

RAF exchange officers contribute to US rescue and aid effort

Royal Air Force personnel serving on exchange with the US Air Force have played an important role in the relief efforts following the devastation wreaked by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria.

Aerospace Battle Manager Flight Lieutenant Rob Parr is currently serving on an exchange tour in Oklahoma. On 31st August he was aboard an E-3 AWACS aircraft flying over Houston, Texas where Hurricane Harvey had caused significant damage. He said:

“I flew two missions on board the USAF E-3G Sentry, one 6.4 hours long, the other 13.4 hours long from Tinker AFB, Oklahoma. Our job was to provide enhanced radio communication between the helicopter assets and ground based elements to help better co-ordinate the rescue efforts.”



The team aboard the aircraft tracked the status of hospitals, landing zones and provided coordinates and taskings to helicopters undertaking rescues.

“With so much confusion on the ground surrounding who needed to be rescued and what facilities were open, the whole crew felt like we were making a real difference, especially when we would get a call from our ground agency giving us only a street address and cell phone number and vague details of what the survivors’ status were.

“Then we were able to figure out where the location was and task an asset to go and assist. It was also great working with such a wide range of civilian, Coastguard, Navy, Air Force and Army assets all trying to help out the best they could.”

As a direct result of the assistance rendered on the two flights Flt Lt Parr participated, a total of 51 rescues were conducted recovering 218 survivors including three pregnant women and six patients in critical condition.



Summing up the sorties Flt Lt Parr said: “The mission was great, it was probably one of the most rewarding and interesting missions I’ve done in my seven years of flying on AWACS.”

When Hurricane Irma struck the Caribbean Flt Lt Matt Jenkinson piloted a C-17 transport aircraft from its base in North Carolina to Illinois, one of 36 C-17s evacuated from Charleston AFB ahead of the storm. Once there he was put on three hours standby.

“I flew two Hurricane relief Operations” he said. “One was immediately before Irma struck where we landed four hours before the storm arrived to deliver a

search & rescue team and medical & blood supplies. The second was after the storm had passed through – again delivering urgent supplies.”

He added, “We took an Air Traffic Control tower into St Thomas in the US Virgin Islands along with water & food provisions then headed, via Tampa for fuel, to Texas. There we loaded 130 US tons of water and food and took it to St Croix the following day. We received a waiver to operate on night vision goggles into the airfield at night.”



The military personnel exchange programme in its current guise commenced in 1971 when the RAF and USAF agreed to allow each other’s personnel to fill reciprocal positions. Designed to maximise the special relationship the UK shared with the US, the benefits to many areas of air force activity were immediately apparent. In consequence the exchange programme grew steadily to encompass agreements with the US Navy, Marine Corps, Army and Coast Guard.

The range of specialisations also broadened and now embraces everything from Air Transport, Fast Jet, Rotary and ISR platforms, to Project Engineers, Research and Development, Intelligence, Cyber, Space and Force Protection specialists to name but a few. The programme with the United States today stands at an exchange of 55 RAF personnel who have swapped places with 40 Americans now stationed in the UK. Similar exchanges take place with a number of other nations and RAF personnel serve around the world.

Editor: Wg Cdr Dylan Eklund

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[The Ushtar Eagle Has Landed](#)

The UK’s NATO ally Albania hosted over 200 RAF Reserves and Regulars in numerous locations around the country as they trained together developing operational teamwork and friendships on Exercise Ushtar Eagle 17.

Exercise Director and Officer Commanding 8 Force Protection group, Wing Commander Phil Hateley said:

“The UK is committed to NATO, and despite the fact we have are leaving the European Union we are still committed to European security, and our deployment of troops in Albania is a clear demonstration of that. Coming to Albania has given us many opportunities that we could never replicate in the UK. The freedom to be able to go and conduct

military training in and amongst local villages is the hallmark.”



Drawn from 18 individual RAF stations across the UK, Reserves from specialisms including the RAF Regiment, RAF Police, logistics, medical, intelligence and Media Operations worked alongside their Albanian counterparts to hone their war-fighting, peacekeeping and humanitarian skills.

The Balkan country provided a stunning backdrop for a series of gruelling drills and training scenarios that UK and Albanian troops could carry out on operations together in the future. Gunners and soldiers bonded together over tactical training, physical exercise and some social time in the evenings.



Interest in Ushtar Eagle reached presidential levels in the first week with a visit from the Albanian President, Ilir Meta, who watched a combined tactical demonstration by the RAF Regiment Reserves and soldiers from the Third Battalion of the Albanian Army. He was joined by the British Chief of the Defence Staff, Sir Stuart Peach, who was in Albania’s capital Tirana for a NATO conference.

