

DCMA Acceptance Flight Safety

*By Cassandra Locke
DCMA Public Affairs*

Whenever Boeing rolls out a new C-17 *Globemaster III* from the plant in Long Beach, Calif., Air Force Tech. Sgt. Sidney De Leon, a C-17 acceptance loadmaster, and his team have to ensure it is ready for the United States Air Force to fly.

“The Air Force expects to receive a perfect product, and it is up to us to identify and correct any problems before we accept the aircraft for delivery to the C-17 fleet,” said De Leon.

The idea is for the crew to recognize those troubles at the plant, fix them, and deliver the plane to Air Mobility Command.

“We inspect every single switch, button, system, etc. Once all that is done, we do engine runs to make sure the engines are up to par,” said De Leon.

Once they complete all the ground checks, they taxi to the runway to perform an aborted takeoff to make sure the brakes work. After that, they take off for the very first time. “Most people would be amazed at the problems a single loose screw can cause ... our

Air Force Tech. Sgt. Sidney De Leon, Defense Contract Management Agency C-17 acceptance loadmaster, checks the proper function of the opening of the cargo/door ramp in-flight while flying along the coast of Long Beach, Calif. Whenever Boeing rolls a new C-17 out of the plant, De Leon and his team have to ensure it is ready for the U.S. Air Force to fly. (Photo courtesy of DCMA Air Force Col. Michael Coolidge)

Acceptance Crew Ensures Safety for Air Force

job is to fly these airplanes with the understanding that there may be problems encountered while we're airborne," said De Leon.

The flight crew usually flies about five hours performing various critical aircraft systems checks in-flight, including shutting down engines, dropping the landing gear manually, validating the stall warning system and whatever else needs to be done to ensure the aircraft is safe. Once the airplane passes all the inspections, the pilot and the loadmaster sign a book certifying the airplane is ready for flight by USAF crews and Boeing International C-17 customers.

"It is a very unique job within the military," said De Leon. "There are only four of us in the entire Air Force that do this job, and I'm one of them." He said this particular job is a special duty assignment, and those considered for the position must be highly qualified as an instructor/evaluator C-17 loadmaster, typically with a minimum of 3,000 flying hours of experience. Applicants need to be C-17 airdrop qualified and be Joint airdrop inspector rated, according to De Leon.

"This position gives me another perspective about how the Air Force and the civilian sectors are tied together. It takes a team effort to produce and verify the capabilities of the C-17," De Leon said. "Once we deliver a new jet, they are immediately being used to transport military troops and cargo worldwide, including wounded soldiers out of hostile locations to medical facilities at a moment's notice," said De Leon.

Air Force Maj. Ed Martin, DCMA government flight representative and chief of flight operations, serves as the liaison between the government and the contractor. His job is to ensure compliance with DoD directives and fly all new C-17s on their initial acceptance flights.

Air Force Tech. Sgt. Jonathan Rabalais is De Leon's counterpart

and contributes to the validation of airworthiness and functionality of C-17 aircraft before delivery to Air Mobility Command and international military customers. The loadmaster's function is to certify all the systems of the aircraft. He or she is required to open the cargo ramp/door, troop doors and manual gear extension retraction in-flight. Additionally, they evaluate contractor's flight training and ground safety programs.

Air Force Master Sgt. Dan Moen is the C-17 maintenance supervisor. He is in charge of procedural compliance of C-17 production and serves as the on-site government C-17 maintenance expert. "Attention to detail is the key word in this business," said De Leon. "The lives of many people are at stake if we don't do our job well." 

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**— Air Force Tech. Sgt. Sidney De Leon,
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