

## Fort Campbell Lifeliners deliver supplies using Caribou Low Cost Low Altitude Air Drops

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**Bagram, Afghanistan** – Transporting cargo rapidly, safely and precisely is the main goal for the riggers and their partners that take part in the daily aerial supply delivery operations.

The importance of this sort of operation is in its name, low cost low altitudes. The reason it's called this is because the parachutes are one time disposable parachutes.



Supply aerial bundles within the DHC-4T Turbo Caribou aircraft, Aug. 24, 2013, at Bagram Air Field, Parwan province, Afghanistan. The Caribou uses the low cost low altitude airdrop delivery method to distribute these supplies to one of the Forward Operating Bases in Afghanistan. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Sinthia Rosario, Task Force Lifeline Public Affairs)

“Whenever you drop them to the troops in the field they don’t have to recover anything, they don’t have to back load anything, they can just pick up their equipment and move on,” said John Early, a pilot at Bagram Air Field in Afghanistan.

The airdrops occur at approximately 150 feet above ground for it to be considered low altitude. Normally the Air Force drops anywhere between 500 feet and 15,000 feet depending on the cargo and where it is being dropped.

“One of the reasons that this is a good system is because it’s not all that expensive, but more importantly you have a very quick reaction time,” said Early.

He continued to explain that whenever the soldiers on the ground need something, usually within three hours, if the riggers have it already rigged up they can be in the air and on their way to drop the supplies to the soldiers.

“The [LCLA] mission helps sustain troops in two ways,” stated Chief Warrant Officer 2 Gregory Benson, an airdrop systems technician with the 647th Quartermaster Detachment in support of Task Force Lifeline. “First, it puts much needed supplies on target. It allows units to receive these supplies without setting up a large drop zone. These loads can be delivered inside the FOB [forward operating base] from 150’ moving at 100mph. Secondly, it keeps supply convoys off the road; the less trucks on the road, the less IED [improvised explosive device] attacks, and the more soldiers go home intact.”

The Caribou aircraft, which is a contracted aerial asset that provides the (LCLA) drops, have the capabilities to drop supplies in extremely small areas. It can deliver a fairly high capacity of supplies compared to other aerial assets used in Afghanistan.

The aircraft can also travel into isolated areas where larger aircraft cannot maneuver. This form of aerial supply drop reduces the threat toward the customer. It can be dropped into and recovered from a secure compound. Another advantage to this aircraft is you can distribute supplies to multiple locations.

“We can drop to more than one location on the same flight, so we can go to one place and drop two or three bundles, go to another place drop two or three more bundles and then come home,” stated Early. “In that respect, it’s very, very good for the local commander because he can get what he needs quickly and efficiently, with a minimum risk to his people.”

Although the Caribou team provides services all year round, the summer months with high temperatures can cause challenges. The Caribou pilot maintains constant awareness of the flight altitude, high temperatures and fuel consumption. Both the riggers and the pilots ensure all precautions are taken when loading the supply bundles on the aircraft.

“We supply the warfighter with their supplies, we keep convoys from rolling into hostile areas, we save the army money on replacing vehicles, and mothers and fathers get to complete their tours and return to their families,” readily explained Benson. “I’d do it all day, every day.”