An Albanian naval establishment close to Durres was the setting for members of 2503 and 603 Squadrons and the Third Battalion of the Albanian Army to storm a building suspected of being a “terrorist safe house”. Under the cover of smoke the combined assault team entered the building, making an “arrest” and extracting the “suspect” with the help of RAF and Albanian police.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach said:

“I would like to thank the Albanian people for the warmth of their welcome and the exceptional training facilities they provide. We have come a long way together through our shared military history and shared experience in NATO. I am confident as the UK Chief of Defence that our future is much more secure as a result of our alliance.”



The Albanian Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, Brigadier General Bardhyl Kollçaku, who also attended the demonstration, said:

“This is a demonstration of the excellent cooperation we have between the Armed Forces of the United Kingdom and the

Armed Forces of the Republic of Albania, and the assurance that this cooperation will extend and will continue even more in the future in the interests of peace and security, not only between our countries but also in the region and beyond.”

Moving from the coast to more rural areas in the mountains for the second week the exercise featured section attacks, patrolling through Albanian villages, ambushes and defensive tactics.

Enduring

temperatures over 35 degrees the RAF and their Albanian counterparts trained from dawn till midnight, pushing themselves physically and mentally. The gunners received a warm but curious welcome from the local population as they went about their daily business.



LAC Alex Hand, from 609 Squadron, and the youngest Reservist on the exercise, said:

“Opportunities like this to train abroad are one of the reasons why I joined the Reserves. I have been pushed out of my comfort zone but loved every minute of it. Working with the Albanians has been very interesting and meeting other Reservists from around the country has made me realise the scale of the organisation I belong to.”

This is the first time the RAF Reserves have worked and trained so closely with the UK’s NATO ally Albania. The two countries are developing a close working relationship after the Royal Navy and British Army previously completed exercises and training.

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[Third anniversary of operations against Da'esh](#)

The Royal Air Force has marked the third anniversary of the first UK airstrikes against Da'esh by continuing operations against the false caliphate.

Daesh fighters are being pinned down by the RAF in their former stronghold of Raqqa as the UK marks three years of operations against the barbaric cult in Iraq and Syria.



Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, said:

“British forces have crippled Daesh since 2014, forcing this miserable cult from the gates of Baghdad to the brink of defeat in Raqqa. By air, land and sea UK personnel have played a tireless role in striking targets and training allies, demonstrating that our values will not be compromised at any price.”

Since 2014 RAF Typhoon, Tornado and Reaper aircraft have struck Da'esh 1340 times in Iraq and 262 times in Syria. In that time the group has lost territory, finances, leaders and fighters as the 73-member coalition has liberated cities in both countries. As the second largest contributor to the Global Coalition's military campaign, the UK has flown more than 8,000 sorties providing strikes, surveillance and reconnaissance, air-air refuelling and transport.



The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier said:

“This has been an immense effort by RAF airmen and airwomen over the last three years of continued operations, countering Da'esh in Iraq and Syria. However, the tempo continues with RAF aircraft destroying 17 targets in Syria in a single day last week.”

Three years ago Daesh was barely an hour from the gates of Baghdad, but today it has lost more than 73 per cent of the territory it occupied in Iraq and 65 per cent of its former territory in Syria. The RAF has played an essential role to allies, helping Syrian Democratic Forces engaged in ground close combat and the Iraqi Security Forces who continue their advance having liberated Mosul and Ninewah province. More than 5.5 million people have been freed from Da'esh's rule and over two million displaced Iraqi civilians have returned to their homes. In Mosul alone, it is estimated that over 265,000 people have returned.



The commander of UK air operations in Iraq and Syria, Air Commodore Johnny Stringer said:

“This has been an exceptional operational performance and contribution by the Royal Air Force over three years. The professionalism and judgement of our aircrew has been matched by the unstinting dedication of our engineers, suppliers, and intelligence staff across the Op Shader theatre and the wider support from stations across the UK.

“The evil brutality of Daesh is near its end and we will continue to provide this vital UK airpower until our mission is finished. I am immensely proud

of, and humbled by, the magnificent efforts of all in 83 Expeditionary Air Group who have made such a difference in this fight.”



Recognising the valuable contributions made by many serving military personnel, the Defence Secretary announced an Iraq and Syria Operational Service Medal during his recent visit to Iraq.

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[RAF Valley's future secure for next 25 years as restoration work is completed](#)

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon unveiled a newly restored runway at RAF Valley on a trip to Anglesey, Wales today.

The station is primarily used for advanced fast jet training for pilots and, whilst the previous infrastructure was strong enough for the Hawk aircraft, it has been restored to support pilots training in the likes of Tornados and Typhoons.

The existing runway was ageing and so a £20 million contract was awarded to refurbish it as well as the link taxiways in addition to providing a new section airside perimeter road, new visual aids, aeronautical lighting and signage. It will extend the life of the runway by a further 25 years, demonstrating the UK's commitment to Defence in Wales.



Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

“This famous runway has been an integral part of the careers of generations of fast-jet pilots who have seen action across the world and are currently leading RAF strikes against Daesh. I'm delighted that this investment will see the runway play that vital role for at least another 25 years, training new pilots in the skills they need to help keep us safe when flying the next generation of aircraft.”



The graduating fighter pilots go on to fly Typhoon and F35 Lightning II aircraft which secure the skies of the UK and overseas. The station is also home to helicopter flying training where aircrew learn the skills required for mountains and maritime flying ahead of employment on the RAF and Royal Navy front lines, whilst the Mountain Rescue Service is based at RAF Valley saving lives across the UK.

All new UK fighter pilots pass through RAF Valley before they reach their frontline Squadron, and in the last 3 months, 4 graduates have gone on to fly the world's most sophisticated fighter, the F-35 Lightning II, out in the United States.

The UK already has 11 F-35B jets being flown in the US, and 120 UK personnel being trained there. By the end of the year the UK will have 14 of the jets, with initial flight trials from the brand new Queen Elizabeth Aircraft Carrier's deck planned for next year.

As the US' only Tier 1 partner, UK industry will provide around 15% of every F-35 jet which is built, and later today, the Defence Secretary will also visit the Defence Electronics & Components Agency (DECA), based at MOD Sealand, in North East Wales.



The facility was chosen as the global repair hub providing maintenance, repair, overhaul and upgrade services for F-35 avionic and aircraft components. Over the lifetime of the programme, components for hundreds of European-based F-35 aircraft will be serviced and maintained at the site.

The work will generate hundreds of millions of pounds of revenue for the UK defence industry, with the potential to unlock more than £2bn of future F-35 support revenue over the lifetime of the programme, sustaining thousands of high tech jobs and skills.

A newly-refurbished hangar at RAF Valley will also house three brand-new Jupiter helicopters which will be used to train pilots from all three Services, delivered as part of the UK Military Flying Training System (UKMFTS).

These state-of-the-art Airbus helicopters, which closely recreate the cockpits and controls of front-line aircraft, are due to begin flying from RAF Valley later this year. The refurbishment of the hangar is part of an infrastructure improvement programme being delivered through the UKMFTS at both RAF Valley and RAF Shawbury worth a total of around £80 million.



Station Commander Royal Air Force Valley, Group Captain Nick Tucker-Lowe, said:

“The visit of the Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon today has highlighted RAF Valley's vital contribution to UK defence as the home of fighter pilot

training.”

“Our team of military personnel, Civil Servants and industry partners take great pride in their role of training the next generation of fighter pilots for the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy. With our refurbished main runway, we are well prepared for the future.”



UK Government Minister for Wales Guto Bebb said:

“This £20 million investment in the runway is a huge boost to RAF Valley. It further demonstrates the UK Government’s commitment to defence in Wales and the North Wales economy. It is great to see Wales playing such an important role in the advancement of our defence services and with an extra 25 years now on the lifespan of this site, the future of RAF Valley and the local economy remains strong.”

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[French military equipment delivered to Guadeloupe on RAF C-17 Globemaster](#)

French military equipment delivered to Guadeloupe on Royal Air Force C-17 Globemaster

Urgently required vehicles and equipment have been delivered to Pointe-à-Pitre on the French Island of Guadeloupe aboard a Royal Air Force C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft.

Following a request for assistance from French President Emmanuel Macron the heavy-lift aircraft flew to évreux-Fauville Air Base west of Paris and collected 30 tonnes of equipment and supplies including a tipper truck, digger and specialist bulldozer. The vehicles will now be taken by sea to the island of St Martin which sustained severe damaged in Hurricane Irma.



Speaking before the aircraft departed France, Colonel David Desjardins, the Base Commander of évreux-Fauville Air Base, said:

“Cooperation between the French Air Force and Royal Air Force has been in place a long time. Today we are working together to send engineers and equipment to support both the clean-up operation and the population affected by Hurricane Irma. We do often work together such as operations in Africa and the Middle East, we work well together”



The pilot of the 99 Squadron C-17 was Flight Lieutenant Mark Shepherd. He said:

“We work regularly with the French military transporting freight from France to Western Africa in support of their operations there. The level of cooperation between us and the French on this task has been excellent and this has been reflected in how smoothly the transport of this urgently required equipment has been achieved.

“As ever it has been a pleasure to work with our French colleagues and to help the people affected by Hurricane Irma.”



The flight is the latest example of the close relationship between the French and UK Armed Forces. The two nations, which have the largest defence budgets in Europe, continue to work closely on shared interests. British and French forces are deployed together in NATO, fighting against Daesh in Iraq and Syria and training together across the globe. RAF C-17s have also been used on a regular basis in recent years to transport freight from France to sub-Saharan Africa.

The RAF air transport fleet continues to directly support the UK aid effort with further C-17s, A400M Atlas, C-130J Hercules and Voyager aircraft transporting personnel, aid and equipment to the Caribbean and between the islands struck by the hurricane.

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