Boeing C-17 Globemaster III Reaches Million Flight Hour Milestone

The fleet of C-17 Globemaster III airlifters built by The Boeing Company [NYSE:BA] has reached one million flying hours -- the equivalent of one of the advanced cargo jets flying every minute of every day continuously for more than 114 years.

A mission today evacuating injured U.S. troops from Iraq and transporting them to Germany for medical treatment helped the aircraft reach this million-hour milestone. The Air Force selected this C-17 and its crew, comprised of active duty U.S. Air Force (USAF), Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve and Royal Air Force members, to represent the entire fleet.

The Air Force originally anticipated the C-17 fleet would have intense 30-day surge periods only a few times in the aircraft's lifetime. But since the war on terrorism began nearly five years ago, the fleet has been surging continuously. Relief for natural disasters like earthquakes, hurricanes and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami has added to the demand.

"The intense, non-stop pace of C-17 operations is like driving the Indianapolis 500 on a daily basis, rather than once a year," said Dave Bowman, Boeing vice president and C-17 program manager. "Our unparalleled customer support of the operational fleet has been a key element in enabling the C-17's surge mode. Boeing teams are working side-by-side with the customer's maintenance crews around the globe, 24 hours a day. We are there for our customer -- anytime, anywhere."

The flight hour milestone came significantly sooner than Air Force or Boeing planners anticipated. Officials at the Tanker Airlift Control Center, the Air Force's nerve center for global airlift operations, confirmed that C-17s have been pressed much harder since Sept. 11, 2001, than originally planned.

"Reaching this milestone is an incredible accomplishment for the entire C-17 team," Bowman said. "And hitting one million flight hours more than a year ahead of the original plan is a testament to the aircraft and our customers' confidence in it."

Whether supporting the warfighter or providing vital humanitarian relief around the globe, the C-17 has continually demonstrated during its first million hours why it is now the world's airlifter of choice.

"When you look at the punishment this aircraft takes from the environment it operates in -- landing regularly on unimproved surfaces and lengthy stays away from home station maintenance -- the high mission capable rate seems to illustrate that the aircraft structures and systems are robust and up to the challenge," said U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Donald Dickerson of the Air Mobility Command's Aircraft Maintenance Section.

The C-17's million-hour journey began with its first flight from Long Beach, Calif., on Sept. 15, 1991. While most of those hours have been flown by C-17 customers, Boeing's ongoing support was integral to reaching the milestone. The quality, capability and reliability designed and built into the C-17 have allowed the customer to fly the airplane far beyond the number of hours originally envisioned.

Boeing employees and supplier company partners will gather March 27 at the Long Beach, Calif., C-17 assembly plant to hear from the U.S. Air Force and U.K. Royal Air Force leaders responsible for amassing this remarkable flight hour tally. The C-17 crew and the jet they flew for the aero-medical evacuation into Iraq also will attend.

Boeing currently is on a multi-year production contract to design, build and deliver 180 C-17s to the U.S. Air Force through 2008. To date, the USAF has 148 C-17s in its fleet, with four additional Globemaster IIIs operated by the Royal Air Force.

A unit of The Boeing Company, Boeing Integrated Defense Systems is one of the world's largest space and defense businesses. Headquartered in St. Louis, Boeing Integrated Defense Systems is a $30.5 billion business. It provides network-centric system solutions to its global military, government, and commercial customers. It is a leading provider of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems; the world's largest military aircraft manufacturer; the world's largest satellite manufacturer and a leading provider of space-based communications; the primary systems integrator for U.S. missile defense; NASA's largest contractor; and a global leader in sustainment solutions and launch services.
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