

Air Force World

First Production QF-16 Delivered

Boeing recently delivered the Air Force's first production QF-16C full-scale aerial target to Tyndall AFB, Fla.

The former Michigan Air National Guard F-16C Block 30 airframe is the first of 13 QF-16s scheduled for delivery as part of Lot 1 production of the new flying target.

QF-16s will replace the 82nd Aerial Targets Squadron's QF-4s that provide targets for weapons testing and training over the nearby Eglin Range complex.

Boeing is under contract to convert up to 126 retired, early model F-16s to the QF-16 configuration.

QF-16, serial No. 86-0233, arrived at Tyndall on March 11.

★ screenshot

04.01.2015

An HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter hovers over the Pacific Ocean, allowing the crew to practice combat search and rescue techniques during Forceful Tiger. The large-force exercise demonstrated the 18th Wing's combat capability to defend Okinawa, Japan.

C-5M Flies Into the Record Books

Airmen assigned to Travis AFB, Calif., claimed to have set 45 aeronautical records during an April 3 flight of a C-5M transport loaded with cargo. The eight-person aircrew included members of Travis' Active Duty 22nd Airlift Squadron and Air Force Reserve Command's 312th AS, according to a base news release.

The records claimed are the Class C-1.T jet category for altitude in horizontal flight, altitude with payload, time-to-climb, time-to-climb with payload, and greatest payload to 9,000 meters. "We took on approximately 265,000 pounds of cargo and our goal was to climb as fast as we could at 3,000, 6,000, and 9,000 meters," said Maj. Jon Flowers, pilot for the flight.



USAF photo by SSgt. Rachelle Coleman



“We got up to an altitude of approximately 37,000 feet before we ran out of performance,” he said. The National Aeronautic Association and Fédération Aéronautique Internationale must certify any national and international records, respectively. If certified, the marks set on April 3 would give the C-5M 86 aeronautical records, surpassing the B-1B bomber, having 83, said Travis officials.

Turn, Turn, Turn: Maintenance vehicles line up on the snowy flight line at Minot AFB, N.D., during a rapid launch exercise in late March. A B-52H is sheltered behind them. USAF maintainers, fire department and security forces personnel, B-52H crews and crew chiefs, and other base personnel practiced generating fast and fluid responses to deter, and if necessary defeat, a military attack.

Doolittle Raider Robert Hite Dies

Retired Lt. Col. Robert L. Hite, one of the last surviving Doolittle Tokyo Raiders, died in Nashville, Tenn., on March 29. He was 95. Hite was the copilot on airplane 16, dubbed *Bat Out of Hell*, during the top secret April 18, 1942, mission to bomb Japan.

The raid, led by Lt. Col. James H. “Jimmy” Doolittle, had little impact on the Japanese military, but significantly boosted American morale during World War II. Hite was captured by the Japanese in China following the raid and was imprisoned in Shanghai for 40 months. He was held in solitary confinement, tortured, and starved until he was liberated on Aug. 20, 1945.

During the Korean War, Hite returned to Active Duty and served overseas before he was released from duty for the second time in November 1955.

He was the recipient of the Distinguished Flying Cross, Purple Heart with one Oak Leaf Cluster, and the Chinese Breast Order of Pao Ting.

Only two Doolittle Raiders are still living. They are: retired Lt. Col. Richard E. Cole, copilot of crew 1, and David Thatcher, who was a staff sergeant and the engineer-gunner of crew No. 7.

—Amy McCullough

First Internationally Built F-35A

Italy rolled out its first F-35A from a facility in Cameri, Italy, on March 12, marking the completion of the first F-35A assembled internationally, according to a company press release.

Aircraft AL-1 moves from the Italian Ministry of Defense’s final assembly and checkout facility to additional checkout inspections, then first flight later this year, Lockheed Martin officials said.

The F-35 is the first of eight on order for the Italians, and the Cameri facility is also home to the European F-35 maintenance overhaul and upgrade center.

In addition to the Italian F-35A and F-35B airframes, the Cameri facility is expected to build F-35As for the Royal Netherlands Air Force and could be tapped to produce airframes for other European countries as needed.

The Italians are replacing their Panavia Tornado, AMX Ghibli, and McDonnell Douglas AV-8B attack aircraft with F-35s.

