

MC-12 flies first combat sortie

6/11/2009 - **JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq** -- The U.S. Air Force's new MC-12 Liberty aircraft flew its first combat sortie June 10.

"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 (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) 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.

"Project Liberty MC-12 is the first of its kind," said Lt. Gen. Gary North, 9th Air Force and U.S. Air Forces Central commander. "What our Air Force teams at our various headquarters staffs have done with the program has been nothing short of miraculous.

"They've satisfied very ambitious objectives and done it alongside our industry partners to achieve combat-urgent requests in a superb fashion, from initial contracts to combat sorties inside eight months," the general added. "This capability to the field will enable our ability to continue to provide the persistent stare and integration of the MC-12 as our U.S. Air Force's newest ISR platform in theater.

"The allocation of this asset to the fight to best integrate within the joint forces in-theater will meet the needs of the commanders in both Iraq and Afghanistan as we continue to receive the combat-coded aircraft in the AOR (area of responsibility)," General North also said.

The MC-12 is a manned special-mission turboprop aircraft designed to augment information gathered by other intelligence-collection capabilities operating in-theater and allow military leaders to make battlefield decisions. Overall, the aircraft carries a specialized four-person crew aboard and communications equipment to provide full-motion video and signals intelligence.

"The MC-12 is an embodiment of the Air Force's commitment to Coalition ground forces," said Lt. Col. Phillip Stewart, 362nd ERS commander. "Our focus is to provide dedicated, responsive ISR operations, and we're ready to go."

In April 2008, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates established the ISR Task Force to better support warfighters on the ground in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility with increased ISR. A few months later, the task force launched Project Liberty - a program to deploy MC-12s to the AOR.

"ISR is a core Air Force mission," General North said. "Our Airmen know how important ISR capacity, capability and integration are in combat operations. The MC-12 enhances and complements the entire ISR umbrella . from the continuum of space down to small UAVs and will integrate in a seamless fashion into the scheme of maneuver in the processing, exploitation and dissemination of intelligence at all required levels in the battlespace."



JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq — The first MC-12 Liberty aircraft in-theater lands here at approximately 6:20 p.m. local time June 10 after its first combat sortie. The Air Force's newest ISR platform, the MC-12 is a medium-altitude manned special-mission turbo prop aircraft designed for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. The aircraft will operate from here in direct support of Coalition and joint ground forces. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Tiffany Trojca)