

Operation Christmas Drop 2017 in Full Flight

By Tanya M.C. Mendiola | Joint Region Marianas Public Affairs
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ANDERSEN AIR FORCE BASE, Guam -- Operation Christmas Drop 2017 officially took off with the ceremonial “push” of the first pallet at Andersen Air Force Base (AFB) Guam Dec. 11.

Operation Christmas Drop is the longest ongoing U.S. Department of Defense operation and humanitarian airlift in the world. It began in December 1952, when a WB-50 Superfortress aircrew flying a mission over the Pacific spotted islanders from Kapingamarangi waving at them. As a sign of goodwill, the crew gathered what they could, bundled the items, attached a parachute and dropped the package to the people below.

Distinguished visitors at the push ceremony included U.S. Air Force Expeditionary Center Commander Maj. General Christopher Bence; Joint Region Marianas Commander and U.S. Defense Representative to the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Palau Rear Adm. Shoshana Chatfield; Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, 515th Air Mobility Operations Wing Commander Col. Scott Zippwald; Yokota Air Base, 374th Airlift Wing Vice Commander Col. Sergio Vega; and U.S. Embassy in the Federated States of Micronesia Deputy Chief of Mission Joanne Cummings.

Col. Scott Hurrelbrink, 36th Wing vice commander, Andersen AFB, stood on a stage built on a trailer that fed humanitarian airlift boxes into the belly of a C-130J Super Hercules, which will have its inaugural flight during the operation. In the shade of the hangar, Hurrelbrink addressed a crowd filled with island community members and military partners and shared the importance of the humanitarian event and training opportunity.

“What started with one bundle and one island has grown into an immense tradition of goodwill and partnership that has impacted the residents of more than 50 surrounding areas,” he said. “Operation Christmas Drop goes well beyond the reach of this magnificent island because it connects the military, it connects our civilians and communities, alike.”

Over the decades, the operation evolved into a multi-national airlift training exercise. This year service members from Andersen AFB, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii and Yokota Air Base, Japan, partnered with the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) to execute low-cost, low-altitude training air drops.

The 2017 Christmas Drop Committee, a non-profit organization, raised more than 53,000 dollars and received in excess of 20,000 dollars in donated supplies such as tools, fishing equipment, educational materials and toys, among much more. This year, island neighbors located in remote areas in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau will receive the packages.

C-130 air crews from the JASDF, the RAAF, and the U.S. Air Force 374th Airlift Wing’s 36th Airlift Squadron from Yokota, Japan will fly a combined 22 sorties, dropping 120 boxes, weighing 65,000 pounds. The Navy and Coast Guard will also assist in deliveries.

Throughout the year, the committee worked with the local community including the University of Guam, local and national media, the Mayors Council of Guam and other Guam government entities to raise the funds and collect the crucial supplies.

“I’d like to personally thank everyone who has contributed to this monumental event from across the whole government to our local communities, right here in Guam, to our most trusted partners, Japan and Australia,” Hurrelbrink said. “Thank you from the bottom of my heart.”



Two bundles soar toward a Micronesian island during the 66th Operation Christmas Drop, Dec. 13, 2017. Over the course of 10 days, the aircrews airdrop food, supplies and educational materials to islanders throughout the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, Federated States of Micronesia, and Republic of Palau. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. David Owsianka)

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