Florida Guard Leads Euro-TSP

A dozen Florida Air National Guard F-15Cs and around 200 Air Guardsmen from the 125th Fighter Wing deployed as part of the second European Theater security package sent to the continent, marking the ANG’s first TSP deployment in support of US Air Forces in Europe-Air Forces Africa.

“The TSP is a strategic capability that allows the Air Force greater flexibility against evolving threats. ... It reassures our allies and partner nations that our commitment to European

By the Numbers

35,000

Size, in square miles, of USAF's planned Powder River Training Complex after an expansion was recently approved by the FAA. It will span the Dakotas, Montana, and Wyoming and provide bombers with enhanced training airspace.

security is a priority," Lt. Gen. Darryl L. Roberson, 3rd Air Force commander, said in a March 27 news release.

Heightened tensions with Russia prompted USAFE-AF-AFRICA to commence TSPs for Operation Atlantic Resolve this year, dispatching A-10s from Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz., to Spangdahlem AB, Germany. The first F-15s deployed to Leeuwarden AB, Netherlands, March 31 and will forward deploy to Graf Ignatievo AB, Bulgaria, during the six-month TSP.

The Liberty Verdict

Air Force Special Operations Command will continue flying the U-28 as its primary manned intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance platform instead of converting to the MC-12W Liberty, AFSOC Commander Lt. Gen. Bradley A. Heithold said.

"Congress was not enamored" with AFSOC's plan to acquire and modify 33 secondhand MC-12s divested by Air Combat Command and US Special Operations Command, he said March 18.

After reviewing a special operations report justifying the move, Congress decided the marginal capability increase over the U-28 "wasn't worth the investment," Heithold said.

AFSOC will still get 13 MC-12s to stand up a new Air National Guard special operations ISR and foreign training unit in Oklahoma, but the rest of the 33 planned aircraft will go elsewhere, he said.

The Army will take eight of the 51-strong MC-12W fleet, leaving the bulk of the Air Force airframes up for grabs. "They're opportune aircraft" for a government-owned, contractor-operated ISR fleet, Heithold said. "Nobody's decided that, but the opportunity's there."

Russian Provocation

Russia's military forces undertook massive snap military drills, from its Eastern Military District to the Arctic to the Black Sea in March.

The exercises included deployments of both Tu-95 Bear and Tu-22 Backfire nuclear-capable bombers to Crimea. Iskander SS-26 theater ballistic missile systems also deployed to Russia's Kaliningrad region, near the Baltic states.

The drills involved more than 100 aircraft, 15 submarines, 40 naval ships, and upward of 76,000 personnel, running March 16-21.

Adm. Cecil D. Haney, head of US Strategic Command, called the moves "very provocative," saying they were clearly intended to send a strong signal to the US and its allies.

No Eyes in the Clumsy Skies

Air Mobility Command accident investigators determined that inadequate visual scanning and overreliance on collision

avoidance systems by the crews of an Air Force Reserve Command C-130H and Army C-27J caused a midair collision near Pope Field, N.C., last December.

They found "convincing evidence" that "a breakdown in visual scan" resulted in insufficient clearing of the aircraft flight path by both aircrews, stated the accident investigation board's report, released March 16.

The 440th Airlift Wing's C-130 was pulling up after a night time low-level supply drop with night vision goggles when the C-27J clipped it roughly eight miles south of Mackall AAF, N.C., on Dec. 1, 2014.

The Army Special Operations Command C-27 passed head-on diagonally under the C-130, grazing the latter's underside with its wingtip. The C-27's vertical stabilizer struck the C-130's right wing, external fuel tank, and outboard engine nacelle, according to the AIB report.

The impact sheared a third of the C-27's vertical tail off, but both aircraft landed safely.

The C-130 sustained an estimated \$1.8 million in damage and associated cleanup. No crew members were injured.

Ninth GPS IIF Satellite Launched

The ninth Global Positioning System IIF satellite successfully launched aboard a United Launch Alliance Delta IV rocket from Cape Canaveral AFS, Fla., on March 25, the Air Force announced.

The Boeing-built satellite reached orbit just over three hours after launch and "sent signals confirming its health," according to a company press release.

"Boeing, ULA, and the Air Force successfully launched four GPS IIFs last year, the highest operations tempo in over 20 years, and today's mission marks the first of three launches planned in 2015," said Dan Hart, vice president of Boeing Government Space Systems. "As they enter service, the IIFs are advancing and modernizing the GPS constellation by improving accuracy, signal strength, and anti-jamming capability."

