



Come to **Pápa**

Boeing C-17s in Hungary provide critical support to multinational missions By Jerry Drelling

When the Boeing C-17 known as SAC 01 touched down at Pápa Air Base in western Hungary, emotions ran high. “We’ve been working hard to get the base ready,” said U.S. Air Force Col. John Zazworsky, the first commander of the Heavy Airlift Wing for the 12-nation Strategic Airlift Capability consortium. “The initial arrival [in July] was emotional because, for one thing, the families were all out there.”

The second C-17, SAC 02, arrived last month.

The arrival of SAC’s third C-17, slated for this month and completing the initial order, is scheduled to take place as the SAC nations are set to begin supporting multinational commitments in Afghanistan.

There’s tremendous pride at Pápa because NATO and Partnership for Peace nations teamed up to acquire and operate the three Boeing airlifters out of this former Warsaw Pact fighter base—a first-of-a-kind multinational joint venture.

Most of those who came out to watch the first plane arrive had never seen anything like the muscular, hulking gray airlifter known for its role in saving lives in humanitarian, peacekeeping and aeromedical missions worldwide.

The 30-year SAC agreement, forged over a nearly three-year period, created a multinational airlift fleet that will serve the requirements of 10 NATO and two Partnership for Peace nations, which will share acquisition and operating costs. The group will also support airlift requirements for the European Union and United Nations. The SAC nations include NATO countries Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and the United States. Partnership for Peace members are Sweden and Finland.



“So much cooperation was achieved in such a short amount of time to make this happen, and we’re thrilled that the SAC nations selected the C-17,” said Jean Chamberlin, Boeing vice president and general manager of Global Mobility Systems.

The arrival of the C-17s, bearing the colors of the Hungarian flag on their tails, signaled a new era in the history of Pápa, a small community of about 30,000 residents located between Budapest and Vienna. Over its long history, Pápa served as a base during World War II and the Cold War. A reminder of what life used to be like here, old wooden guard towers still sit adjacent to hardened aircraft bunkers that are now used as storage facilities.

Boeing personnel serve as the primary maintenance, material management and support team under the C-17 Globemaster III Sustainment Partnership program working out of a pilot alert building where Soviet fighter pilots were once housed.

For members of Boeing’s team, working in Hungary has been a fascinating career move. “The new friends you make from the different forces, tight friendships with all the members—the Swedes, the Finns, the Romanians, the Dutch and the U.S. Air Force team. I think we’re pretty close,” said Steve Ramella, Boeing’s spare parts lead.

Crystal Remfert, a Boeing senior avionics technician, arrived in mid-June. “That’s probably one of the most exciting things about being here,” she said of the opportunity to support the multinational effort. “And for my career management and my experience, it’s definitely going to help me.” ■

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PHOTOS: (LEFT) The Strategic Airlift Capability consortium’s first Boeing C-17 basks in the sun after wing activation ceremonies in July at Pápa Air Base, Hungary. **(ABOVE)** The Heavy Airlift Wing at Pápa Air Base, Hungary, is staffed by multinational crews assigned from 12 participating nations. **JERRY DRELLING/BOEING**

Model for the future?

Frontiers magazine recently sat down with Henryka Bochniarz, president of Boeing Central and Eastern Europe, and Antonio De Palmas, president of Boeing European Union and NATO Relations, to discuss the Strategic Airlift Capability consortium’s recent acquisition of three Boeing C-17s and how it has opened the door to future defense acquisition opportunities.



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What makes the Strategic Airlift Capability acquisition so unique?

Bochniarz: This program enhances international cooperation not only in Central and Eastern Europe but also beyond this region. For nearly a year now, personnel from 12 nations have worked as a team in Pápa, Hungary, blending their varied skills, military experiences and cultures into a new form of multinational military unit. The team has focused on conducting strategic airlift missions as soon as the first aircraft was delivered—positioning itself to provide aid anywhere, at any time and on any mission—humanitarian, disaster relief or peacekeeping.

