

# A Day In The Life Of A WSOp Fixed Wing Crewman

As a Weapon Systems Operator on the RAF's C17 fleet of strategic transport aircraft no day is the same. Every flight has its own challenges and there is always something unexpected to deal with.

As the largest transport aircraft in the RAF the C17's are always in demand, whether that be supporting continuous operations in the Middle East or recovering helicopters and personnel from exercises in North America.

Today my flight is to Canada to transport 2 x Army Wildcat helicopters to the Army's permanent winter training base at Suffolk just outside Calgary.



Planning for each trip is usually completed a few days prior to the flight. This can involve booking catering from foreign handling agents around the world, to ensuring the right amount of safety and survival equipment for the trip is ordered, customs preparation for each of the different countries and liaising with Load Control at RAF Brize Norton to find out what the planned load for the trip is.

In a 3 man crew such as the C17, while the Pilots look after the route planning it is the Crewmen's responsibility to ensure the aircraft load, catering, passengers, customs etc are within the rules and regulations of both civilian and military aviation agencies.

Once the planning is complete and the day of my flight arrives, I report to work at the Sqn 5hrs before the

planned take off time. I arrive at work at 09:30 and have to be aware of the strict time that I am allowed to work. Today my maximum in work time is 16hrs.

I gather my flying kit and my first job is to check the aircraft details. I liaise with the engineers to ensure that the aircraft will be ready on time and check that there are no defects or limitations that will affect my trip.

After noting the details I phone load control and liaise with the C17 movements supervisor who will be assisting loading the aircraft today. It is their job to plan the load but as I have overall responsibility I ensure it meets all the regulations and as the Subject Matter Expert I can alter the layout if needed.

Once I have all my paperwork I go to the aircraft to carry out safety checks and setup the cargo compartment prior to loading. This includes applying power and a re-ole of the aircraft floor.

Once my Load Team have arrived I give a safety brief and outline the loading plan. During the loading my role is one of supervision, control and operation of the aircraft equipment such as the ramp and locks. The load cannot be rushed as safety is paramount and it takes the team 2 1/2 hours to load and restrain the helicopters, pallets and loose equipment. We will always try and ensure that all available space is used to maximise efficiency.

During the load I also deal with the inflight catering, brief the pilots on the load and any anticipated delay, and liaise with the Duty Air Movements Officer about passengers and load paperwork.

Once the load is complete I carry out a final check of the load to ensure all restraint is applied correctly, check I have all of the relevant paperwork for every item of cargo and then compile a trim sheet for the captain to sign.

I brief the passengers on safety procedures and flight details before grabbing a coffee and heading for the aircraft flight deck for our crew briefing.

This briefing includes the weather expected, on route details, aircraft details and load configuration. All this has taken about 4 hrs of the day and we are now ready to start the aircraft and fly to Calgary.

I monitor the aircraft start and once airborne my main role is that of supervision. This includes ensuring the passengers have access to food and drinks, preparing food for the crew, monitoring and checking the load to ensure nothing has moved during the critical stages of flight, preparing customs paperwork for our next stop and gathering enroute weathers to ensure that our planned route is still within the aircrafts weather limits.

Once we have arrived at Calgary I liaise with the customs officials and handling agents to meet all regulations and then supervise the offload of the cargo.

Once complete I handover the aircraft to the oncoming crew who are continuing to America with the aircraft and join up with my pilots and head to the hotel. We have a debrief on the flight and then a well earned drink. Overall my working day has been around 14 1/2 hours but it has passed quickly as there is always lots to do. I now have 2 days free in Calgary before the return flight to the UK so plenty of time for some sightseeing.

Sgt Keith