

Ben Ellis Q&A

1. What is your job role and organisation?

Engines and Airframes Fitter at Marshall

2. What do you do in this job?

My job role is to service and maintain military aircraft from many different countries around the world, particularly the Lockheed Martin C-130 Hercules.

Based in the Hangars at Cambridge Airport, I am part of a team made up of Apprentices, Fitters, Technicians and a Team Leader. Each team takes responsibility for an Aircraft input, receiving the aircraft from the customer and conducting maintenance checks of varying depths.

During an input the aircraft can be stripped down to its component parts to allow a full survey of the condition of the aircraft, as an Engines and Airframes fitter I could be completing the maintenance of the Engines, Landing Gear, Wings, Fuselage, Empennage or interior of the aircraft.

3. Why did you choose this career?

My Grandpa was an Aircraft Engineer in the Royal Navy, and having had an added interest in Aircraft due to being part of the RAF Air Cadets, this type of career has always been an attractive one. The opportunity to work on military aircraft was an added appeal along with the ability to be in a practical hands on career.

4. What background education or training do you have?

After achieving good grades in my GCSE's I went on to study Maths, Physics and Chemistry at A Level. After completing my A levels I accepted the offer of an Apprenticeship at Marshall.

5. What has your career path been?

I completed my A levels in 2015 and began my apprenticeship the same year. After spending a year in the training workshop and going to college one day a week, I went out into the hangars to begin my training on the Aircraft. For 3 further years I was trained by experienced fitters on the different areas of the aircraft, being shown how to conduct the maintenance and best practices.

6. What does a typical day involve?

A typical day as an Engines/Airframes Fitter at Marshall involves maintenance on a particular section of the aircraft that you have been assigned for the full aircraft input. I am currently working on the Wings of our current Aircraft, this could involve maintenance inside the fuel tanks located inside the wings repairing leaks, operational checks outs of the flaps and ailerons, repairing damage of the wing structure, replacing components, and even removing and refitting the entire wing section from and to the aircraft.

This career provides something different every day as the aircraft is at a different stage each day, you receive excellent job satisfaction as each day you witness the work that you carry out progressing the overall condition of the aircraft. As each day goes by the aircraft progresses closer to completion to allow us to complete full operational check outs of landing gear, flying controls and Engine Ground Runs, as well as all other, fuel, hydraulic and electrical systems.

7. What is your work environment like?

The physical environment in the hangars is a busy one, with up to six aircraft being worked on in any one hangar there is a plethora of maintenance equipment, storage racks and tool boxes within the hangar, therefore organisation and management of the equipment in the hangars is key. There are dangerous chemicals and hazardous confined spaces that we have to work with therefore safety is of paramount importance.

I am part of Blue Team in the Hangars who are responsible for maintaining the C-130 aircraft, generally from countries such as Sweden, Netherlands and Austria. Blue Team has a fantastic comradery and work ethic, it is a team that gets the job done to a high standard, trains apprentices thoroughly and keeps motivation and moral high.

Myself and my team work as a standard Monday to Thursday, a 37 hours week, working 4 days a week is a brilliant shift which allows you to reset and recharge over a 3 day weekend, freeing your social life up for more activities. Overtime is generally an option for the weekend to allow you to progress the aircraft forwards and earn some more money at the same time.

8. What aspects of your job are most challenging?

One of the most challenging aspects of the job is ensuring the aircraft is delivered back to the customer on time. On older airframes that our team works on, components can be more likely to malfunction or fail, therefore can set back the schedule. It is up to us to ensure that we work hard to recover from any set backs and ensure each task is completed on time and to a high standard. Any job you complete will affect how the aircraft performs, the safety of the people who are on the aircraft once we deliver it is in our hands, therefore ensuring each job has been completed correctly and in line with the maintenance manuals is of maximum importance.

9. Can you give an example of a project or piece of work that you have been most proud of?

One project that I am particularly proud of is that some of the aircraft that our team completed the maintenance for supported the recent evacuation activity in Afghanistan. Knowing that our work has contributed to saving thousands of lives is humbling, and really emphasises how important our work is, and how vital it is that we complete each job to the highest standard.

10. How do you hope your career will progress?

In the short term I hope to progress to become a Certified Tradesperson, following on from that becoming a Technician at Marshall. Allowing me to survey the aircraft and sign off completed



work by the fitters. In the long term I would like to progress into Management, leading projects and developing teams going forwards.