet configurations. "These modifications will definitely help the pilots and ground maintenance personnel," he said.

In addition to making the aircraft safer, the C-130 AMP is also designed to prepare the C-130 for another 30 years of service. Perhaps then, Fulenwider said, it would be a good time to retire. ■

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