

## The tyranny of distance; Singular circumstances; Bolstering security; Supporting Somalia ....

### ENABLERS

The bulk of Flintlock—US Africa Command’s premier special operations forces exercise—is based on one-to-one contact between troops on the ground. But about 60 Ohio Air National Guardsmen played a critical role in this year’s iteration: transporting people and equipment via air around a training area nearly twice the size of the continental United States.

More than 20 countries and 2,000 people participated in Exercise Flintlock 2017. It included events in Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, Morocco, Tunisia, Cameroon, and Mauritania.

“We’re a force enabler, we’re able to bridge the gap between these large geographical locations,” said Lt. Col. Jeremy Ford, the director of operations for the 164th Airlift Squadron, 179th Airlift Wing, from Mansfield, Ohio. He served as director of the air operations center for Exercise Flintlock, headquartered in N’Djamena, Chad.

“We’re solving the tyranny of distance for this exercise,” Ford told *Air Force Magazine*.

The multinational activity is designed to build and strengthen partnerships and build the capacity to help the African nations “protect the civilian population, particularly against cross-border attacks from violent extremist groups,” Ford said.

The unit sent two C-130s and some five dozen people to Africa for the exercise, and as the “primary airlift mover” for Flintlock, they transported more than 400 people and 50 tons of cargo over the course of three weeks.

### HOT, DUSTY, SANDY

“These conditions, you can’t simulate back in the state of Ohio,” Ford said. “So being here in Africa with the hot, sandy, dusty conditions, where we’ve got to work through challenges with a limited amount of resources, ... we had to kind of think outside the box and become creative.”

Ford said the exercise provided critical operational experience the airmen can use in the future and an opportunity for the unit to hone its skills as a force multiplier for Active Duty troops, particularly special operations forces.

“All these contingency operations we’re involved in today, it’s not just our Active Duty forces. It’s a combination of Active Duty, ANG, and Reserve forces. So when we’re able to train together and work together in an environment like this, it makes us more interoperable and it makes a better Total Force package,” Ford explained. “That real-world experience is going to pay off in the future for us.”

Ford said the airmen “learned a lot from this exercise about what we can expect from our special operations forces if we ever wanted to integrate with them in the future.”

Flintlock was also a way to increase interoperability with African partner nations and Western partner nations, he said.

Chadian Brig. Gen. Zakaria Ngobongue noted at the ex-



179th Airlift Wing aircraft maintainers from the Ohio Air National Guard prepare a C-130 for the Flintlock 17 exercise.

ercise’s opening ceremony that the environment “is plagued with insecurity” and said that Flintlock is “a great opportunity for our special forces to benefit from the shared training of participating nations.”

“Terrorism, one of the major dangers of the third millennium, threatens the stability of states and security of citizens while fueling violence and hatred,” Ngobongue said.

The Air Guardsmen weren’t the only USAF personnel involved in the exercise; several Air Force Special Operations Command troops embedded in US Special Operations Command Africa participated, as well. Many were involved in medical training on the ground, Ford said.

“We’ve done the first-ever Chadian [casualty evacuation] training here in Chad this year, with our AFSOC folks and our Air Guard aircraft,” Ford explained.

The event included training on the ground and more in the air, with soldiers playing roles as patients, he said.

### GOING AFTER AL-SHABAB

Also in March, President Donald J. Trump approved a plan to provide offensive air strikes for the African Union Mission and efforts to defeat al-Shabab militants in Somalia. The authorization designated Somalia as an “active area of hostilities” for 180 days.

“This authority is consistent with our approach of developing capable Somali security forces and supporting regional partners in their efforts to combat al-Shabab,” Pentagon spokesman Navy Capt. Jeff Davis told reporters at the Pentagon.

Davis said the help will increase pressure on the Islamic militant group.

“We stand with the international community in supporting the federal government of Somalia as it strives to improve stability and security in Somalia. The additional support provided by this authority will help deny al-Shabab safe havens from which it could attack US citizens or US interests in the region,” Davis stated. ★

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