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Cal Guard's 163rd Reconnaissance Wing Reaches Remotely Piloted Aircraft Milestone

MARCH AIR RESERVE BASE, Calif. — The California Air National Guard's 163rd Reconnaissance Wing flew its 100,000th hour with the MQ-1 Predator remotely piloted aircraft earlier this month.

The wing's 196th Reconnaissance Squadron has flown the MQ-1 since November 2006, when it became the first Air National Guard unit to receive the remotely piloted aircraft. The wing is currently transitioning to the more advanced MQ-9 Reaper remotely piloted aircraft.

"This landmark achievement is a testament to the commitment and dedication of our airmen," said Col. Dana Hessheimer, 163rd Reconnaissance Wing Commander. "Our most valuable asset is our people. Thanks to them, we've been able to assist in domestic emergency response operations and provide global mission capabilities and support for troops on the ground in harm's way."

The 163rd made history last year when it used an MQ-1 to gather real-time video of the Rim Fire and firefighting crews in and around Yosemite National Park. The MQ-1's imagery enabled incident commanders to more effectively allocate their resources and ensure safe lines of retreat for firefighters. It was the first time a National Guard remotely piloted aircraft had ever been used for domestic firefighting support.

In addition to being the first Air National Guard wing to fly the MQ-1, the 163rd was the first to stand up a fully functional formal training unit (FTU) and field training detachment (FTD). The FTU trains pilots and sensor operators, who control the aircraft's cameras. The FTD prepares airmen to build, maintain and repair the MQ-1.

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