

COMACC visits 379th AEW, addresses Airmen's questions about evolving AF

by Staff Sgt. Jasmine Reif
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During the commander of Air Combat Command's recent tour of the Central Command area of responsibility, he spent a day at the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing to talk with Airmen and hear about the good ideas being developed at the base and to find out which processes he could help improve.

"It's always great to come down here and see the inventiveness and commitment of our Airmen," said Gen. Ronald Keys, ACC commander. "I have two goals, one is to make sure all the good ideas being developed over here get back to the force at large so we can train and be smarter when the next rotation rolls in and second is to find out about processes that aren't working as well as they should so I can go back and fix them."

379th AEW airframes

ACC operates fighter, bomber, reconnaissance, battle-management, and electronic-combat aircraft. It also provides command, control, communications and intelligence systems, and conducts global information operations. The 379th AEW is the deployed home to many ACC airframes - the B-1B Lancer, RC-135 Rivet Joint and E-8C Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System.

The 34th Expeditionary Bomber Squadron flies B-1B Lancers in support of Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

"The B-1 is a great piece of equipment. It carries the largest conventional weapons load of any of my bombers," General Keys said. "It has the capability of being a 'Burger King' jet. You can have it your way and load it however you want. It can stay airborne for a long time and provides the precision and persistence we need."

The general said two improvements are currently being worked for the B-1.

"We want to improve the B-1's capability of getting inside the net and passing information around to everyone who's airborne. The second is giving them more precision, which will be done through adapting a laser pod," General Keys said. "We're currently working through technical issues and it's just a matter of getting the pieces and parts and putting them on the airplane."

The RC-135 Rivet Joint provides worldwide reconnaissance, real-time intelligence, command and control, information warfare and combat support to national leadership and war fighting commanders. The RJ has been deployed in this area of responsibility for 16 and a half straight years.

"Their mission contribution is amazing," General Keys said. He added that initially the RJ was built, and people were trained,



Gen. Ronald Keys, Air Combat Command commander

to respond to a war in central Europe. "It's a perfect example of the ability to adapt and learn based on today's environment," General Keys said. "They do many more things than it was originally designed to do. It has upgraded technology, so the capabilities it brings to the fight were never even dreamed of when it was built and brought online."

The Airmen of the 763rd Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron have successfully adapted to the change of enemy tactics. They have worked through the bugs in their new systems in the heat of the environment, while keeping up with the high ops tempo of the wing.

Another aircraft that has adapted to the War on Terrorism is the E-8C Joint STARS, which 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 targeting that contributes to the delay, disruption and destruction of enemy forces.

"I'm impressed by the adaptability of the crews who are flying the planes. The technology is one thing, but the ability to take that technology and use it in inventive ways like coming up with cross unit targets and answers to questions that the aircraft was never built to answer is amazing."

The men and women of the 128th Expeditionary Air Command and Control Squadron

are unique. They are the epitome of Total Force, as a blended unit composed of Army, Air Force and Air National Guard personnel, and they work together to detect, locate and attack enemy armor at ranges beyond the forward area of U.S. ground forces.

The general highlighted a critical capability to our success, but also a significant concern, the KC-135 Stratotanker.

The KC-135s maintain a continuous presence throughout the AOR ready to air refuel Air Force, Navy, Marine, and Coalition aircraft at any time. The aging KC-135 is the Air Force's top recapitalization priority. The air refuelers get us where we need to be and then allow us to remain in the fight longer.

"We're hopeful that very soon we'll have a KC-135 replacement program started and have the proposals out," General Keys said. "We think it will start sometime this year and then it will take a number of years before the KC-X, as we call it right now, is on the ramp. New air refuelers are critical. The aircraft we have now are doing outstanding work, but they're doing it on the backs of our maintainers."

Combat training

As the number of deployments to hostile environments increases for Airmen across the Air Force, combat skills training has become a constantly evolving program.

"It's almost daily that a new tactic, technique or procedure is developed and if it turns

out to be successful, it's fanned out to the rest of the force. As each AEF comes down, it is better trained, better prepared and better adapted," General Keys said.

