

First Heavy Airlift Wing Mission without US Air Crew on Board

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From the delivery of its first aircraft in July 2009, the Heavy Airlift Wing (HAW) has flown every mission with a multinational crew. Today for the first time in its short history, the HAW completed a combat mission with a different crew mix: seven airmen consisting of three Swedes, two Norwegians, one Bulgarian and one Polish had the honor of flying the first mission without any US Air Force crew members on board. With this accomplishment the 12-nation Strategic Airlift Capability (SAC) has taken a significant step forward in providing strategic airlift to the partner nations of Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden, and the United States. On the same mission the aircraft itself was the first of the three aircraft fleet to accumulate more than 1000 flying hours of the nearly 2800 hours flown by the HAW since its activation.

The significance of this occasion was not lost on the air crew involved. "Yes, there was something special in the air, when we left for this mission. On previous missions we've always had US personnel on board, but now we were on our own," says Captain Oyvind Haheim, a Norwegian pilot and aircraft commander, who flew his first C-17 flight in February 2009. As one of the first new C-17 pilots trained in this unit, he has seen and participated in missions flown by the HAW in combat AORs and in support of humanitarian relief operations following the Haiti earthquake.

HAW leadership also pointed out the importance of this day at the strategic level. "To outside observers, this mission looks like any mission we have flown in our short history: the HAW moved cargo to the ISAF AOR in support of a partner nation. However, to the 12 SAC nations and the combined teams of the HAW, NATO Airlift Management Agency (NAMA), Boeing and Papa Air Base, this mission is a significant milestone," states HAW commander, Colonel John Zazworsky of the US Air Force. "All SAC nations sent experienced airmen to the HAW, and together with the experienced C-17 personnel from the US Air Force they have learned to fly, maintain, support and plan missions for the C-17. Now our crew force is maturing to the point where crew members are upgrading to positions of greater responsibility according to their past experience. We'll celebrate this accomplishment appropriately, and then quickly move on to the work ahead of us: continuing to expand the capacity of the HAW and proving the concept that 12 partner nations can work in cooperation to provide a valuable military capability to all involved," added Colonel Zazworsky.