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LONG BEACH, Calif., April 30, 2009 -- Boeing [NYSE: BA] and the UK Royal Air Force (RAF) today announced that the RAF fleet of six C-17 Globemaster III airlifters has surpassed 50,000 flying hours in eight years of service.

A mission out of Afghanistan on Tuesday, April 28 helped the fleet achieve the milestone.

"The C-17 is a remarkable airlifter in every way imaginable, from mission readiness and reliability to its flexibility in being able to handle tough tasks," said RAF Air Marshal Kevin Leeson, Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff for Logistic Operations. "I can't imagine operating without them."

The C-17s, assigned to 99 Squadron at RAF base Brize Norton near London, provide critical airlift capability for the Joint Rapid Reaction Force. Brize Norton is the RAF headquarters for strategic air transport and air-to-air refueling.

"This accomplishment is a testament to the RAF and to the Boeing employees who build this reliable, durable aircraft and support our customers' maintenance crews around the world, 24 hours a day," said Jean Chamberlin, Boeing vice president and general manager, Global Mobility Systems.

"The Royal Air Force was the first international C-17 customer to utilize a unique 'Virtual Fleet' concept developed by the U.S. Air Force and Boeing as an offer under a foreign military sales case. The virtual fleet structure ensures cooperative support and spares to the RAF fleet no matter their geographic location," said Gus Urzua, Boeing vice president and program manager for the C-17 Globemaster III Sustainment Partnership (GSP). "Congratulations to the RAF."

The RAF received its first C-17s from Boeing in May 2001. The four leased aircraft accumulated more than 16,000 flying hours in their first three years. The UK government decided to buy the four airlifters at the conclusion of their lease, and to purchase additional aircraft.

By the time UK5 and UK6 were delivered in April and June 2008, the fleet had reached 41,000 flying hours. Within hours of delivery, both aircraft flew out of Brize Norton on RAF missions.

"Eighty percent of our current tasking is in and out of Iraq and Afghanistan," said RAF Wing Cmdr. Simon Edwards, Officer Commanding 99 Squadron. "The RAF C-17 has exceeded expectations from Day One. This is another excellent example of how much we contribute to UK Defence."

The RAF marked another notable C-17 achievement in March when RAF Squadron Leader Keith Hewitt logged 5,000 flying hours in the aircraft. Hewitt is one of only a few C-17 pilots to reach this milestone.

There are currently 200 C-17s in service worldwide -- 14 with international customers. The C-17 is the world's only tactical airlift aircraft with strategic capabilities that allow it to fly between continents and land on short, austere runways.

The U.S. Air Force, including active Guard and Reserve units, has 186. International customers include the UK Royal Air Force, the Canadian Forces, the Royal Australian Air Force, Qatar, and the 12-member Strategic Airlift Capability consortium of NATO and Partnership for Peace nations. The United Arab Emirates announced in February that it will acquire four C-17s.

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