Ground Strike Lightning

The F-35A will be capable of "basic" close air support when it achieves initial operational capability next September, but improvements in the coming years will make it more effective for joint CAS missions, according to Air Combat Command.

Initial war-ready capabilities will include "limited" suppression and destruction of enemy air defense capabilities, and limited air interdiction weapons and capabilities, said Maj. Michael Albrecht, the F-35 functional area manager in ACC's operations directorate.

By next year, the F-35 will be capable of dropping both laser guided bombs and Joint Direct Attack Munitions, whereas by 2019 it will improve both its sensor capabilities and gain the ability to use "different variations of precision guided munitions," such as the Small Diameter Bomb II, he said March 12.

Albrecht confirmed that the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency did present a brief on future CAS weapons development, but said the services are still talking about their various concepts and ideas in this area.

He said the services "talked about having their [research and development] look at what kinds of things we could bring to the CAS fight in the future," specifically weapons that are "platform agnostic, so we can put it on whatever is flying out there."

—Marc V. Schanz

Russia Ditches CFE Treaty

Russia declared it will no longer participate in a Vienna-based consultative group on the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), making good on a 2007 threat to pull out of the conventional weapons agreement.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said he was “disappointed” by the decision, but NATO supports continued efforts to regulate conventional forces in Europe.

“We believe that to have consultations on arms control, arms reductions is important,” he said, adding later that Russia is continuing to deliver weapons and heavy equipment to rebels in eastern Ukraine.

Russian diplomats claim they are withdrawing because NATO countries are allegedly dodging the terms of the agreement, signed just prior to the end of the Cold War.

This does not mean rejection of “further dialogue on control over conventional arms in Europe,” said Russian diplomat Anton Mazur, who leads the Russian delegation in Vienna on arms control issues.

—Marc V. Schanz

Airmen Rescue Saudi Aircrew

Djibouti-based Air Force rescue personnel plucked a two-man Saudi F-15S crew from the Red Sea after the pair ejected during a strike sortie over Yemen, according to the Saudi government and a press report.

An HH-60G rescue helicopter from Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, recovered the Saudi airmen on March 26, in coordination with US Navy ships in the area, within two hours of the request for assistance, reported the *Wall Street Journal*.

“Both pilots are reported in good health and high spirits” and were taken to King Khalid AB, Saudi Arabia, for treatment, according to Saudi officials.

Air Force Reserve Command HH-60s of the 303rd Expeditionary Rescue Squadron are currently deployed to Camp Lemonnier alongside pararescue personnel and Alaska Air National Guard HC-130 tankers for Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa.

Saudi Arabia kicked off an Arab coalition air offensive against the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen the previous week.

Hogs Hit the Sandbox

Idaho Air National Guard A-10Cs deployed to Al Udeid AB, Qatar, to fly a trio of international exercises in the Persian Gulf region, US Air Forces Central Command announced.

Six aircraft and roughly 120 pilots, maintainers, and support personnel from Gowen Field, near Boise, formed the 190th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, which arrived in late February and early March.

“During these exercises, the focus will be more heavily on the A-10 ... in the area of close air support, forward air patrol, and combat search and rescue, among other tactics,” said 190th EFS Detachment Commander Lt. Col. Anthony Brown.

AFCENT officials stressed that the 190th EFS deployment is a noncombat commitment to relieve pressure on in-theater units engaged in Operation Inherent Resolve against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

High Attack Angle, Airframe Flaw Downed F-15D

An F-15D assigned to the 48th Fighter Wing at RAF Lakenheath, UK, crashed on Oct. 8, 2014, in part because a radome irregularity disrupted airflow during a maneuver. The pilot safely ejected.

The flaw “generated sufficient yaw to cause a spin,” delaying the pilot’s recovery of the aircraft, according to an accident investigation board report, released March 12.

The pilot was engaged in combat maneuvers just north of Lakenheath and entered into a “series of descending vertical maneuvers” followed by an abrupt aft-stick input that “spiked” the aircraft’s angle of attack, according to the AIB.

Aerodynamic testing showed similar radome imperfections only affected aircraft handling in specific, infrequent flight regimes, such as that encountered when the pilot initiated the pitch-up maneuver.

