

Air Guard readies for C-27J fleet

Nov 2, 2009

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Photo credit **U.S. Air Force**

A C-27J Spartan taxis on the ramp at Redstone Arsenal, Ala., during flight testing in early 2009. The Air Force plans to add 38 C-27Js to its inventory, which will be operated by the Air National Guard.

ARLINGTON, Va. (Army News Service, Nov. 2, 2009) - For the first time ever, the Air National Guard will be the sole operator of a new aircraft straight off the assembly line.

The C-27J Spartan, the latest propeller-driven airlifter, is an "extremely rugged" aircraft, designed for austere environments, said Air Force officials. It is about half the size of a C-130 with 3.5 cargo pallet positions.

"It is the first time in Air Force history where the service acquired a new airframe solely owned, operated and maintained by the Air National Guard," said Lt. Col. Chris Beckman, the ANG's aviation planning and execution chief.

In April, through Resource Management Decision 802, Defense Secretary Robert Gates moved the C-27J program and its related direct support mission from the Army to the Air Force.

Army Chief of Staff Gen. George W. Casey Jr., supported Gates' decision saying "we need the capability to re-supply our forces. We do not have to fly the planes to get that."

He added that flying fixed-wing aircraft is not the Army's core competency.

Since that time, the Air Force, Air Mobility Command and the Air National Guard have taken a serious approach to building the program, officials said.

"Making a switch like this is no small affair, especially at this phase in the acquisition process," said Lt. Col. Gene Capone, AMC's C-27J test manager at the Joint Program Office.

He added the Army lost its fiscal year 2010 monies for the C-27J due to RMD 802, so the Air Force will fund the Army's completion of the Multi-Service Operational Test and Evaluation (MOT&E).

"ANG pilots and loadmasters from the 179th Airlift Wing (in Mansfield, Ohio) and the 175th Wing (in Baltimore) will be the first operational C-27J crews to be trained and deployed and are critical participants in the upcoming MOT&E," Beckman said. "The MOT&E, which is scheduled for April 2010, will determine if the C-27J program is ready for deployment and domestic operations."

Two Army National Guard units, Company H, 171st Aviation Regiment from Georgia and

1st Battalion, 245th Airfield Operations Battalion from Oklahoma, will also participate in the MOT&E.

The Air Force will field 24 C-27J's at ANG units in the following locations: Baltimore, Mansfield, Fargo, N.D., Bradley Air Field, Conn., Battle Creek, Mich., and Meridian, Miss.

"The ANG has played a critical role in the development of the C-27J roadmap to include basing, personnel, aircraft delivery, Air Force instruction and technical order development and review, service transfer and planning for operational execution," Beckman said.

To prove the direct support concept for transporting Army time-sensitive and mission-critical payloads, the ANG's 179AW is leading a test which began several months ago. Following pre-deployment training and integration with an Army Combat Aviation Brigade, the unit's C-130s recently deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"All of this is being done well within the new current execution model of 24 months that all of our forces now live in," Beckman said. "For example, we are already looking at mobilization packages and have not yet seen a tail or trained crew."

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