News Release

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AIR FORCE MATERIEL COMMAND'S GENERAL DELIVERS CAFB'S NEWEST C-17

CHARLESTON AFB, SC -- The commander of Air Force Material Command delivered the 89th production model of the C-17A Globemaster III to Charleston AFB Aug. 1.

"America should see this and talk to the professionals who put these airplanes together," said Gen. Lester Lyles, AFMC commander. "Talk to the aircraft commanders and see what they have been able to do with this aircraft and how we are supporting the war on terrorism. I am honored to be a part of the delivery crew."

As leader of the command responsible for acquiring new aircraft systems, Lyles said he jumped at the chance to tour the Boeing aircraft assembly plant at Long Beach, Calif., and flew in a brand-new Block-13 version of the C-17 on its maiden flight to Charleston. Each block version is a major modification of the previous aircraft.

The delivery Aug. 1 was the second of 12 planned deliveries of the Block 13 aircraft, which includes upgraded mission computer software, extended range fuel tanks, improved airdrop and formation flying capabilities, and advanced wind sheer and terrain warning systems.

Lyles said he has always been a big fan of the C-17.

"In a wartime environment (in) a landlocked country with unimproved runways, very rough terrain and the worst conditions that you can imagine, this aircraft and crews are doing fantastic," Lyles said.

Air Force Material Command, headquartered at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio, manages the C-17 System Program Office and the logistics system that keeps the aircraft flying.

"The flexible sustainment contract for depot maintenance with Boeing has worked out very well," Lyles said. "We are trying to partner with Boeing to make sure at some point that we can do some of the work for sustainment at our Air Logistics Center at Warner-Robins (AFB) in middle Georgia.

"We're in the process of defining what that partnering role will be," Lyles continued. "It will be a team effort to take advantage of the best of the talents of the Boeing people and my guys at Warner Robins."

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Warner-Robins ALC already conducts some of the C-17 fleet's analytical condition inspections, he added.

Lyles said one of the lessons learned in procurement of the C-17 is that when the Air Force gets an aircraft this good, it needs to get a lot of them.

“I don’t know if our budget will allow us to do that in every case, but we’re looking at ways to increase procurement,” Lyles said.

He mentioned that Gen. John Handy, commander of U.S. Transportation Command and Air Mobility Command, has already stated the need for at least 222 C-17s.

“I’m hoping we’ll get a lot more,” he said.

The biggest lesson learned with C-17s was the need to stick with the program.

“The C-17 had some challenges at the very beginning ten years ago,” said Lyles. “We managed to get through that and it has been a tremendous success. That same approach can be applied to other systems today. We need to stick with the program as best we can.”

When visiting the Boeing plant, Lyles concluded AFMC could benchmark off Boeing’s employees, particularly at Air Logistics Centers.

“Its true!” Lyles said. “We are trying to make sure we are a true partner with them. Their plant was truly state-of-the-art in terms of technology.”

Lt. Col. Steve Shope, 15th Airlift Squadron commander and one of the pilots who brought in the new aircraft, described the general as being genuinely interested in how AFMC can further improve the aircraft.

“He spoke with everyone on the aircrew, seeking their ideas and asking for feedback,” Shope said. “It was his first time on a C-17 flight and he was very impressed with the technology and how well it worked.”

Lyles said he encourages top Air Force leadership to be a part of these delivery ceremonies. He said the experience could further motivate the workforce and even the general officer.

“It was really a thrill to talk to those outstanding people at the Boeing plant,” said Lyles. “Listening to the aircraft commander and his experiences flying the C-17 in Afghanistan, and seeing the aircrew in action, was a thrill to me.

“I knew about the state of the technology in the C-17, but you really don’t appreciate it until you have a chance to be in the cockpit while it is operating,” Lyles continued. “The thing that impressed me most was what the loadmaster could do in the back, and the versatility in quickly reconfiguring the aircraft for various loads. The loadmaster is one of those unsung heroes; he really has a tremendous asset in his hands.”

Besides AFMC’s strong support for the C-17 program, Lyles also spoke about their outstanding success in supporting the warfighter.

“They (the warfighters) appreciate what we’ve done in our surge capabilities at the Air Logistics Centers, particularly with the munitions that we’re providing,” said Lyles. “They certainly appreciate what we’ve done with incorporating new technology into the C-17, Global Hawk and Predators with Hellfire missiles on them.”

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He added that AFMC has some challenges ahead including to quickly provide capability to the warfighter.

Lyles explained that the Air Force couldn't wait 10-12 years to develop something and get it into people's hands.

"We have a concept called agile acquisition and spiral development," said Lyles. "We are looking at better ways of getting early capability to the warfighter. We let them fly it, try it and operate it, then use improvements in the next spiral update to the platform."

The other challenge is in the Air Logistics Centers.

"We have to make sure they are state of the art, and they can be partners with companies like Boeing to sustain aircraft in the future," Lyles said.

The final challenge is science and technology.

"We have to make sure we don't forget and mortgage our future," said Lyles. "We must continue to put emphasis and money into science and technology."

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