

GLOBAL HAWK FLIES FIRST MISSION FROM BEALE

November 24, 2006

Staff report

Air Force Times

An RQ-4 Global Hawk made it bit of history Tuesday when one of the unmanned aerial vehicles flew its first mission out of Beale Air Force Base, Calif.

The daytime flight was significant because Beale's 9th Reconnaissance Wing is becoming the U.S. home to most operational Global Hawks. The wing will also be home to the Global Hawk schoolhouse, teaching pilots, sensor operators and maintainers.

The Air Force intends to assign seven Global Hawks to Beale. As the service's Global Hawk fleet grows to 54 aircraft in coming years, most of the aircraft will be hangared at overseas bases.

The Air National Guard may also get a Global Hawk squadron assigned to Grand Forks Air Force Base, N.D.

When the RQ-4 is airborne, onboard computers steer the jet aircraft between pre-programmed navigation points. Computers also handle the plane's takeoffs and landings, using parameters set by its ground-based pilots and flight planners.

Staff Sgt. Brian Fox, a Global Hawk expediter assigned to the 12th Aircraft Maintenance Unit, said working on a Global Hawk is far different than handling other aircraft. "Now I'm talking to a computer instead of a person," Fox said. "It's definitely a chance for me to think outside the box."

Prior to the Beale flight, Global Hawks had flown more than 5,000 hours overseas watching over Iraq and Afghanistan. Global Hawks housed at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., continue to fly test missions.