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Posted 6/22/2009 Updated 6/22/2009 [Email story](#) [Print story](#)[SHARE](#) [Print](#)by Staff Sgt. Stacia Zachary
AFCENT Combat Camera Team

6/22/2009 - TARIN KOWT, Afghanistan -- A C-17 Globemaster III crew from the 816th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron used a combat offload procedure here June 20 to deliver materials that will be used to help defend the local population.

This was the first time in many years that the combat offload procedure was used in Afghanistan by a C-17.

Due to the austere location of the forward operating base, the personnel stationed here did not have the equipment necessary to unload the pallets in a traditional manner. Equipment such as a K-loader is typically used to move the pallets because of their size. Tarin Kowt, however, has only forklifts -- the minimum necessary to get basic operations done.

"Since they don't have the equipment to offload, we need to use the aircraft's unique capabilities to deliver the pallets," said Capt. Jeremy Relch, 816th EAS C-17 pilot.

A combat offload is designed to move materials into an austere location that is either being built up, lacks the capability to move certain pallets from the aircraft, or to offload quickly in a combat environment.

"We run up the engines, release the locks (on the pallets) and then release the brakes," Captain Relch said. "It's like the magic trick where the tablecloth is ripped off the table without offsetting the dishes. Same principal -- we pull the aircraft out from under the pallets."

Many factors had to be considered before the combat offload procedure was approved. For instance, Tarin Kowt has a dirt landing strip without any taxways -- limiting the crew from alternative solutions on dropping the cargo.

"We only have one chance at this," said Capt. Manny Vega, 816th EAS aircraft commander. "If we don't land with enough space to allow a combat offload, then we need to scrub it and do it all over again."

Another consideration for the mission was weather.

"Weather has been a factor," Captain Vega said. "We needed the airstrip to be dry. We couldn't have attempted this if it were raining."

Likewise, the extreme temperatures found in Afghanistan during the summer months play a part in mission planning.

"When it's hot out with high pressure altitude, the aircraft's performance is reduced," Captain Relch said. "Many factors have to be perfect for the mission to get a green light. All four legs went well and the pallets were delivered."

Aircrews regularly train for combat offloads, however they are rarely used.

"We have a very limited opportunity to do one of these in a combat environment," Captain Vega said. "Pilots can go their entire careers and not do one outside of the training spectrum."

Performing the combat offload was a memorable event for the loadmasters on the team as well.

"We're taught the basic mechanics in tech school and then we train in a sim, but it's not something I ever saw myself doing," said Senior Airman Michael Sedak, 816th EAS C-17 loadmaster, originally from Fort Myers, Fla.

"This is a once-in-a-career opportunity and I got lucky."

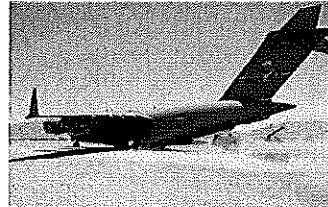
The materials unloaded are part of the recent increase in troop commitment to Afghanistan to help wipe out the threat of terrorism and to help rebuild the country.

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Photos



A pallet is combat off-loaded from a C-17 Globemaster III June 20, 2009, at Tarin Kowt Airfield, Afghanistan. The 816th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron is the first unit to conduct a combat offload in theater. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Shawn Weismiller)

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