

# Rapid Raptors

A NEW PACAF CONCEPT GETS F-22S TO THE FIGHT FAST.

By Marc V. Schanz, Senior Editor

**F**-22 officers at JB Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, have devised an operations concept that allows for dispatching the stealth fighters, along with a tailored support package, to any forward operating location where they will be ready for flight operations within 24 hours.

The idea, first developed by pilots and weapon officers, has opened up the operations aperture for one of the Air Force's most valued platforms—and gives the service new strategic flexibility and resilience.

According to officials at Pacific Air Forces and the 3rd Wing at Elmendorf, the initiative to enable Raptors to deploy in a smaller package, move quickly, and be combat ready in 24 hours has already paid dividends.

PACAF Commander Gen. Herbert J. Carlisle in a September interview said one of the area-denial strategies that potential adversaries have invested in greatly in the last decade is the ability to hold at risk US installations such as Kadena AB, Japan, or Andersen AFB, Guam. Large volumes of short- and medium-range ballistic missiles complicate contingency planning, he noted.

“A potential adversary knows that one of the things about the Air Force is that we launch and recover from fixed bases, which become fairly easily targetable if you want to do something to them,” Carlisle said. “The idea is you can move airplanes to different locations and not leave them at a fixed location for a long period of time. There are a lot of airfields out there.”

The concept was briefed by members of Elmendorf's 525th Fighter Squadron to Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III during his visit to Alaska in August.

Until now, traditional F-22 deployments to large bases such as Kadena, Andersen, and Osan AB, South Korea, required a good deal of logistical tail—everything from spare parts to

weapons to materials used to maintain the jet's stealthiness. This problem drove officers to look at and streamline the F-22's deployment model.

The result is the “rapid Raptor package,” a tailored four-ship deployment of F-22s paired with specific materials, munitions, and key maintainers flying aboard an accompanying C-17.

The F-22 concept has been tested multiple times and featured in exercises. Indeed, this past summer, PACAF F-22s from Hawaii deployed to Wake Island, a small coral atoll some 2,300 miles west of JB Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii. For three days, a two-ship flight with 29 airmen showed that F-22s could stage off the island.

They “demonstrated that, if necessary, with little advance notice, we can rapidly deploy to Wake Island, which has the necessary infrastructure in place to support our aircraft and operations,” said Lt. Col. Mark E. Ladtkow, commander of the Hawaii Air Guard's 199th Fighter Squadron.

The deployment concept is scalable, and it involves a smaller logistics footprint than a traditional theater security package deployment to fixed installations. “If you have the right capability on a C-17 ... and you have the F-22s, you can move them together, quickly,” Carlisle said.

He said this is an element of “passive defense,” just as important, if not more so, to operations in the Asia-Pacific region as hardening facilities to survive a barrage of ballistic missiles. Dispersing high-value assets such as the F-22 and keeping an enemy guessing about where they are—or where they could be heading—changes an adversary's strategic calculus.

“He may know [the Raptors] are there, but by the time he wants to do anything about it, you won't be there anymore,” Carlisle said. ■

*F-22s fly over Wake Island in the Pacific during a “rapid Raptor package” deployment in June.*



USAF photo by MSgt. Connie Reed