

Virtual Flag provides joint combat training

by Nick Tovo
Defense Media Activity

11/13/2008 - **HICKAM AIR FORCE BASE, Hawaii** -- HICKAM AIR FORCE BASE, Hawaii (AFPN) - - More than 300 joint service members spanning across 20 worldwide locations participated in the Virtual Flag exercise Nov. 3-7.

Virtual Flag is a large combat employment exercise conducted in a virtual battlespace. It is designed to provide operational and tactical warfighter training in a combat environment.

"Virtual Flag provides the entire training audience an opportunity to interact with joint elements of the Theater Air Control System with minimum additional personnel demands on high-demand/low-density assets," said David Milewski, Virtual Flag program manager, Air Combat Command, Langley Air Force Base, Va. "A primary focus is on the TACS providing command and control training from the joint terminal air controller up to the air and space operations center floor."

Through the Distributed Mission Operations Center at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M., Virtual Flag links geographically separated joint units together, allowing each to interact with one another using aircraft simulators at their home stations.

The 613th Air and Space Operations Center here was the command and control hub for the virtual environment. This is the first time 613th AOC personnel participated in Virtual Flag from home station.

"We provide the information, intelligence and taskings to the aircraft to execute bombs on target or pick up signals and take pictures of different targets," 1st Lt. Roslyn Schulte, an intelligence and reconnaissance officer for the 613th AOC.

Virtual Flag allows pilots and operational controllers to get the same experience they would get out of a real flying exercise without using costly fuel and deployment time.

"We're put into a very realistic virtual world," said Maj. Chad Fager, chief of dynamic targeting for the 613th AOC. "For example, if you're in your simulator in New Jersey, you can look to your left and see someone flying in their simulator in Wisconsin. Those guys are able to fly together and be controlled by the AOC here at Hickam."

Lieutenant Schulte believes Virtual Flag is a great opportunity for the Army, Navy and Air Force to work as a team.

"We get to work with their maritime operations center which is similar to our air operations center," Lieutenant Schulte said. "So it's been great training for us to work on our real time communication and tasking."

Virtual Flag is an ACC-sponsored exercise held four times a year. ACC plans to include coalition forces in Virtual Flag for the first time during the current fiscal year.



HICKAM AIR FORCE BASE, Hawaii-- Personnel on the 613th Air and Space Operations Center floor provide command and control for air and space operations within the Pacific theater. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Justin Huett)