



By Wilson Brissett, Senior Editor



A 318th Special Operations Squadron U-28A aircraft at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., in 2013.

■ Three Airmen Killed in Cannon U-28 Crash

Three airmen died March 14 when their U-28A aircraft crashed during a training flight near Cannon AFB, N.M.

Capt. Andrew Becker, 33, was a pilot for the 318th Special Operations Squadron at Cannon. He was from Novi, Mich. Capt. Kenneth Dalga, 29, was a combat systems officer for the 318th SOS, from Goldsboro, N.C. First Lt. Frederick Dellecker, 26, was a copilot assigned to the 318th SOS. He was from Daytona Beach, Fla.

The airmen were flying a routine training sortie when the aircraft went down at about 6:50 p.m. near Clovis Municipal Airport, said 27th Special Operations Wing Commander Col. Benjamin R. Maitre. The Air Force has launched an investigation into the crash.



Becker



Dalga



Dellecker

“Cannon Air Force Base [is] a tight-knit installation and wing-focused on getting the mission done, and obviously any time an incident like this occurs, it hits us hard,” Maitre said.

■ Mountain Home Airman Killed in Southwest Asia

SSgt. Alexandria Mae Morrow, 25, of Dansville, N.Y., died March 22 while deployed to Southwest Asia for Operation Inherent Resolve. Morrow was part of the 366th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho.

She died while performing maintenance duties, according to a Pentagon statement. Mountain Home, on its Facebook page, said Morrow sustained a fatal injury while “executing her duties as a weapons loader” and that “those who knew her valued her love of life and art, her leadership, her skills, and her passion.”



Morrow

■ Security Forces Airman Dies in Syria

SSgt. Austin Bieren, 25, of Umatilla, Ore., died March 28 in northern Syria of reported natural causes. He was assigned to the 21st Space Wing at Peterson AFB, Colo., and was deployed in support of combat operations, according to a Defense Department statement.

Bieren, a security forces airman, was the second US service member to die in Syria during Operation Inherent Resolve. In November, Navy explosive ordnance disposal technician Senior Chief Petty Officer Scott Cooper Dayton was killed in a combat incident.



Bieren

SrA, Xavier Lockley/USAF

■ The Air Force’s Low Aircraft Availability Rates

Across nearly all of its combat and mobility aircraft, the Air Force is failing to meet aircraft availability standards, according to data the service recently provided to Congress.

“The Air Force has a challenge in aircraft availability, and we are trying to shore that up,” Col. Michael Lawrence, chief of the maintenance division in the logistics directorate, told *Air Force Magazine*.

Aircraft availability measures what percent of an entire aircraft fleet is ready to perform its primary mission and, unlike more commonly cited mission capable rates, includes aircraft undergoing major repairs or overhauls. It offers “a mechanism to understand the relative health of any fleet,” he said. The data show that in the fourth quarter of 2016, 16 of the 17 USAF aircraft fleets included in the survey had availability rates below the standard that indicates a fleet in good health. Additionally, only six of the 17 aircraft types had availability rates within five percentage points of the standard, considered by maintainers as an acceptable deviation from the norm.

While warning that “every weapons system has its own story,” Lawrence said three main factors contribute to the servicewide low rates of aircraft availability. Some of the lowest rates during that time period were among platforms undergoing service life extension programs, like the B-1 and B-2.

Here, “there is a need to prepare for a near-peer adversary,” Lawrence said. “It’s painful to take these aircraft off the front lines, but we know we’ve got to do it.”

The F-22A Raptor also suffered a low availability rate, at 46 percent. Lawrence said this was primarily caused



An F-15E takes off from RAF Lakenheath, UK, in February.

by work on the aircraft’s stealthy low observable platform surfaces.

Second, as the average age of the Air Force inventory increases, “the amount of time we have to spend working on those aircraft tends to increase,” leaving them in the depots longer.

Third, “the maintenance manpower shortfall” has had an impact on aircraft availability. The data were provided to the House Armed Services readiness subcommittee ahead of a March 22 hearing on the current state of the Air Force.

| | Models | Total Aircraft Inventory | Aircraft Availability (AA) Standard | 3-Month AA Avg (Oct-Dec 16) | 10-yr AA Avg (FY 06-16) |
|---------------------|---------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Combat Air Forces | A-10C | 283 | 72% | 62% | 62% |
| | B-1B | 62 | 55% | 40% | 41% |
| | B-2A | 20 | 58% | 39% | 38% |
| | B-52H | 75 | 61% | 59% | 59% |
| | CV-22B | 50 | 71% | 65% | 51% |
| | F-15C | 212 | 63% | 56% | 62% |
| | F-15D | 24 | 63% | 60% | 61% |
| | F-15E | 218 | 66% | 69% | 65% |
| | F-16C | 791 | 66% | 65% | 67% |
| | F-16D | 156 | 66% | 54% | 65% |
| F-22A | 182 | 72% | 46% | 56% | |
| Mobility Air Forces | C-17A | 222 | 79% | 72% | 72% |
| | C-130H | 217 | 64% | 63% | 62% |
| | C-130J | 107 | 72% | 69% | 74% |
| | KC-10A | 59 | 78% | 64% | 70% |
| | KC-135R | 344 | 80% | 66% | 68% |
| | KC-135T | 54 | 80% | 61% | 69% |