“By a preponderance of evidence, the board president also found that the inherent reduced stability of the F-15D model was a significant contributing factor to the mishap,” states the report.

Minuteman Double Shot

Air Force missileers conducted a rare second unarmed Minuteman III operational test launch less than a week after a first shot from Vandenberg AFB, Calif. Air Force Global Strike Command announced that the launches were on March 23 and March 27.

“These launches are a visible reminder to both our adversaries and our allies of the readiness and capability of the Minuteman III weapon system,” Lt. Col. Daniel Hays, 341st Missile Wing task force commander from Malmstrom AFB, Mont., said in a news release.

AFGSC has “two more launches scheduled for this fiscal year,” command spokeswoman Capt. Michele Rollins told *Air Force Magazine*. Staging launches close together also took advantage of in-place Navy range support and was “far more efficient” than one-off testing, she added.

A launch crew from F. E. Warren AFB, Wyo., fired the first test shot of the pair.



The War on Terrorism

Operation Freedom's Sentinel (Afghanistan)

Casualties

As of April 16, one American had died in action in Operation Freedom's Sentinel.

Slowing Afghanistan Troop Withdrawal

The US will maintain its current 9,800 troop force posture in Afghanistan through 2015, as requested by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, the White House announced.

"The specific trajectory of the 2016 drawdown will be established later this year to enable our final consolidation to a Kabul-based embassy presence by the end of 2016," said President Obama during a joint press conference with Ghani, March 24.

Obama emphasized that the overall timeline has not changed and that the US is still shifting out of the combat role. He noted that four years ago, the United States had more than 100,000 troops serving in Afghanistan, but less than 10,000 today.

"We're essentially moving the drawdown pace over to the right for several months in part to compensate for the lengthy period it took for government formation, and in part because we want to make sure we're doing everything we can to help the Afghan security forces succeed so we don't have to go back," said Obama.

Ghani paid tribute to US personnel killed or wounded in Afghanistan. "You stood shoulder-to-shoulder with us and I'd like to say thank you," said Ghani.

"The 2,215 Americans that have died, must not die in vain. They must leave behind a legacy of a stable Afghanistan," which he said the flexible drawdown schedule will help secure.

—Amy McCullough

C-130 Swap Out

West Virginia and Wyoming Air National Guard C-130Hs returned from a four-month deployment for operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Horn of Africa, and the broader Persian Gulf region in March.

Four aircraft from Cheyenne, Wyo.-based 153rd Airlift Wing were augmented by two C-130s from West Virginia's 130th AW in Charleston, and nearly 100 pilots, maintainers, and support personnel, according to a wing news release.

The combined expeditionary unit flew 1,310 flying hours over 649 sorties, airlifting some 3,140 personnel and 2,370 tons of supplies since deploying last November.

The rotation relieved the Minnesota ANG's 133rd AW and handed off to C-130s and airmen of the Kentucky ANG's 123rd AW in late February.

The final Wyoming Herc returned to Cheyenne from the US Central Command area of operational responsibility on March 5.

Operation Inherent Resolve (Syria and Iraq)

Casualties

As of April 16, four Americans had died in Operation Inherent Resolve. All four troops were killed in noncombat incidents.

Resolved Overview

US Central Command released new figures detailing air strike targets in Operation Inherent Resolve, revealing that 5,314 individual targets, from fighting positions to weapons caches, have been struck since the campaign began in August 2014. The target list has expanded to 26 categories, from 17 listed in CENTCOM's January report, with multiple categories added on types and purposes of buildings, weapons categories, as well as various oil infrastructure targets.

The heaviest hit targets include fighting positions, with 1,003 struck as of March 18 (up from 673 in early January), and 689 "logistics buildings" (a category not included in the January report). Other heavily hit targets include 460 "technical vehicles"—civilian vehicles with crew-served weapons mounted on them—up from 303 in January, as well as 547 "miscellaneous" vehicles (up from 394 in January).

The artillery, anti-aircraft artillery, and mortar category has been split up in this report. It shows 47 artillery pieces having been struck thus far, along with 99 mortars, and 48 AAA and air defense targets.

Some 40 weapons caches have now been hit, up from 23 in the January report.

—Marc V. Schanz

Back to Tikrit

After a request for assistance from the Iraqi government, US and coalition aircraft conducted air strikes in Tikrit, supporting Iraqi forces attempting to dislodge ISIS fighters from the city.

