

## **New Hercules gives Austria enhanced connection**

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Strategic military airlift was for years non-existing in Austria. The country, situated between the Warsaw pact and NATO for many years could allow itself to play a modest role in the region. After the wall collapsed in Berlin situations changed and some movement came to exist in the Austrian Defence situation.

### **No Strategic transport**

With the confrontation of a changed safety theatre and the Balkan conflicts including peace keeping and enforcement actions Austria saw itself as a player and wanted to join in this actions, but how? The situation demanded a transport need, which could not be provide with the twelve Pilatus PC-6B2/H2 and two Short Skyvan 3M only suited for light and local transports. For a short period the Austrian Air Force leased a Spanish CN-235 from CASA for this purpose but the fact was recognized that Austria needed a few heavy transports to fulfil international commitments abroad. The choice was made for an airplane with four engines. Austria had the experience that Austrian soldiers incorporated in the German contingent travelled with a Dutch Hercules and considered their own Transall to small.

### **C-130K Hercules, the best choice**

Austria first supplied the permanent deployment in Bosnia of an AB-212 helicopter with the leased CN-235 but could finally take things in their own hand when the first C-130K arrived in 2003. On the date of 22-05-2002 a contract was signed between the United Kingdom and Austria in a government to government agreement. Three ex-RAF C-130K's (with the serials XV181, XV291 and XV292) would go to Austria. They were not on the nomination to stay in RAF service any longer while sister aircraft in the RAF transport fleet were modernised. After those three aircraft were upgraded with Marshall Aerospace in Camebridge concerning the same formula like the modernised RAF aircraft, they received the serials 8T-CA, 8T-CB and 8T-CC.

### **Many extra features**

To comply with the strict regulations in the Austrian airspace some changes are need in the cockpit especially in the avionics. The Hercules received a 'glass cockpit' with a new dual inertial navigation system and Digital Engine Control (DEC). The DEC optimise the engine power and saves fuel. Other improvements are the Traffic Control Avoidance System (TCAS) to avoid mid air collisions and a Rockwell Collins FMR-200X weather radar with colour screen. Complex weather situations in the mountains, which change constantly within short ranges, make it necessary to have high definition equipment to monitor this. Unlike the RAF there was no wish for Austria to fly with the assistance of a crew navigator and a Flight Management System (FMS) was installed.

During the upgrades, the airplanes received a D-check resulting in some changes in the airframe and cargo bay to strengthen the fuselage. The four engines were overhauled and the airplane received four Hamilton 'sunstrand' hydromatic propellers. It is expected that all these changes will put the three Hercules's in service for another twenty years.

### **Operational capabilities**

Thanks to the FMS the Austrian C-130K's are flying with two pilots, an engineer and one- or two loadmasters. The range is depending on the cargo. This means 8800 km. without cargo, some 6000 km with 10 tons cargo and 3000 km. with the maximum cargo of 18 tons. This is possible thanks to extra external fuel tanks of 10.265 litres each. The spacey cargo bay of 48.1 square and 127 cubic metres can be changed rapidly in different configurations. This can be for example 5 standard pallets of 436 L, or 64 parachutists, or 74 stretchers with 2 accompanying hospital soldiers.

### **A wish accomplished**

Austria is today the proud owner of the new transport fleet to provide airlift for both military and humanitarian missions. With the new C-130K Austria could provide help in the Tsunami disaster in Asia. The airplanes could stay in the air for 9 hours, enough to launch aid missions to that area. The three aircraft are flying with the Fliegerregiment 3 from Horsching air base in Linz. However major reorganisations and restructuring of the Austrian air force will certainly concern the transport element it is expected that the airplanes will stay on Horsching. A true enhanced connection !

Wim Das & Kees Otten

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