He said one of the greatest things about coming to this AOR is seeing how people are adapting to the requirements of combat and how quickly those lessons learned are sent back to the states and implemented in exercises across the country. He said Airmen are doing things much differently today than even six months ago.

AFSO 21

The 379th AEW is an example of innovation, ingenuity and of expeditionary operations. Airmen have continuously improved processes as their missions expanded, despite limited infrastructure.

With fewer people in the Air Force, the general says he thinks Airmen must do their jobs smarter and figure out what processes can be eliminated to save time and money. The Air Force program Air Force Smart Operations 21 was created to encourage Airmen to do just that.

"I've told my Airmen that AFSO 21 is pretty simple. The first thing is you have to figure out what we aren't going to do anymore. You can't take 40,000 people out of the Air Force and give all the work to everybody else," General Keys explained. "When we figure that out then we have to decide what the right way to do it is."

The general said he encourages Airmen to consider what can be done faster because if things are done faster two things will happen. "I can give people back their lives because they don't have to be on 14-hour shifts," General Keys said. The second benefit is people on normal shifts can accomplish more work if they are operating more efficiently.

Two examples of that process working can be found in the 379th Expeditionary Theater Distribution Center and 379th Expeditionary Maintenance Squadron Centralized Intermediate Repair Facility.

The ETDC streamlined its equipment issue process by using numbered metal seals on bags. The numbers are kept in a database, and the seal is checked for integrity upon the individual's return. If the seal is not broken, an inventory is not necessary, which saves about a minute of processing per person. One minute multiplied by 360 people getting on a rotator equals six hours of processing time saved per group.

The 379th Expeditionary Maintenance Squadron Centralized Intermediate Repair Facility is an example of saving time and money by putting war fighter assets into the hands of war fighters quicker.

They provided 11 C-130 engines and 27 C-130 propellers to forward deployed units saving \$2 million. In addition, the C-130, KC-135 and E-8 wheel and tire shop reduced their maintenance steps from 92 to 57 cutting the time spent on repairs by 15 percent. The result was 17 percent more tires were repaired

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Air Command Command
commander**

with the same amount of work.

He said there are many inventive changes that can be made. "We can look at our jobs and say you know, if I started doing this job today and I had a clean sheet of paper would I do it the same way? In some cases you would say yes and others you would say you wouldn't do it that way at all.

Nontraditional missions

It's also a great compliment to our Airmen that they can perform nontraditional missions with the Army, General Keys said. "The fact that we're adaptable enough to take a fairly small amount of training and end up with a skill level doing missions that need to be done without missing a beat.

However, Air Force leadership is making an effort to get Airmen back to doing the jobs they were originally trained to do and away from providing in lieu of forces to the Army.

"My problem is when I train people to do things outside their Air Force skill I have no way of keeping them current on their primary job," he said.

In some cases Airmen will perform jobs for the Army that the Airmen already have skills in such as explosive ordnance disposal, office of special investigations and combat communications. "What we're attempting to minimize now are skills such as convoy drivers, that require Airmen to get an entirely new set of training and combat skills in order to do it properly."

Merging career fields

As Airmen continue to learn new skills with the Army, the Air Force is making Airmen multi-skilled by merging career fields.

"I think we're going to make some real money with merging Air Force Specialty Codes. Its one of the ways we're going to survive the cut of 40,000 people," General Keys said.

"We'll 'multi-skill' people so when Airmen go on an expeditionary operation there

are people who are not only a hydraulics specialist, but on some level also an electrician.

The Air Force is in the process of identifying which skills would be smart to put together.

"Not only does it give us more capability per person but there's a real savings because when I reduce the number of AFSCs I have, I reduce the number of technical school instructors, who I'd like to put in my expeditionary rotation. We won't need as many school houses and all the money that goes into supporting them.

According to General Keys, merging AFSCs makes Airmen more flexible and adaptable, which is one of the expeditionary goals. Also, it saves money and reduces the number of people needed in the force. "We're going to start down this road and as we learn more we're going to adjust, nothing is forever," he said.