TSgt. Matthew Plew/USAF: Staff chart



An E-8C JSTARS assigned to the 116th Air Control Wing at Robins AFB, Ga., was damaged by contractors in 2015-16.

■ Maintenance Error Causes \$7.35 Million in Damage

Contract maintainers left drain holes covered during depot maintenance of an E-8C JSTARS between March 2015 and July 2016. This let water accumulate and caused about \$7.35 million in damage to the aircraft, according to an Air Force Materiel Command investigation.

The E-8C, assigned to the 116th Air Control Wing at Robins AFB, Ga., was in depot maintenance at a Northrop Grumman facility in Lake Charles, La. During the maintenance, contractor personnel covered three holes in the radome on the belly of the aircraft. Water from washings and rain collected

“Northrop maintenance quality assurance inspectors were required to ensure all drain holes were free from obstructions after being washed, but failed to do so,” the report states. “The accumulated water, and subsequent cycling of the antenna, which produced an electrical current, damaged the antenna’s electrical components.”

The Air Force has not determined if Northrop Grumman will incur a financial penalty for the incident; however, the maintenance contract lets the service evaluate if the contractor’s performance merits the payment of an award fee, according to AFMC.

■ Holmes Takes Command of ACC

Gen. James M. “Mike” Holmes assumed control of Air Combat Command from Gen. Herbert J. “Hawk” Carlisle on March 10 during a ceremony at JB Langley-Eustis, Va. Holmes previously served as USAF deputy chief of staff for strategic plans and requirements at the Pentagon. Carlisle, who had led the command since 2014, retired after 39 years in uniform.

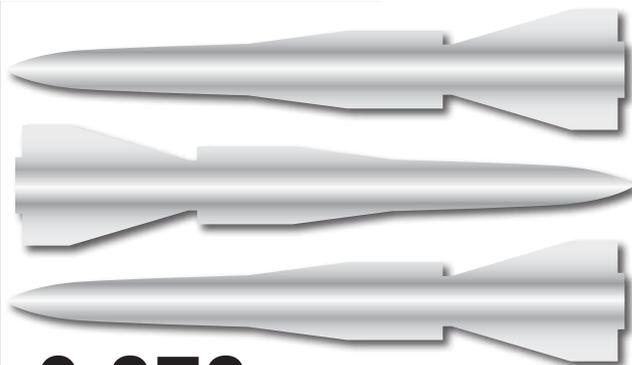


Holmes

“There has never been a more important time to serve in uniform, and you truly represent the greatest treasure in our nation’s arsenal,” Chief of Staff Gen. David L. Goldfein told the audience of ACC airmen during the ceremony. Carlisle said, “I have absolute, complete confidence in Mike Holmes and Sarah, that they are the right team to lead this command in the future and to greater heights.”

After assuming command, Holmes told the ACC airmen, “We now face new and revised challenges from both great and regional powers who threaten the survival of our American experiment.” He went on to say the ability of the nation to fend off these threats “certainly depends on the capabilities you bring as part of a joint team.”

By the Numbers



3,878

The number of weapons released by US and coalition forces in the month of March for Operation Inherent Resolve—a new high for the operation that is now more than two years old.

Source: US Air Forces Central Command Airpower Summary, March 2017.

TSgt. John Lasky/USAF, staff illustration

■ THAAD Deployment Begins in South Korea

A C-17 delivered the first elements of a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system to Osan AB, South Korea, in early March.

“The timely deployment of the THAAD system by US Pacific Command and the Secretary of Defense gives my command great confidence in the support we will receive when we ask for reinforcement or advanced capabilities,” the US Forces Korea commander, Army Gen. Vincent K. Brooks, said in a news release.

The deployment came the same day North Korea launched four ballistic missiles into the Sea of Japan. Defense Secretary James N. Mattis and Japanese Minister of Defense Tomomi Inada agreed “that these launches are an unacceptable and irresponsible act” that undermines stability in the region, according to a Pentagon statement.



An Air Force C-17 delivers the first two Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) launchers to Osan AB, South Korea, in March.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has already fired some 120 ballistic missiles in his five years of reign—that’s a significant increase from his father, Kim Jong Il, who fired just 34 ballistic missiles over the course of 17 years, Pacific Air Forces boss Gen. Terrence J. O’Shaughnessy told reporters at AFA’s Air Warfare Symposium in Orlando, Fla.



