

Pacific Stars & Stripes
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3 JUMPERS QUALIFY FOR “CENTURY CLUB”



“Century Jumpers” from (left) T.Sgt. Richard W. Crutchfield and S.Sgt.s Frank J. Hasler and Carl J. Choate pose with Det. 11, 7th Aerial Port Sq. mascot Eric Von Zipper before making their and 100th parachute jump recently at the Mito Drop Zone in central Japan.

TACHIKAWA AB, Japan; It was a night training deployment similar to many they had performed in the past.

But to three Combat Controllers from Det. 11, 7th Aerial Port Sq. (APS), this particular parachute jump was something special.

T.Sgt. Richard W. Crutchfield and S.Sgt.s Frank J. Hasler and Carl J. Choate were about to make their 100th jump — qualifying them for the “Century Jumpers Club.”

There was no moon and the pitch-blackness of the night amplified anxious stillness inside the HC130 Hercules, as they approached Mito Drop Zone, a small military installation north of here.

On the drop zone below T.Sgt. John E. Wood, noncommissioned officer in charge of Det. II's Combat Control team, broke the calm — "Tiger 089, surface winds six knots at 190 degrees, cleared to drop," he said.

All that could be seen on the drop zone below was a rotating beacon and the code identifier, indicating that everything was "go."

Suddenly the red light changed to green. Choate threw himself into the dark emptiness closely followed by the other two.

The jumpers manipulated their canopies, toward their intended impact point — the drop zone code identifier. At 200 feet above the ground they released parachute equipment bags to dangle on a rope 15 feet below them. These bags carried equipment needed to establish a drop zone in a combat situation.

The ground raced up to meet them. A jaw-jarring thump and their easy rolls demonstrated agility gained from years of practice.

They had completed their goal — the 100th jump — but now they had to join the rest of the Combat Control team to carry out the duties of a team deployment.

The team had exactly 20 minutes to establish a night drop zone for two other C-130s to drop four platforms of heavy equipment. The three jumpers would control the drop.

As long as the Air Force's Combat Control function continues to exist, there will be jumpers poised at the door of an aircraft, ready to launch themselves into space, some of them for the 100th time.

Sent by Patrick Aguilar