Reduction in force

Another reason for merging AFSCs is to allow the Air Force to reduce the force by 40,000 people.

"I think this will be the toughest year for us because last year we started losing the slots in the Air Force and this year it's the faces," General Keys said. "People will PCS and no one will come in to replace them."

He said in a number of cases when the Air Force has given up so many Airmen, people have to readjust because some are going to be put into new career fields to avoid shortfalls in others.

"This will be a real learning year for us to figure out if we made the cuts exactly the right way and we'll ask ourselves if we need to make adjustments to make sure we have capability across the wing," General Keys said.

His challenge as the MAJCOM commander is to take a bright idea and farm it across the command so that everyone is doing it the same way.

"We're an expeditionary Air Force and when we end up at the end of the world again in another war we need to be able to get to an expeditionary wing and have everyone doing the processes the same way," he said. "I don't need to discover fire more than once and I don't want everyone reinventing the wheel."

"It's always great to come where the work of the Air Force is getting done. I see enthusiastic, courageous and disciplined people who are making it happen and I appreciate the work that everyone is doing," General Keys said.

"I've told everyone two things. I need those cards and letters of all the good things being developed down here and I need to know what needs to be fixed so that I can work on it. My responsibility is to get the resources, training and people to where they need to be to get the mission done."

Diligentia et Accuratio

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Passing the torch

**AEF 5/6 accomplishments prepare
AEF 7/8 for success**

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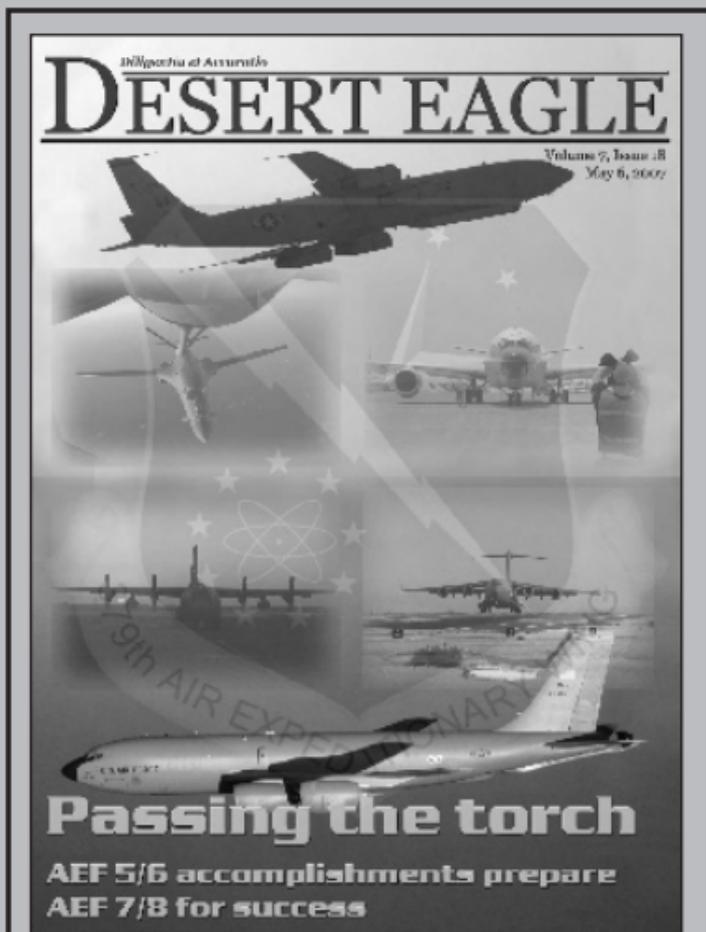
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Graphic by Staff Sgt. William Reynard

On the cover: 379th Air Expeditionary Wing aircraft provided persistent, unblinking and lethal airpower across the AOR in direct support of the Global War on Terrorism. See Pages 8-10 for final figures and the rotation in review as AEF 5/6 prepares to pass the torch to AEF 7/8.