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"Gunfighters" experiment and exercise expeditionary style



366th Wing and contractor members of the Mountain Home AFB Joint Expeditionary Force Experiment '99 team monitor the En Route Expeditionary Operations Center pallet during a flight Sunday as part of JEFX's live-fly portion. (USAF photo by Senior Airman Bennie Davis)

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MOUNTAIN HOME AIR FORCE BASE, Idaho (ACCNS) - One of the differences between experiments and exercises is that "we exercise to train, we experiment to learn," according to Maj. Gen. Jerry Perryman, Aerospace Command and Control and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Center commander.

People and aircraft from here did both this week during the live-fly portion of the Joint Expeditionary Force Experiment '99.

Beginning Sunday, more than 40 366th Wing aircraft -- including KC-135R tankers, B-1B bombers and F-15C, F-15E and F-16 fighters -- flew simulated combat missions over the Nellis AFB, Nev., ranges thwarting a fictional enemy which was "invading" Nevada. Hundreds of 366th WG "Gunfighters" from various operational and support functions were also involved in the effort.

"The live-fly exercise gave the wing the opportunity to practice being an on-call, air expeditionary wing as part of the Air Force's new structure and deployment schedule," said Maj.

Marc Jamison, wing JEFX project officer. "The experiment scenario and coalition participation was the perfect environment to practice our composite wing training."

But this week also saw a continuation of Gunfighter involvement in experimentation. One JEFX initiative tested by wing people included the En Route Expeditionary Operations Center.

First tested at last year's Expeditionary Force Experiment, the EEOC was again in the middle of crucial command and control requirements. Loaded on a modified KC-135, the center launched from here Sunday in front of the deploying bombers and fighters. Once airborne, the EEOC was connected through a variety of communication links to the Air Force Operations Support Center at Langley AFB, Va., the deployed EOC at Nellis AFB, Nev., and two wing B-1B bombers.

In addition to receiving the Air Tasking Order and re-tasking the bombers en route to their targets, the commander and his staff were able to communicate with all the major JEFX locations and plan the next day's missions, taking advantage of valuable time in the air en route to the deployed location.

"I need real time communications connectivity forward to the Area of Responsibility and back to home station while en route -- the ability to get updates and guidance from the Joint Forces Air Component Commander and monitor the wing's launch while airborne hours ahead of the main force," said Col. Robin Scott, 366th WG commander, who led Sunday's EEOC mission.

Some of the gear tested this week included worldwide telephone connectivity using INMARSAT and Iridium, both commercial portable, airborne systems. EEOC members also tested a new ability to surf the Department of Defense's classified Web called the SIPRNET. On Sunday's flight, Scott participated in a JEFX chat room with key decision-makers at Langley AFB, Nellis AFB, and at Hurlburt Field, Fla.

Describing the EEOC mission, Scott said "The flight went well overall with lots of lessons learned on the viability and ease-of-use of some of the communications gear. This wing has had the capability to plan en route for several years, and the new technology we were experimenting with simply allowed us to do the job better."

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