



A photograph of a C-130T Hercules aircraft in flight, viewed from a low angle looking up. The aircraft is white with a high-wing configuration and four engines. The background is a clear blue sky. The title 'VR-55 Minutemen' is overlaid in large yellow text on the right side of the image.

VR-55 Minutemen

Story and Photos by Ted Carlson

Fleet Logistics Support Squadron 55 was established in April 1976 at NAS Alameda, Calif., and was the first Naval Reserve unit to fly the C-9B Skytrain II. In 1993, the Minutemen transitioned to the C-130T Hercules, left, and today the squadron comprises approximately 275 personnel, including 35 pilots.

The Minutemen provide global logistics support for U.S. Naval forces deployed throughout the world. Primary theaters of operation include the Mediterranean, European, southwest Asian, Middle Eastern, Indian Ocean, Australian, Far Eastern, and Pacific Ocean island regions. VR-55 plays a pivotal role in the efficient and timely delivery of personnel and materiel to ships and deployed units in order to maintain a high level of operational readiness. Providing the vital link between ports, air stations, and foreign civilian locales, VR-55 helps fleet commands meet their operational readiness goals and accomplish United States foreign policy objectives.

In December 1990, VR-55 mobilized within four days to support Operation Desert Shield, and subsequently Operation Desert Storm.

The squadron conducted air logistics support missions around the clock as part of the Air Force's Military Airlift Command, moving



soldiers and Marines from Germany to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Egypt, and Greece as well as conducting nighttime special missions through eastern European airspace.

During the Gulf War, the squadron established a VR community record for the most monthly and quarterly hours flown—794 hours in January 1991 and 2,178 hours from January to March 1991. The squadron moved 4,327 troops and 2,729,665 pounds of cargo supporting that war effort. In December 1993, a new chapter was opened, as the squadron received its first Lockheed C-130T Hercules turboprop transport. On 21 December 1998, the Minutemen began a permanent duty station move from Moffett Federal Airfield to NAS Point Mugu.

From bases in NAS Sigonella, Italy; NAF Atsugi, Japan; and Bahrain, VR-55 provided direct support to American forces assigned to Implementation Force operations in the Balkans, as well as for operations Enduring Freedom, Noble Eagle, and Iraqi Freedom. In April 2003, the squadron set another record flying 523.3 hours in one month, the highest monthly total for Navy C-130s.

Squadron skipper Cdr. Scott Handler described a typical deployment for the Minutemen. “On deployment to Bahrain, we take 10 to 15 maintainers and two aircraft crews (eight minimum plus assorted trainees). In transit, we go through Canada, Germany, Italy, and finally to Bahrain, three days after we left home. Once in the

Above, LCdrs. Michael DeShazo, left, and Alastair MacGregor in the overhead break at NAS Point Mugu, Calif. Right, a Minutemen Hercules banks over the Pacific Ocean in May 2005.



theater, we fly a variety of local missions from Bahrain. On occasion our tasking takes us completely around the globe. We are usually gone about 18 days, and that enables us to work at our deployment site for about 12 days, with the crews taking turns and rotating for flights.”

The future is bright for the squadron’s versatile C-130Ts. Cdr. Handler explained, “In addition to possibly picking up an aerial refueling role, this August we will start configuring our aircraft for the medevac



role, with the installation of litters. We will fly out of Travis AFB, Scott AFB, and Washington D.C., bringing back wounded soldiers along with medical teams.”

Since its establishment, VR-55 has accumulated an impressive record, having transported over 808,000 passengers and 35 million pounds of cargo over 17.6 million air miles, while logging more than 121,500 mishap-free flight hours. The 2004 Battle E is the most recent of many awards that have recognized the Minutemen’s accomplishments.

Cdr. Handler concluded, “we fly anywhere in the world, 24/7, do it safely, and have great morale within our squadron. We are having a good time and get to see the world.” ✈

Ted Carlson is a photojournalist specializing in Naval Aviation.

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