

Diligentia et Accuratio

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20,000-hour
milestone
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marrow drive

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JSTARS pass 20,000-hour mark, save four lives during night mission

By Senior Airman Tim Bazar
Editor

A routine mission for a 16th Expeditionary Air Command and Control Squadron aircrew turned into history as they helped the Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System platform pass the 20,000-combat-hour milestone Tuesday.

The sortie was the 1,756th combat mission flown by the 16th, 12th and 128th EACCS JSTARS crews who rotate deploying here from the 116th Air Control Wing at Robins Air Force Base, Ga.

"The milestone is a fitting tribute to the outstanding performance, dedication and attention to detail demonstrated by all the JSTARS crews that have taken to the skies of Afghanistan and Iraq over the past four years," said Lt. Col. Laszlo Veres, 16th EACCS director of operations.

Although the crew passed the 20,000-hour mark, a more important event happened on the moonlit mission. They helped save four lives after a helicopter carrying coalition forces crashed into a lake.

While flying on a familiarization ride over the skies of Iraq, a helicopter crashed into a lake with its blades in the water and wheels up. Soon after, the JSTARS crew who were more than 30,000 feet overhead began receiving "mayday" calls from the stranded troops who were standing on the belly of the overturned helo.

The JSTARS team called for first responders, who sped to the scene of the crash and rescued four coalition forces from the overturned helicopter.

"If we hadn't been out here at the right time, those guys may not have been saved for a long time," said Capt. Matthew Amig, aircraft commander. "When we give the Army and Marines on the ground a little piece of mind, it makes the long missions worth it. Those four guys will be going home now."

"Since they began rotating to the AOR in 2002, many of the squadron members have been deployed to AUAB for more than a year," said Colonel Veres. "Despite the extended time away from home, Airmen of the 16th EACCS remain dedicated to the squadron's mission, the importance of the effort they support in Iraq and the knowledge that their long sorties are saving lives every day."

The E-8C JSTARS is an airborne battle management, command and control, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance platform. Its primary mission is to provide theater ground and air commanders with ground surveillance to support attack operations and



Photo by Senior Airman Tim Bazar

Capt. Christina Hodsden, 16th Expeditionary Air Command and Control Squadron navigator, makes adjustments during a night mission over the skies of Iraq. During the sortie Tuesday, the JSTARS crew celebrated their 20,000th combat hour and saved four lives after a helicopter crashed into a lake.

targeting to delay, disrupt or destroy enemy forces.

"One of CENTCOM's highest priorities is to ensure the safety of the population of Baghdad and protect key infrastructure that ensures the security of the Iraqi nation," said Colonel Veres. "Known as Operation TOGETHER FORWARD, it is a combined effort between the Iraqi National Police, the Iraqi army, Iraqi police and (Multi-National Division-Baghdad) to reduce the level of murders, kidnappings, assassinations, terrorism and sectarian violence in the city and to reinforce the Iraqi government's control of Baghdad. JSTARS sorties are flown in direct support of this mission, providing planners and commanders in the field with near-real time information of vehicular movement in the Baghdad area.

The computers on the E-8C can gather and display detailed battlefield information on ground forces and relay it in near-real time to ground stations below. The 24-foot antenna mounted on the belly of the aircraft can develop a 120-degree field of view that covers more than 19,000 square miles. The capabilities allow the aircraft to detect targets more than 250 kilometers away.

"For the past four years, JSTARS has been the number one collector of moving-target information for counter-(improvised-explosive device), counter-mortar and target development purposes in support of coalition forces employed in Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and

IRAQI FREEDOM," said the colonel. "Our current surveillance and battle management effort is employed to assist in the defeat of Al-Qaida and associated movements, monitoring key infrastructure and protecting lines of communication in Iraq, and protecting coalition forces against IEDs and suicide bombers."

Crew members on the 20,000-hour mission included: Maj. Tracey Murchison, mission crew commander; Maj. Derrick Smits, deputy mission crew commander; Capt. Adam Acock, senior director; Capt. Matthew Amig, pilot; Capt. Christina Hodsden, navigator; Capt. Stuart Williamson, senior management officer; 1st Lt. Christopher Babcock, air intelligence officer; 1st Lt. Donald Camp, copilot; 1st Lt. Herbert Cranford, air weapons officer; 1st Lt. Sammy Stover, air weapons officer; Senior Master Sgt. George Benson, communications support technician; Army Sergeant 1st Class Dwayne Deweerd, airborne targeting surveillance supervisor; Staff Sgt. Bruce Klima, flight engineer; Army Sgt. Frances Stiles, airborne targeting surveillance supervisor; Staff Sgt. Russell Ticer, senior director technician; Senior Airman Hugh Hermes, communications support technician; Senior Airman Benjamin Rusch, airborne mission systems specialist; Senior Airman John Terry, air operations technician; Airman 1st Class Steven Green, airborne mission systems specialist; and Airman 1st Class Raymond McLeod, air operations technician.