



## Milestone reached in aircraft named for 9/11

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9/3/2008 - SOUTHWEST ASIA (AFPN) --  
Airmen in a unit here recently reached 40,000 flight hours in support of the war on terrorism fittingly in an aircraft named for the attacks which began the war.

The 7th Expeditionary Air Command and Control Squadron Airmen reached the milestone Sept. 2 in E-8C Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System aircraft 02-9111.

"It's a pretty big event," said Lt. Col. William Gould, 7 EACCS commander. "It has taken us quite a while to get to this. We've been here since the beginning of the (war on terrorism) flying these missions and supporting the folks on the ground."

The unit, deployed from the 116th Air Control Wing at Robins Air Force Base, Ga., provides air-to-ground surveillance to theater ground and air component commanders. The milestone capped more than 3,650 missions for the unit whose service here started just two months after 9/11.

"The Army depends on us for ground coverage so it's very important to me to know we've been supporting them for 40,000 hours," said Capt. Karen Everman, a surveillance officer from Syracuse, N.Y., who was part of the crew on the milestone mission. "I was at Robins the day this aircraft was delivered and I actually flew on its first mission there. It's kind of like a homecoming to fly such a significant mission on this jet."

The milestone marks years of unique support to the area of operations.

"We actually bring a huge menu of capabilities," said Colonel Gould. "We are the only platform in the world that provides wide-area surveillance for ground moving target indication. Also, we have a huge suite of battle management specialists who can control other aircraft if we need to, move around the battlespace, support [troops in contact] or support a downed aircraft if necessary."

Colonel Gould said the JSTARS aircraft can provide data to help identify areas on which unmanned aerial vehicles should focus. Because what they provide is so important to units on the ground, the crew normally includes three Army crewmembers.

"I'm very proud to be a part of this because I know how important this platform is to the theater," said Army Lt. Col. Darryl Verrett, deputy mission crew commander for the flight. "To be here for this milestone is a very proud moment for everyone who is a flyer."

The Army colonel said he has logged more than 600 hours with the Air Force supporting the mission in the



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An E-8C Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System aircraft sits on the ramp at an air base in Southwest Asia Sept. 1 before a mission over Iraq. The flight will mark 40,000 combat hours supporting the war on terrorism for the deployed Airmen of the 116th Air Control Wing. The E-8C Joint STARS, from the 7th Expeditionary Air Combat and Control Squadron, is an airborne battle management, command and control, intelligence, and reconnaissance aircraft. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Aaron Allmon II)

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"Working hand-in-hand with the Air Force is very special," he said. "You develop a great appreciation for your sister service members once you see them hard at work. You understand exactly what they bring to the fight."

Members of the Georgia Air National Guard also are part of that fight.

"I've been in the Georgia Air National Guard for 23 years," said Tech. Sgt. Eli Lines, a crew chief assigned to the 379th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron. "To deploy with this unit and meet this milestone is for me personally a big event because I'm helping another country gain their freedom by coming over here and crewing a jet allowing the unit to fight the fight."

Sergeant Lines said he was passionate about helping the unit accomplish each and every mission. That attitude among maintainers has helped the unit maintain a 99.6 percent launch rate throughout the 40,000 hours.

"I attribute this success to the hard work of the maintainers on the ground and the aircrew flying it," said Colonel Gould. "It was definitely a group effort and it includes Northrop Grumman, the contractors that helped us keep the planes going. It takes a large component of maintenance folks on the ground to keep these planes fixed."

The colonel said the airplanes are 40 years old and require regular maintenance, especially on the engines. The aircraft flown for the milestone mission had been used as a civilian passenger plane for 15 years when the Air Force purchased it in 1982. It was used as an advanced-range instrumentation aircraft until being reconfigured as a JSTARS aircraft after 9/11 and renamed for the event.

"This jet would never get off the ground without the hard work of all our people," said Staff Sgt. Frank Grimm. "I think we do a good job. I think the numbers speak for themselves."

Senior Airman Mike Albreti, another crew chief with the unit called the aircraft maintenance friendly.

"I think the aircraft works great, flies great and is really easy to work on," he said. "I really like the mission of these aircraft. It gives me a quick thrill knowing I'm doing something important. This is not practice. This is real life. Knowing that and having the aircraft go up and do its mission makes you feel good."

From maintainers to flight and mission crews, the unit has come together to make its 40,000 hour contribution to the war on terrorism, said Colonel Verrett.

"It makes you realize that we, as a unit, have put in a lot of work for a long time," he said. "It's taken years to reach this milestone. It makes you proud that you can put in your part. When you look at the big picture, you can see that everybody has pulled together to get to this milestone."

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