

GLOBAL HAWK FLIES FIRST BEALE ACC SORTIE

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BEALE AIR FORCE BASE, Calif. (AFPN) -- A newly-arrived RQ-4 Global Hawk Unmanned Aerial Vehicle made its first operational Air Combat Command flight from here Nov. 21.



An RQ-4 Global Hawk Unmanned Aerial Vehicle takes off from Beale Air Force Base, Calif., Nov. 21 for its first operational Air Combat Command flight. (U.S. Air Force photo/John Schwab)

The first Global Hawk flight from Beale signifies the end of the base's and communities' five-year wait for the aircraft, and the beginning of local training flights as the base continues to gain more aircraft and normalize the mission.

"This is an important day for Beale and the surrounding community as we flew the first complete sortie from Beale and for Air Combat Command," Brig. Gen. H.D. Pumbo Jr said . "This flight symbolizes the first of many training missions designed to prepare our crews for missions over Iraq and Afghanistan and worldwide in the global war on terror."

The Global Hawk provides Air Force and joint battlefield commanders near real-time, high-resolution, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance imagery to fight the war on terrorism. Since 2001, the Global Hawk has flown more than 5,000 hours overseas in support of Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

"Although designed as surveillance and intelligence-gathering aircraft, Global Hawks flown locally are not currently outfitted with sensors used during overseas missions," General Pumbo said. "Beale's Global Hawk aircraft are used to train pilots, sensor operators and maintainers so they are ready for combat missions over Southwest Asia."

Beale personnel have been preparing for the base's operational flights for the past three and a half years. Prior to receiving an operational Global Hawk, maintenance Airmen trained in overseas locations during deployments. Stateside maintenance training began in 2004 with the arrival of Beale's first Global Hawk. Now, two Global Hawks on the base will mean more training opportunities for both maintenance and operations Airmen.

"Although the second Global Hawk will mean a heavier workload for maintainers, it will allow Beale to fly more training missions," said Staff Sgt. Brian Fox, 12th Aircraft Maintenance Unit expediter. "More aircraft mean more aircraft parts to work on. However, with that, we will have more flying options."

Despite the amount of time training and working on the Global Hawk, maintaining the aircraft is still a great learning experience, Sergeant Fox said .

"Maintenance on a Global Hawk is extremely different from maintenance on an aircraft with a pilot in the cockpit," he said. "Now I'm talking to a computer instead of a person. It's definitely a chance for me to think outside the box."

Thinking outside the box also applies to the pilots who fly the aircraft, according to Lt. Col. Chris Jella, 18th Reconnaissance Squadron commander.

"It's not the same as flying regular aircraft -- you really have to rely on the two-dimensional instrument screens instead of feel when flying this aircraft," he said. "It's more 'head' flying than 'body' flying.

"It is also wonderful that we can fly a mission overseas and then go home to our families afterward," Colonel Jella added. "I love the technology and the direction the Air Force is going with it."