



C-17 debuts in exercise

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12/17/2003 - **NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE, Nev. (AFPN)** -- For the first time, the C-17 Globemaster III was included in a mission-employment exercise held here the first two weeks of December.

The C-17 adds a greater air-mobility presence to the exercise, which allows combat air forces to get a better idea of how the airlifters are used, said Lt. Col. John Sullivan, commander of the new C-17 Weapons Instructor Course.

The exercise packed the flightline here with aircraft from the Air Force, Navy and German air force. Realistic combat scenarios tested the capabilities of both the aircrews and aircraft involved.

"This is as close to combat as you can get," Sullivan said. "The Nellis range provides the most realistic training anywhere for us. There is no place else we can go to get this kind of training other than here."

"Being able to communicate, coordinate and integrate with all the different aircraft is the biggest lesson taught at the exercise," said Capt. Harmon Lewis, a student from Charleston Air Force Base, S.C.

Students of the new course joined weapons officers to test their skills in the exercise.

"The whole purpose of this exercise is the integration between all the different weapon systems," Sullivan said. "The scenarios are set up such that you can't operate them without knowing what everyone else is doing."

The C-17 joined the lineup of coalition airpower, including almost every combat and combat-support aircraft in the Air Force, along with Navy F-14 Tomcat and EA-6 Prowler aircraft, and German F-4s and Tornados. With all these aircraft flying missions simultaneously, the flightline can be intimidating, officials said.

"That is America's power out there," said Brig. Gen. Gregory Ihde, commander of the 57th Wing here. "When everything is running, there is nothing that can explain it, other than pure pride. If you are the enemy and you see this one time, you have to be saying, 'I'm not playing with these guys.'"

C-17 students participated in six missions during the exercise. Missions included troop insertions, aeromedical evacuations and cargo airdrops. Although actual cargo and passengers were simulated, to the aircrews that difference was transparent, Sullivan said.

Many of the missions were developed through experiences aircrews actually faced during past combat operations, he said. The first mission flown during the exercise was very similar to the first C-17 operations in Afghanistan.

"Probably the worst thing you can do in this program is put blinders on and ignore what is going on in the real world," Sullivan said.

The exercises are designed so the pilots do not lose perspective of what their counterparts are facing in the real world.



NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE, Nev. -- Capt. Brian Wald reviews his preflight checklists before flying a C-17 Globemaster III during a mission-employment exercise here Dec. 10. This is the first year a C-17 has been included in the exercise. Wald is a student in the first C-17 Weapons Instructor Course. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Kevin Gruenwald)

"We definitely expended all of our knowledge about every aspect of C-17 operations," said Capt. G. Blane Howell, another student from Charleston. "There were certain things that we had known about theoretically or had read in books, but here we actually got to experience and do (them) in the aircraft. Reading it on the page is a lot different than actually doing it in real life, and we actually got to do everything the C-17 does."

"Part of it is moving the airplane a little more aggressively than I had in the past," Wald said. "But a lot of it was thinking more aggressively about the plan that we were going to fly."

The mental portion of the weapons course and exercise is something that Wald said he was not prepared for.

"I thought I had a more complete picture of how this plane needed to be (flown) tactically; I wasn't even close," he said. "There (were) tons and tons of detailed information that I didn't even know existed, that I now am familiar with."

It is this tactical knowledge that will allow the students to, upon graduation, go back and teach to their fellow C-17 pilots and raise the level of training, said Capt. Jeremy Hanson, a student in the course.

"Weapons officers bring a value of experience back to their units and can train the other pilots with these skills by introducing more realistic scenarios like we faced here," said Hanson, who has flown the C-17 for more than five years.

Educating all C-17 aircrews on how to fly the aircraft in combat scenarios is becoming more important as the aircraft plays a larger role in tactical-mobility missions, officials said.

"Five years ago, I would have told you we would have never done airdrops in Iraq and Afghanistan," Wald said. "I would have told you we wouldn't have done assault landings on dirt runways. Those are great capabilities of the airplane that we were never using."

"I think this course is the future of our weapon system, especially as we continue to operate around the world as we are now," Sullivan said. "The skills we are giving our pilots when they leave here are skills that one day every C-17 pilot will have." (Courtesy of Air Mobility Command News Service)