

# Operation Christmas Drop

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Held annually since 1952, *Operation Christmas Drop* is led by the United States Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) and is the world's longest-running humanitarian airdrop activity.

The operation was first conducted in 1952, when the aircrew of a United States Air Force (USAF) WB-29 aircraft was flying a mission to the south of Guam over the Micronesian atoll of Kapingamarangi. When they saw the islanders waving to them, the crew quickly gathered some items they had on the aircraft, placed them in a container with a parachute and dropped the cargo as they circled again.



Australian Army Captain Anna Thomas decorates a bundle box during Operation Christmas Drop 2022. Credit: Yasuo Osakabe

At the time, the island had no electricity or running water, and the islands were periodically hit by typhoons.

Some of the first containers failed to arrive where intended, so islanders swam out to retrieve some, while others were discovered months later, some miles away.



PACAF Captain Sean Andrews gives the morning briefing during Operation Christmas Drop 2017. Credit: Mr Eamon Hamilton

*Operation Christmas Drop* also has a practical purpose: training crews to resupply areas in the Indo-Pacific.

'The aerial delivery enables aircrews to develop and maintain combat readiness through aircraft generation and recovery across a remote region of the Pacific Ocean', PACAF said in a recent media release.

In 2015, the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) participated in the operation for the first time.

In 2019, *Operation Christmas Drop* was conducted for the first time in Australia, when around a tonne of donations were airdropped to an Indigenous community at Lockhart River in Qld. This was followed by additional drops to Kowanyama in Qld and Roebourne and Yandeyarra in WA. The communities were asked what they were most in need of, with items such as bicycle-repair kits, footballs and thongs being requested.



*Mr Chris Mummy from Cairns International Air Freight loads an Operation Christmas Drop pallet into a C-27J Spartan.  
Credit: CPL Colin Dadd*

The operation was an opportunity for the RAAF to test out the C-27J Spartan – a smaller version of the Hercules. Normally used in battle situations to deliver supplies such as blood, ammunition and rations to troops, it was decided to conduct tactical training while at the same time delivering Christmas cheer.



*Pilots from RAAF No 37 Squadron fly over the community of Mokil (Mwoakilloa) in Micronesia in a C-130J Hercules during Operation Christmas Drop 2022. Credit: CPL Keiren Whiteley*

After a three-year absence due to COVID-19, the operation recommenced in 2022 in the West Pacific, with Australia joining partner nations to deliver several 200kg bundles of goodwill to support more than 20,000 people in remote countries.

The RAAF deployed a C-130J Hercules and 24 personnel to Guam in support of PACAF's humanitarian airdrop activity, along with the militaries of Japan, New Zealand, India and the Republic of Korea.

The six nations each flew airdrop missions to support the Republic of Palau, Northern Marianas and Federated States of Micronesia – an area covering six million square kilometres of the West Pacific.



*RAAF Leading Aircraftman Stephen Manila from No 37 Squadron watches a bundle fall towards a Micronesian island during Operation Christmas Drop 2017.  
Credit: Staff Sergeant David Owsianka (USAF)*

'We are honoured to again have the opportunity to support our Pacific partners and celebrate Christmas with some of the more remote parts of the region,' said Air Commodore David Strong, Commander Air Mobility Group.

'It's a unique opportunity to work side-by-side with other Indo-Pacific Hercules aircraft and build relationships at the aviator level, which will benefit our cooperation in future.'

Sky News video: [RAAF pitches in for Operation Christmas Drop | Sky News Australia](#)

References:

[Operation Christmas Drop, cheer from above \(archive.org\)](#)

[Yokota resident recalls memories of Operation Christmas Drop | Stars and Stripes](#)

[Air Force's 71st Operation Christmas Drop to Deliver Supplies to Remote Pacific Islands | Air & Space Forces Magazine \(airandspaceforces.com\)](#)

[Defence Force airdrops supplies into remote communities for Exercise Christmas Drop - ABC News](#)

[Operation Christmas Drop supports remote communities in West Pacific | Defence](#)