



*Here: A Raptor takes on fuel from a KC-10 after an operation in Syria Sept. 23, 2014. The September strikes marked the F-22's first combat use. Right: Gen. Frank Gorenc (r), USAFE commander, said the F-22's presence in Europe helped assure allies the US would protect them from Russian aggression. To his right is ACC Commander Gen. Hawk Carlisle.*

**T**he F-22 Raptor is performing even better than expected in the war zones of Iraq and Syria, and the Air Force is planning to take full advantage of its capabilities in “everything we do,” said Air Combat Command boss Gen. Herbert J. “Hawk” Carlisle in September during the Air Force Association’s Air & Space Conference in National Harbor, Md.

The fifth generation fighter made its combat debut in September 2014 during the opening assault against ISIS extremists in Syria, and Carlisle said the aircraft is “doing extraordinarily” as it continues to play a vital role in Operation Inherent Resolve.

Since it entered the fight, the F-22 has flown hundreds of sorties, thousands of hours, and dropped hundreds of bombs, but perhaps the fighters’ most important contribution to the mission is the situational awareness it provides. Carlisle said this “makes every single airplane in the airspace on the coalition side that much better.”

In the fight against ISIS, the F-22 has been “absolutely incredible,” said Carlisle. “I’d venture to say it does more than was even thought it could do. It produces greater capability and when you put it in the hands of our airmen, it does fantastic things. It’s an aerial quarterback.”



# Fifth Gen Quarterback

The F-22 has proved its mettle against ISIS.

In fact, the Raptor's situational awareness, precision attack capability, and newfound quarterback role is so critical USAF won't even send other aircraft into certain areas in Syria and Iraq unless they are escorted by F-22s, he added.

The Raptor also is reliable, with recent mission capable rates around 75 percent, and "even better in the field." Carlisle said the fighters have proved to be "far more" maintainable than originally expected.

In late August, four F-22s from the 95th Fighter Squadron at Tyndall AFB, Fla., and a C-17 from the 60th Airlift Wing at Travis AFB, Calif., arrived at Spangdahlem AB, Germany, for the Raptor's first European deployment.

It also was the first "rapid Raptor" deployment for ACC, said Carlisle. The concept, which was first developed in Pacific Air Forces, involves dispatching a contingent of F-22s with a smaller logistics package to a forward location with the expectation that the fighters will be combat-ready within 24 hours of deploying.

Carlisle said the concept worked well, and the Raptors flew "100 percent of the [planned] sorties," including stops at Lask AB, Poland, and Amari AB, Estonia, where they trained with USAF and allied forces and demonstrated the United States' commitment to NATO and European security.

"I was eager to get the F-22 in theater to show and assure our allies that we are serious about our contribution to NATO," said US Air Forces in Europe-Air Forces Africa boss Gen. Frank Gorenc.

## SURPRISE MESSAGE

The decision to introduce the aircraft into the European theater "was made a long time ago in our effort to try and send a message to assure allies and to deter" a "very aggressive Russia," said Gorenc.

"I don't know how well it deterred President [Vladimir] Putin; however, it's done a lot to assure our partners," he said.

By mid-September the European deployment had wrapped up, but Gorenc said the short visit helped pilots and crews see how the fifth generation fighter can operate and collaborate with USAF units and allies in the region. Each of the stops during the deployment was conducted in "rapid order," also proving that the infrastructure is available to support the F-22, he added.

"When American airpower shows up in a place people don't expect, ... it sends a pretty big message. [It] assures our allies, friends, and partners, and also sends a distinct message to potential adversaries out there that we

can be where we need to be when we need to be there," said Carlisle.

Gorenc said, "You can bet that I will be asking for that capability" in the future, but when asked if there were any plans to bed down F-22s in Europe or create a semipermanent detachment similar to the continuous bomber presence on Guam, he said, "it depends."

"I recognize there are priorities to be accomplished and I'm hoping that ... every once in a while, [we] come above the line, but I think already, we proved a lot," said Gorenc.

Carlisle said ACC is developing a "rapid personnel recovery, roll on, roll off capability," which he dubbed "Rapid Next." He said the command expects to exercise the capability at "an overseas location" in a couple months.

"We're developing this and it's getting better all the time," said Carlisle. "I also believe that when we get this right, we will truly be able to give more capability to combatant commanders with the amount of capacity we have. It's developing at a rapid pace."

"One of the ways" for the Air Force to benefit from its flexibility "when we have a capacity problem, is to act faster, is to move things faster, and get them faster. That's where Rapid Raptor comes from," Carlisle said. "Rapid Next will take us to an even greater level." ✦