US and Polish C-130 Hercules aircraft prepare to fly a four-ship formation at Powidz AB, Poland, in March.

■ Air Force To Increase Rotational Presence in Europe

The Air Force will increase its rotational presence in Europe thanks to a significant boost in European Reassurance Initiative funding in the Fiscal 2017 budget, US Air Forces in Europe Commander Gen. Tod D. Wolters said at AFA’s Air Warfare Symposium. The increased number of theater security packages will be “equivalent to what you see with the introduction of the brigade combat team” in Europe, he said.

In November 2016, the Army announced plans to deploy 5,700 troops from two brigades to Europe for Operation Atlantic Resolve, which provides reassurance to NATO allies in response to Russian aggression in the region. Wolters said he’s also “very excited about the insertion” of four multinational battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland on a rotational basis.

■ It’s Official: USAF Needs a Minimum of 100 B-21s

The Air Force’s requirement for the B-21 Raider bomber, initially stated as “80 to 100” airplanes, is now officially at least 100 aircraft, the Air Force said. Written testimony presented to the House Armed Services Committee by Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Stephen W. Wilson indicated that 100 is now the minimum number of B-21s required.

Through a spokesman, the Air Force confirmed the number, saying the change happened “in spring 2016” at the request of Air Force Global Strike Command. At that time, USAF established 100 “as the floor—not the ceiling” for the B-21 fleet size, he said. AFGSC “requires a minimum of 100 B-21 Raider aircraft, with a mix of legacy bombers, to meet future COCOM [combatant commander] requirements,” the spokesman said.

He said that AFGSC chief Gen. Robin Rand told AFA’s Mitchell Institute in July last year that 100 aircraft, and “not one single one below that,” was his “best military advice” on the B-21 fleet size.



“I can’t imagine how I would deal with the missions I have, with fewer bombers than we have in today’s inventory,” Rand said in his Mitchell remarks. Because of the B-21’s secrecy, it was not explained then that Rand’s advice had become official policy.

MSGT. Jeremy Larlee/US Forces Korea; SSGT. Alonzo Chapman/ANG; USAF Illustration

The War on Terrorism

US Central Command Operations: Freedom's Sentinel and Inherent Resolve

■ Casualties

As of April 18, a total of 35 Americans had died in Operation Freedom's Sentinel in Afghanistan, and 39 Americans had died in Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq and Syria.

The total includes 71 troops and three Department of Defense civilians. Of these deaths, 31 were killed in action with the enemy while 43 died in noncombat incidents.

There have been 165 troops wounded in action during OFS and 34 troops in OIR.

■ Civilian Deaths in Mosul Air Strike Investigated

US Central Command is investigating a March 17 strike in Mosul that reportedly killed more than 100 civilians. The strike in Mosul's al-Jadida neighborhood hit a building where more than 100 people were hiding. Iraqi security forces requested the strike, which targeted ISIS fighters and equipment, Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve said.

CENTCOM chief Army Gen. Joseph L. Votel said in a statement that the death of the civilians is a tragedy, and "we are investigating the incident to determine exactly what happened and will continue to take extraordinary measures to avoid harming civilians." The fight in Mosul is difficult because ISIS fighters are operating among civilians.

■ Death of Top Al Qaeda, Taliban Leaders Confirmed

A February air strike killed Mullah Abdul Salam, the Taliban's commander for the province of Kunduz. The

Taliban said a remotely piloted aircraft killed Salam, along with four of his top associates.

"Mullah Salam and the Taliban fighters under him murdered and terrorized the people of Kunduz for too long," said Army Gen. John W. Nicholson Jr., commander of US forces in Afghanistan, according to Voice of America.

The Department of Defense also confirmed that a March 19 US air strike in Paktika province, Afghanistan, killed high-ranking al Qaeda leader Qari Yasin. A native of Pakistan, Yasin helped plan a September 2008 bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad that killed dozens, including USAF Maj. Rodolfo I. Rodriguez and Navy 3rd Class Petty Officer Matthew J. O'Bryant. Yasin was also implicated in a 2009 attack on a bus carrying the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore.

"The death of Qari Yasin is evidence that terrorists who defame Islam and deliberately target innocent people will not escape justice," said Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis, in a DOD press release.

■ Three US Soldiers Injured in Insider Attack

Three US soldiers stationed at Camp Antonik, in the Washer district of Helmand province, were wounded there when an Afghan soldier opened fire on them March 19. Coalition forces on base responded and killed the shooter, according to US Forces Afghanistan.

The shooting was the first insider attack on US forces in Afghanistan this year.



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