Fighters, bombers, and remotely piloted aircraft carried out 17 strikes on ISIS targets in the initial wave, hitting a building held by ISIS, two bridges, three checkpoints, berms, staging areas, and a command and control facility, according to a March 26 Defense Department press release.

The strikes inserted US and coalition forces directly into the battle for Tikrit that also involved Iranian advisors, Shiite militias, and Iraqi forces, raising potential deconfliction challenges with the Iranians.

US strikes were conditioned on the Iraqi government taking control of the operation, coordinating a scheme of maneuver with forces, and being able to establish a clear line of communication with Operation Inherent Resolve air planners, said US Central Command boss Army Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III.

Nellis AFB, Nev., the previous month and were developing tactics to integrate with fifth generation aircraft ahead of the F-35's introduction, according to the RAF.

Despite weather that challenged even airmen from the "north of Scotland," the exercise has proved the ability to "operate in extreme climatic conditions," said RAF Squadron Leader Alex Hunter.

Zephyr culminated in larger-scale exercises with AWACS and Red-force aggressors.

Raptors and Flying Scots

Eight Royal Air Force Typhoon FGR4s joined F-22 Raptors at JB Langley-Eustis, Va., for the three-week joint training exercise Western Zephyr, RAF officials announced on March 5.

"Training of this nature alongside our allies is essential if we are to keep the RAF at the forefront of combat airpower," said deployed boss, RAF Wing Commander Jim Walls.

The Typhoons wrapped up participation in Red Flag at

USAF photo by SSgt. Joe W. McFadden



JASSM-ER Ready to Rock

The Air Force’s Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile-Extended Range is now available for B-1B bomber crews to use in combat, announced officials at Dyess AFB, Texas.

The base, home to the B-1s of the 7th Bomb Wing, received its first batch of JASSM-ER production missiles in March 2014.

The declaration that the JASSM-ER is available for combat operations followed in early December, according to a March 9 base release.

Weeks later, the Air Force approved the missile for full-rate production. JASSM-ER boasts roughly two-and-a-half times the range of the baseline JASSM, meaning some 500 nautical miles (575.4 miles).

The B-1 is the only platform cleared to carry the extended-range version; the Air Force has integrated the baseline variant on B-2As, B-52Hs, F-16s, and F-15Es.

C-130 Compliance Top Priority

Making certain legacy C-130Hs are upgraded to comply with navigation and safety requirements to operate in US and international airspace beyond 2020 is “absolutely priority one” for the Air National Guard, ANG Director Lt. Gen. Stanley E. Clarke III said.

There are other modernization programs that “I’d say would be second tier to that one, but that one’s got to come first,” he told members of the House Appropriations Committee’s defense panel on March 17. “The Air Force is committed to putting the resources behind this compliance issue in order to make sure we are compatible,” he said, despite the fact that there’s no current program of record to do so.

Clarke said that ambiguity and disagreement between Congress and the Air Force as to whether upgrades would be part of the C-130 Avionics Modernization Program has put the effort “a little bit behind” schedule.

The Air Force must “have multiple vendors” if there is any hope of meeting the FAA’s deadline, but Clarke assured the panel that USAF will “make sure it happens.”

Five Thousand Scrambles and Counting

District of Columbia Air National Guard aerospace control

We Got Your Back: An A-10 fires its 30 mm GAU-8 Avenger rotary cannon during a theater security package deployment to Campia Turzii, Romania, during an Operation Atlantic Resolve mission. USAF deployed 12 A-10s and some 200 airmen for the 90-day TSP. They trained with Romanian airmen flying MiG-21 aircraft in Atlantic Resolve and the exercise Dacian Thunder as part of an ongoing show of commitment to US allies in the region.

alert F-16s recently scrambled for the 5,000th time since Sept. 11, 2001, in defense of the nation’s capital, unit officials announced.

Stricter flight restricted zones were instituted over the National Capital Region following the 9/11 terrorist attacks when the unit began 24/7 alert. Since then, the unit has responded to more incidents than NORAD’s other continental alert sites combined.

“If you add up all of their alert calls and double that, that doesn’t come close to the amount of activity we have had,” said 113th Operations Ground Commander Col. Mark Valentine.

The 5,000th scramble occurred March 21.

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