

Mt. Vernon airport holds military airlift

Airlifts require volunteers and confidentiality

BY EMILY ROTH

SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — On June 11, the National Guard stopped at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport to eat and refuel before heading to Kansas.

Troops from the Illinois Army National Guard boarded Lockheed C-130 Hercules transports during the airlift. The transports, based in Peoria, touched down in Mt. Vernon to refuel before the soldiers boarded. Two airlifts occurred that Friday, one in the morning and another at midday. Three planes

were used during the midday deployment.

This was the second airlift the airport has helped facilitate, the first one occurring in 2012. According to Chris Collins, airport director, preparations for the event are necessary, and include making the airport looking as nice as possible for the military, and finding volunteers.

"The first thing is we spend quite a bit of time trying to get the airport looking nice," said Collins. "We want to make sure that we're worthy to host the military. So we try to do a lot of grooming and cleaning and making sure the infrastructure is up to shape. And then the next thing is getting the volunteers and their assignments.

To make it go seamless you need people at different places to make sure all the needs are addressed. Everyone's in orange shirts and everybody all kind of has a role. [I've talked about] being an ambassador before, it doesn't matter if it's at the LSA (Light Sport Aircraft) Expo, the balloon event, or this. You want people to have smiles on their faces and shaking hands and to be glad you're here."

Collins said with a laugh that he finds volunteers through "phone calls, emails, begging and pleading." According to Collins, volunteers help with airport events due to their love of aviation. "Calling in favors, anything that you can

Please see **Airport**, Page 6A

Airport:

Continued From Page 1A

do," he continued. "Most, not even most, I would say all of them, as soon as you call, they'll be here. They just love aviation. That's what makes it really special to be a part of this."

"This is such a special opportunity, and I don't think people really realize how special it is that we get to host something like this."

Collins indicated that if the military will require the airport's services for an airlift, there will be a call in April.

"The first one we did was in July," he said. "This one kinda fell in June, 2012 was the first year — 2013 from what I understand was being planned, but then the sequester hit and they put the plans on the shelf. So we're really hoping that we can have it every year."

The sequester Collins mentioned refers to the federal spending cuts of last year as a result of the Budget Control Act. During the 2013 fiscal year, reports indicate that approximately \$85.4 billion was reduced in government spending.

Though refueling occurred during the most recent airlift, it did not in 2012. "This was new for us," said Collins. The soldiers stopping to take



Sentinel Photo/EMILY ROTH

INCOMING FLIGHT — Airport Director Chris Collins directs an incoming aircraft, the second of three, during last Friday's midday airlift. The National Guard stopped at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport to eat and refuel before heading to Kansas.

a bite to eat was new as well.

"The difference between the last time and this time was that last time there were more aircraft participating," explained Collins. "So they just came in, picked the guys up, took them to their destination and went home. The second time it was kind of a round robin. They came in, picked the guys up, took them to their destination, then they came back. That's what facilitated the need for fuel and food."

Airlifts are a rare event that Collins wishes to continue holding at the airport, but they are not something he

can announce beforehand.

"This is probably the one thing that we can't put out in advance," he said. "And I wish we could, but the military is very strict on that. I get a lot of people who come up to me saying 'I wish I would have known about that.' And we just have to be really careful to protect their wants and needs and desires because I'm fearful that if we violate that then that may jeopardize future airlifts. We're very protective of that. ... I want everybody out here to see it and be part of it, and have the pride, but we just can't [announce the

airlifts in advance.] We're protective of that because we want to make sure that we continue to have this opportunity."

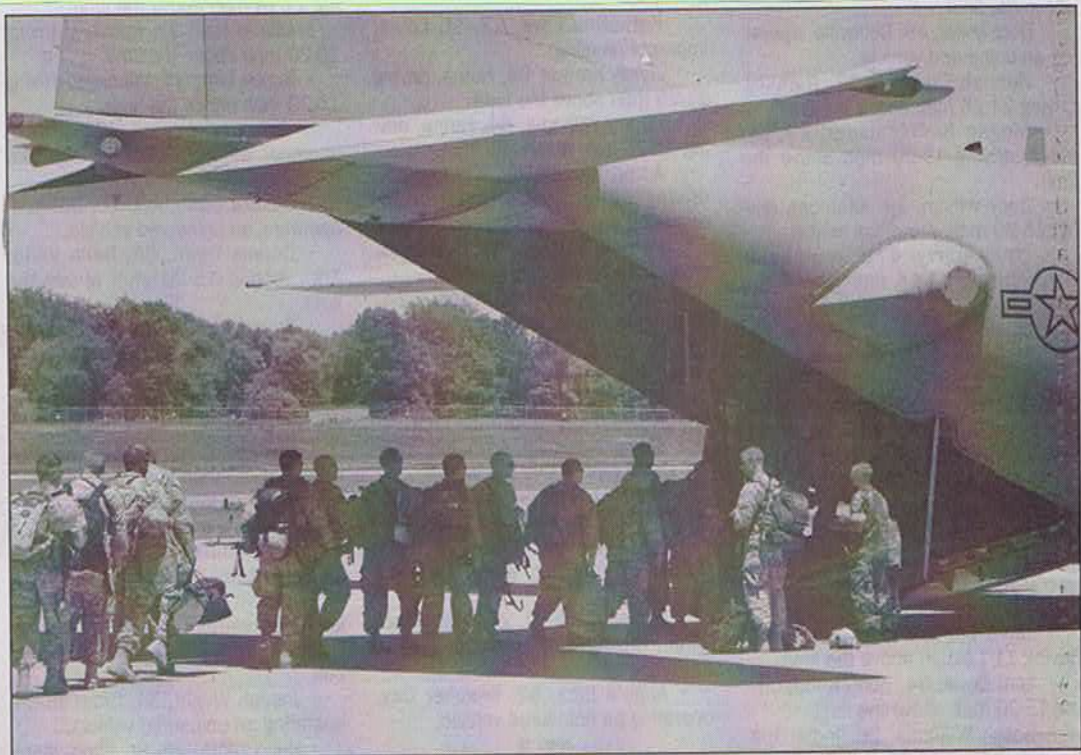
The Lockheed C-130 Hercules is a four-engine turboprop military transport aircraft used largely as a troop, evacuation and cargo transport aircraft. It has also been used in other roles such as search and rescue, scientific research, weather reconnaissance, aerial refueling, maritime patrol and aerial firefighting. It is the main airlifter of many militaries around the world.

eroth@morningsentinel.com



Sentinel Photo/EMILY ROTH

HEADING OUT — Members of the Army National Guard walk down the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport tarmac before boarding the aircraft. Troops loaded the plane while in full uniform and carrying all equipment.



Sentinel Photo/EMILY ROTH

AIRPORT AIRLIFT — Troops from the National Guard board a transport aircraft during an airlift last Friday at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport. The transports, based in Peoria, touched down in Mt. Vernon to refuel before the soldiers boarded. Three planes in total were used during deployment.