

Lt. Col. Wendall Hurst checks for landmarks while flying above the landscape of Michigan's thumb.

Staff photo/LANDY DORST

## 'Herk': Defense team at ready

By Steve Barnaby  
editor

In civilian life they are known as Bob Boschma, Farmington Hills zoning inspector, and Wendall Hurst, pilot for Northwest Orient Airlines and Farmington Hills resident.

But on weekends and weeknights they literally change uniforms and become part of the U.S. Air Force Reserve as loadmaster Robert Boschma and Lt. Col. Wendall Hurst.

Recently we spent a day with the two

on a tactical training mission to see if that magic of military flying perpetuated in movies such as "Twelve O'Clock High" and countless other flying movies still holds true.

While civilian airliners have become commonplace, many of us are still tempted to stop and gaze at a military aircraft trudging through the sky, propellers churning, engines roaring. For a moment, the scene brings relief from our everyday humdrum existence and recharges our sense of adventure.

As we jolted and jostled through the

air on the C-130 transport over Michigan's thumb area, my mind drifted to other days and other times.

"C-130 goin' down the strip . . . I wanna be an airborne ranger. I wanna live a life of danger."

So the song went which, for a generation of GIs, immortalized and romanticized a bulky, 61,000-pound transport aircraft which only a mother could love.

But instead of just its mother's love — in this case the Lockheed Corporation which manufactures the craft —

the versatile C-130 has become the object of affection for hundreds of thousands of armed forces personnel as well as civilians.

Its maiden voyage was in August 1954.

Although the antithesis of the sleeker and much faster jet passenger planes of today, the C-130 has a loyal following of its own. Books have been written about it, songs composed and fan clubs formed.

The 95-foot-long gargantuan, with its 132-foot wingspan, has indeed become a familiar scene to military personnel and civilians, alike in its 30-year history. Capable of hauling more than 35,000 pounds, it can drop cargo loads ranging from 500-pound packages to 20,000-pound vehicles.

Because of its versatility, the aircraft has been used in countless emergency rescue and supply missions throughout the world, speeding food, clothing, shelter, doctors, nurses and medical supplies in and moving victims out.

With more than 50 versions in existence, the aircraft has been used for weather reconnaissance, gunship, search and rescue and as an inflight refueling tanker.

Knowing the craft's capabilities more than most are the men of the 927th Tactical Airlift Command, 63rd Tactical Airlift Squadron who fly and supply the "Herk" out of the Selfridge Air National Guard Base as part of

their duty with the U.S. Air Force Reserve.

OUR DAY'S ACTIVITIES with the 6-man crew would include two "drops" — one of which would consist of rigging 3,500 pounds of railroad ties and propelling it over a series of metal rollers out the back side of the aircraft with the aid of 12,000 pounds of pull provided by a small parachute.

"Sounds like a train going out the back," said Boschma with a mischievous grin.

The 10-year reserve veteran teams with fellow crewmember David Lee to rig the load. Incorrect rigging could cause a bangup endangering the aircraft and the lives of all aboard, said Boschma.

Calling themselves the "Mutt and Jeff" team, the two work coolly and efficiently as the transport chugs through the air.

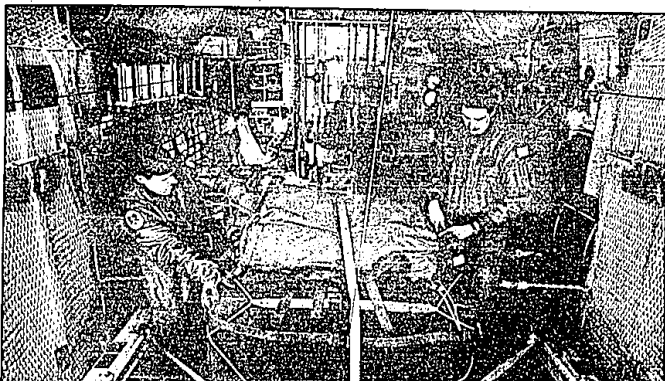
Shortly after takeoff, Boschma handed me safety instructions. "The poor man's flight attendant," I thought, looking at the instructions.

"Although supplied with motion sickness pills, I was hit with the 'elevator' effect. With as much nonchalance as possible, I looked around for the air sick bags. The safety instructions noted, the user of same bag would be responsible for removing it from the

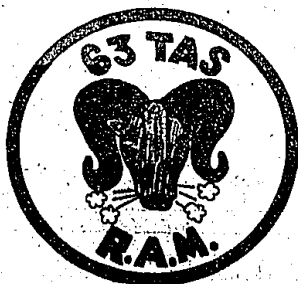


Hurst listens to the pre-flight briefing describing conditions of the cargo drop.

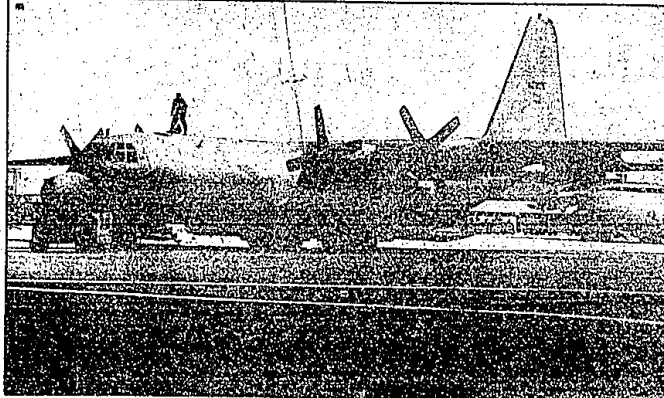
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Bob Boschma (left) and crewmate David Lee are loadmasters aboard the C-130. Their job is to prepare the cargo for flight and to make sure the load is parachuted safely to the ground.



When Boschma isn't flying he works as a zoning inspector for the city of Farmington Hills.



The C-130 Hercules weighs 61,000 pounds and the four prop jet engines produce a total of 15,000 horse power. The aircraft has a 132-foot wingspan and uses 300 miles per hour.