

The critical importance of this German base has sparked a building and flying boom.

Ramstein on the Rise

Photography by Greg L. Davis



Army paratroopers board C-130s at Ramstein AB, Germany, for a massive training airdrop.



Ramstein AB, Germany, has long been important to the Air Force. Now, though, it is in the middle of a building boom, with USAF upgrading facilities, taxiways, and runways and constructing more infrastructure to handle increased traffic.

The upsurge in activity follows the closing of Rhein-Main Air Base, near Frankfurt, which was a major transit point for US aircraft. Ramstein has now become the hub for cargo and passenger transport through Europe. It is home to the 86th Airlift Wing and its C-130s, but has also become one of the major bases supporting Europe-based units from sister services.

Right: Troops of the Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team approach C-130E Hercules transports at Ramstein.

Below: SSgt. Benjamin Comer of the 86th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron performs post-flight checks on the wing of a C-130E that has just returned from a drop exercise.



Two above: A C-17A of the 62nd Airlift Wing, McChord AFB, Wash., begins its take-off roll.

Above: Members of the Ramstein Contingency Aeromedical Staging Facility team form a barrier to keep ambulatory patients moving

up a ramp into a waiting C-17. The CASF handles patients—mostly from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—as they travel from the combat zone to the United States for treatment.



Counterclockwise, from left: Airmen of the 86th AW (on the tarmac and in the cockpit) perform maintenance checks on a C-130 on the ramp at Ramstein; the aircraft bears the markings for the 86th Operations Group commander. • SSgt. Waylon Westbrook, deployed from Pope AFB, N.C., removes bolts holding the lubrication pump housing for a C-130 propeller. • C-130E engines, wing, and tail as seen from a bubble inside the aircraft's cockpit. This aircraft and another seen in the background are on a training mission over Germany.



Counterclockwise, from above: Aerial view of the main aircraft parking area, new runway, and terminals for processing cargo and passengers. • USAF SSgt. Derwood Burk looks out a C-130E paratroop door; he worked as a jumpmaster with the US Army's 173rd Airborne BCT in a recent exercise. • Three VIP transport aircraft of the 76th Airlift Squadron line up at Ramstein. The 76th moves VIPs on C-21, C-20, and C-40 aircraft.

Right: Air Force ambulances park behind a Mississippi Air National Guard C-17A, waiting to take patients from Landstuhl Regional Medical Center to the US.

Below: Paratroopers prepare to board a Hercules of the 37th Airlift Squadron.

Bottom: A C-130E maneuvers into the Mosel River valley during a training mission over Germany.



Two above left: A soldier secures the static line of a jumpmaster in the paratroop door as he configures the C-130 for a safe jump.

Two above right: A C-130's T56 engine runs inside a specially built \$2.1 million test cell at Ramstein. The test cell allows the 86th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron to check engines and propellers without generating complaints about noise.

Above: Capt. Shawn Cones, a C-130E crew member, looks toward the cockpit while positioned under a clear bubble that allows him to look out from atop the cockpit area. He was monitoring the skies around the C-130 for flight safety.



Left: The tail of a C-130E gets a close inspection from SSgt. Benjamin Comer. The age of these transport aircraft make careful examinations a must.

Bottom left: C-130E serial #72-1299 skims over a German forest during a low-level training mission. The aircraft, assigned to Ramstein, is the last E model ever built.

Below: Army soldiers relax after donning their parachutes; they are awaiting the signal to board C-130s nearby.



Above: Two USAF C-130Es fly over Germany during a training mission.

Left: Army Sgt. Maj. Lyle Womack, bracing himself in the paratroop door, performs safety checks in preparation for a drop while an airman holds his back.





Clockwise from above: At Ramstein, a C-130 awaits action on a rare day of fair weather in Germany. This aircraft has just been checked out by a maintenance team before a training flight. • A soldier arches his back and raises his arms while a parachute rigger performs safety checks on the parachute. This must be done before a soldier can proceed to a waiting aircraft. • C-130E #63-7840 waits on a taxiway hold-short line while another C-130 performs a go-around at Ramstein. • A1C Chris Spratt reviews cargo manifests inside the busy cargo processing facility at Ramstein. Spratt is pushing through the paperwork for "up-armor" kits needed in Iraq and Afghanistan. He is assigned to the 723rd AMS.



Counterclockwise from left: C-130E overflies picturesque vineyards lining the Mosel River in Germany. • Soldiers quickly move to the paratroop door of a USAF C-130E Hercules during a training exercise. • A 37th AS C-130 leaps into the air as it leaves Ramstein to begin a training mission. Construction equipment and mounds of dug-up earth—the result of runway improvements—can be seen in the background. • SrA. Aaron Arechiga (foreground) and SSgt. Anthony Vandersee monitor the status of a T56 engine being tested at Ramstein's unique enclosed C-130 engine test cell. Arechiga is deployed from the 46th AMS at Pope, while Vandersee is deployed from the 3rd Component Maintenance Squadron, Elmendorf AFB, Alaska.

Ramstein is busier than ever, but all signs are that optempo growth has just begun. ■

