

by Sarah Anne Carter

Air Force Materiel Command Public Affairs

Air Force Materiel Command's top officer delivered the newest C-17 Loadmaster III cargo aircraft Aug. 1 to Charleston AFB, S.C. Gen. Lester Lyles, AFMC commander, delivered the aircraft, the 42nd C-17 to be delivered to Charleston and the 89th that Boeing Long Beach facility workers produced for the Air Force.

"This aircraft is literally the workhorse for Operation Enduring Freedom and everything we're doing today in the war on terrorism," Lyles said. "It's the major strategic airlifter and one of the primary tactical airlifters in Afghanistan and the entire theater."

Air Force officials describe the C-17 as one of the most flexible aircraft in the Air Force's fleet. The ramp can be configured to transport more than 100 war fighters, around 35 litter and more than 50 ambulatory patients and attendants or almost 171,000 pounds of cargo.

"Right now, with what we're doing since Sept. 11, this airplane is absolutely critical to our operation," said Maj. Scott Brown, C-17 aircraft commander.

This flight was Brown's first time delivering a new C-17.

One reason the C-17 is critical in the war on terrorism is it's capable of landing on runways as short as 3,500 feet while other cargo aircraft require significantly more room.

"We bombed the Kandahar airport and only had 3,500 feet of usable runway afterwards," said Lt. Col. Steve Shope, 15th Airlift Squadron commander. "We delivered a minesweeper to Kandahar that we couldn't have got within 1,500 miles of otherwise. No other airplane could have put it in there."

On top of this, Shope said the C-17 can use a spiral approach to land, which minimizes the aircraft's vulnerability in enemy territory. The new aircraft also provides the



Gen. Lester Lyles, Air Force Materiel Command commander, master III cockpit at the Boeing facility in Long Beach, Calif.

Photo courtesy of Boeing

ter — with the technology to map terrain, track the location of nearly 100 aircraft in about a 100-square-mile area and use a reactive wind-shear warning system on the heads-up display. It can also store 60,000 more pounds of fuel than most of the earlier versions.

Air Force Materiel Command does its part to keep the C-17 running by providing weapon system management, including cost, schedule and performance. Through a partnership with Boeing, AFMC is keeping the C-17 availability rates high, for example,

"We're in the process of finding out what that partnering mode is going to be," Lyles said. "Right now we think it's going to be very successful."

"We'll take advantage of the best of the talents of the Boeing people and the best of the talents of my guys down at (Warner-Robins Air Logistic Center, Robins AFB, Ga.) and I know that it's going to be a winner. We also have all the people who develop and acquire all the systems working obviously with industry."

"The C-17 program office, for exam-

ing the oversight of the development and acquisition of this great airplane."

Current funding is available to produce 120 planes. Congress, however, just gave approval for 60 more, bringing the expected total to 180. Still, Air Force officials hope for more, and with good reason.

"In that landlocked country of Afghanistan, where everything goes in by air, there's no way we could have done what we've been able to do without a program like this," Lyles said.