



Pit stops in "hot" zone require quick off-loads for aircrews

by Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr. 455th AEW public affairs

TARIN KOWT, Afghanistan – When people deployed to Afghanistan say a location is "hot," it could mean one of two things. Either it feels like the sun is closer than the moon, or the enemy is lurking about.

Here, both meanings apply.

For pilots, that equates to making quick pit stops here so they can get in and out of this danger zone as quickly as possible.

For Tech. Sgt. Philip Lester, deployed from Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., that means enduring a 140-degree heat blast from behind C-130 Hercules engines as he unloads cargo and passengers swiftly.

Called an engines running off load, the aircrew leaves their engines on so they can take off quickly, minimizing time spent on the ground.

"We don't want to shut the engines down because of the threat level there and

also because of Murphy's Law," said Capt. Kirby Shacon, an Alaska Air National Guard C-130 co-pilot. "If we shut the engines down and they don't start again we can't leave because we don't have support there. That would leave us, and a high-valued asset, stuck at a forward operating location."

The captain said the last time he was here, his cargo was loaded and unload very quickly, which is surprising since Sergeant Lester is a one-man air terminal operations center. He's the only Airman in the 330th Movement Control Team, an army unit deployed from Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan.

Sergeant Lester is also the only person knowledgeable in air transportation movement. The Army is familiar with Afghanistan's jingle trucks, which are decorative trucks used to haul cargo, but it has limited experience with air movement.

"I've been teaching soldiers how to load and configure pallets, manifest passengers and work on an airfield," Sergeant Lester said.

Here since May 23, the sergeant works out of a metal cargo container that sits at the end of a dirt runway. He gets dusted every time a C-130 takes off. The temperature rises to about 114 by noon, and his nine-by-six-foot container does not have air conditioning

When he has passengers — usually Soldiers on leave trying to get back to civilization for a couple weeks — he and the passengers chase the shade around the lone container. While they're waiting for the C-130 to arrive, he briefs them about the boarding process.

"Since we want to limit their exposure to (the extremely hot prop wash), I tell them to move as quickly as possible to the aircraft," he said.

Sergeant Lester couldn't possibly get the job done by himself. Staff Sgt. Walter Shutler, an Airman assigned to an Army fire department, has helped Sergeant Lester since the fireman arrived June 1.

"Since my job is mostly to remain ready, I have plenty of time to learn about other jobs,"

Sergeant Shutler said. "This also helps me in my job. Since we have deployable fire trucks, I've learned how to strap them down in an aircraft and to fill out the paperwork correctly."

Using forklifts, the two also help load and unload Australian, British and Dutch aircraft.

Every day, until the Dutch control this forward operating base later this year, Sergeants Lester and Shutler will continue to load and unload aircraft as the military moves cargo and passengers through this



U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.

Tech. Sgt. Philip Lester hurriedly unloads a 455th Air Expeditionary Wing C-130 Hercules on Tarin Kowt's dirt runway. In 114-degree temperatures and prop wash from the Herc, the temperatures behind the plane reach to about 140 degrees.

war zone.

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