De Palmas: When the SAC international consortium of 10 NATO members—joined by two Partnership for Peace nations—agreed to acquire three C-17 Globemaster III long-range cargo jets, the agreement set the stage for NATO’s first major defense purchase in 30 years. All the members of the SAC consortium now can count on a heavy-airlift capability, and the C-17 will allow each nation to meet its airlift requirements to support sovereign and multinational mission requirements. Another reason why this program is so significant is the involvement of 10 European Union countries, making this a truly EU capability.

What impact does this have on international defense markets?

Bochniarz: The SAC nations share acquisition and operating costs for the C-17s over the nearly 30-year course of the agreement. This model is helping new members of NATO, like Central and Eastern European countries, with limited defense budgets to acquire capabilities that they could normally not afford.

De Palmas: The unique SAC approach to shared use of the strategic airlifter is viewed as a model for future acquisition and management of defense capabilities. The same model could be applied for other international defense and Boeing programs.

What does this program mean to the Central and Eastern European regions?

Bochniarz: This is a significant milestone for participating Central and Eastern European countries. The aircraft have been assigned to SAC’s Heavy Airlift Wing and are jointly operated by the alliance from Pápa Air Base, Hungary. The advanced C-17 airlifter recently started flying missions in support of International Security Assistance Force operations in Afghanistan. Hungary agreed to both host the wing at Pápa Air Base and to register the C-17s under the Hungarian flag.

– Eszter Ungar

Doing the heavy lifting



“The most important challenge is to work in an effective way together. We have to meet that challenge, and I’m sure we will.”

– Col. Fredrik Hedén of the Swedish Air Force

At Pápa Air Base in Hungary, Boeing employees have taken on a role usually performed by active duty air force personnel and reservists.

“They’re supervising the refueling crews, they’re supervising the oxygen servicing, they’re taking care of the basic troubleshooting and maintenance,” said U.S. Air Force Col. John Zazworsky, the first commander of the 12-nation Strategic Airlift Capability’s Heavy Airlift Wing at Pápa.

“Boeing’s hiring great folks,” he added. Zazworsky and his vice commander, Col. Fredrik Hedén of the Swedish Air Force, are both responsible for bringing Pápa Air Base to life in its new heavy-airlift role, serving the requirements of 10 NATO and

two Partnership for Peace nations. The consortium, known as the Strategic Airlift Capability, is sharing the acquisition and operating costs of three C-17s that make up the wing’s strategic airlift fleet.

The two commanders wasted little time in taking advantage of the arrival of the first C-17, known as SAC 01, in July.

“The first aircraft came, we unloaded it. The next day it launched again,” said Zazworsky, who flew the airlifter to Hungary from Boeing’s C-17 final assembly facility in Long Beach, Calif. “Few active-duty air force units try that.”

When SAC 01 touched down, there was a sense of excitement and relief—excitement that the airlift wing was

officially activated, and relief that it could finally begin flying missions to support the multinational forces serving in Afghanistan. That mission profile is expected to make up a large part of the wing’s early business.

In another unique arrangement for Zazworsky and Hedén, Boeing’s Globemaster III Sustainment Partnership is responsible for all flight-line maintenance for the fleet.

And that kind of support reminds Hedén of Boeing’s role in helping the SAC consortium become a reality when the idea of a multinational heavy-airlift group was just that: an idea.

“Without the cooperation from Boeing from the first minute, it wouldn’t have come through,” he said. “I still think the most important challenge is to work in an effective way together. We have to meet that challenge, and I’m sure we will.”

Both Zazworsky and Hedén believe the success this multinational team has achieved so far should make SAC an attractive alternative for other nations that are looking for creative ways to fill their heavy-airlift requirements. “A number of them have asked questions,” Hedén noted.

The multinational blueprint that is working so well for SAC could be applied to help solve other critical needs, Hedén said.

“What’s next? My answer would be, maybe, tankers. I think this could be examined the same way. It’s a personal comment, but I think that could be a good step for the future.”

– Jerry Drelling

PHOTO: U.S. Air Force Col. John Zazworsky (left) is commander of the Strategic Airlift Capability consortium’s Heavy Airlift Wing, based in Pápa, Hungary. His vice commander, Col. Fredrik Hedén, is a member of the Swedish Air Force. **JERRY DRELLING/BOEING**