

MC-12 Liberty flies first combat mission

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6/10/2009 - **JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq** -- The Air Force's newest intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance platform, the MC-12 Liberty aircraft, flew its first combat sortie today.

"This is truly a success story," said Brig. Gen. Brian Bishop, 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing commander. "Our mission here is to deliver combat airpower and overwatch to the joint fight in-theater, and the MC-12 brings a huge ISR capability to employ in support of the ground commander."

The aircraft, which arrived in Iraq June 8, is assigned to the 362nd Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron, and took off from JBB at approximately 2:30 p.m. local time for a four-hour mission.

"This is the first combat mission for the 362nd ERS, and it was a huge success," said Col. Mike Fantini, 332nd Expeditionary Operations Group commander. "The milestone continues the extraordinary program to push more ISR capability to the joint-force commander."

Landing at approximately 6:20 p.m. local time, the four-person crew was all smiles after completing the historic sortie.

"It feels good being out here and doing something good for the warfighter," said Capt. Jason Goodale, the pilot.

"The crew was great," the Sioux Falls, S.D., native deployed here from Travis Air Force Base, Calif., added. "We performed like we trained. It is great to be part of something that is bringing a unique feature to ground forces."

Flying alongside Captain Goodale were Lt. Col. Phillip Stewart, mission commander, deployed here from Langley AFB, Va., and a native of Silver Spring, Md., and the two sensor operators: Senior Master Sgt. Bruce Hunter, deployed here from Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., and a native of Rock Springs, Wyo., and Staff Sgt. Shaun Nelson.

"It was a great mission," said Colonel Stewart. "It couldn't have gone any better."

"It feels really good to validate the training we went through," he added. "I'm extraordinarily proud of (the Airmen of the 362nd ERS). They are a tremendous group of Airmen. All of them volunteered to come to a brand-new program not knowing what to expect because they believe in the mission and they believe in the men and women that we are protecting on the ground."

Designed to augment information gathered by other intelligence-collection capabilities operating in-theater, the MC-12 provides real-time full-motion video and signals intelligence and allow military leaders to make battlefield decisions.

"It's an awesome mission," added Sergeant Nelson, deployed here from Tinker Air Force Base, Okla., and a native of Lenox, S.D. "I think we are all excited to be a part of it. It's a big capability, and it's nice to be able to bring this capability to more and more of the troops on the ground."

"The job satisfaction is amazing out here," he concluded. "You know you're making a difference, you know you're helping the guys on the ground. That's what we are here to do."



JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq — Lt. Col. Phillip Stewart, 362nd Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron commander, conducts a pre-flight inspection of an MC-12 Liberty aircraft here June 10, prior to the aircraft's first combat sortie. A native of Silver Spring, Md., Colonel Stewart is deployed here from Langley Air Force Base, Va. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Tiffany Trojca)