

Employee Earns Top Honors for Supporting Liberty Program

Cassandra Locke | DCMA Public Affairs

Air Force Maj. Steve Jacque, Defense Contract Management Agency Special Programs South, received the DCMA Government Flight Representative of the Year award for 2009.

Phil Yacovoni, director of DCMA Special Programs South, praised Jacque for forging a unified government and military team focused on improving all aspects of safety of flight to deliver mission-ready platforms. “Jacque has been a real asset to DCMA Special Programs South and a true combat multiplier,” said Yacovoni.

Jacque was lauded for his contributions to the program Secretary of Defense Robert Gates initiated to repair the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance deficit in Iraq and Afghanistan. The program, Project Liberty, involves the procurement of 37 MC-12W aircraft, also known as the Liberty Project Aircraft.

The Liberty provides real-time, full-motion video used to augment other downrange intelligence-collecting capabilities to help military leaders make battlefield decisions. The aircraft sends video to relay nodes distributed throughout the country. Those nodes then push the video to forward-deployed ground forces.

“Platforms like the MC-12 help troops disrupt and hunt down our enemies, often before they strike, saving the lives of

American troops while sparing innocent civilians,” Gates said at a visit to the production lines of L-3 Communications in Greenville, Texas.

The \$950 million program is a success story for DCMA. It normally takes a decade for an acquisition program to reach a 90-percent solution. It took less than a year to field the first MC-12W aircraft, which was brought into combat within 10 months. In addition, the Air Force was able to field three expeditionary squadrons within a year and a half.

Project Liberty’s accomplishments included setting new acquisition, training and deployment benchmarks to provide a full combat aircraft squadron to the Iraqi war zone in less than 10 months. This is the fastest delivery of an Air Force weapon system from concept to combat since the P-51 Mustang during World War II.

Jacque leads an aviation program team that provides oversight for contractor aviation special programs. The team works with Kerry Smithers, GFR at DCMA Aircraft Integrated Maintenance Operations – North Texas. Smithers’ team supports the Liberty Project Aircraft.

DCMA aviation program teams oversee ground and flight operations at contractor facilities. Each team has a GFR, an aviation maintenance manager and a contract safety manager. While Smithers’ team manages multiple programs at various facilities, they’ve provided extra attention



Secretary of Defense Robert Gates is briefed on the MC-12 Liberty aircraft during a tour of the production facility in Greenville, Texas, Aug. 31, 2009. Gates initiated Project Liberty to repair the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance deficit in Iraq and Afghanistan. (DoD photo by Cherie Cullen)



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From left: Air Force Maj. Jose Lopez, 645th Aeronautical Systems Squadron, and Air Force Maj. Steve Jacque, Defense Contract Management Agency Special Programs South government flight representative, work together to support Project Liberty. Jacque's efforts on the program led to numerous GFR mission improvements throughout Special Programs South and enabled the contract management office to participate in the agency's first-ever Single Point of Failure pilot program.

“Both of us have worked diligently to ensure the Project Liberty contractor and subcontractor procedures were sound and effective, ensuring asset security, safety and overall quality of the contractors’ efforts — all while getting the Liberty aircraft to the warfighter.”

— Kerry Smithers, Defense Contract Management Agency Aircraft Integrated Maintenance Operations – North Texas government flight representative

and oversight to the Liberty Project and its fast-moving, frequently changing demands.

“Jacque is a very focused and serious officer who strives to make a difference daily,” said Smithers. “Both of us have worked diligently to ensure the Project Liberty contractor and subcontractor procedures were sound and effective, ensuring asset security, safety and overall quality of the contractors’ efforts — all while getting the Liberty aircraft to the warfighter.”

While modification and maintenance to the Liberty aircraft are routine, the flight-testing aspect shows how Jacque stepped up and went above and beyond to ensure program success, Smithers said. “These aircraft go almost directly from the contractor facility to the fight. Because of that, all aircraft system and

most mission capability testing, calibration and validation flights take place at the contractor facility,” said Smithers.

The sheer number of aircraft and sorties placed a huge demand on Air Force Materiel Command pilots, and Jacque soon took on additional ‘pilot duty’ to help out. “Needless to say, he was part of something very important to the warfighters, and he made it happen when, and however, he could.”

DCMA has GFRs that fly, but Jacque’s billet was not originally a flying one. He came into the position as a fully qualified C-17 pilot and was able to augment that DCMA mission by stepping in and helping fly C-17s into depot maintenance facilities. When DCMA learned that the Air Force needed experienced C-12 pilots, Yacovoni endorsed Jacque’s chance to

fly as guest help outside of DCMA. The 645th Aeronautical Systems Squadron worked rapidly to get Jacque a training slot alongside one of their pilots, Air Force Maj. Jose Lopez.

“Since I’d flown a previous version of the C-12, I was able to step in as one of the initial cadre of MC-12W instructor pilots. It gave the AESS an extra instructor pilot without the administrative cost of acquiring another pilot,” said Jacque.

After training, Jacque and Lopez went right into accepting aircraft from Hawker Beechcraft and conducted functional check flights. Since the initial deliveries, around-the-clock Liberty production efforts have meant Lopez and the other Liberty pilots fly seven days a week for months at a time. Jacque was able to provide a few days break when it was needed the most. He contributed 45 days to the flying schedule and another 15 days to ground training, testing and administrative work required to stay current.

“Initially, I filled a shortfall for the 645th until they could train more pilots,” Jacque said. “For the last couple months, my GFR schedule has only allowed me to fly on the

weekends twice a month, as well as some holidays. It’s not a great deal of flying, but it gives the pilots assigned to the 645th at least a few weekends as well as some holidays off.”

According to Yacovoni, it is Jacque’s spirit of professionalism and dedication that helped him earn the honor of GFR of the Year. However, Jacque is more pleased to know that the intelligence gathered by the aircraft he has supported has led to the capture of 60 terrorists and criminals in Iraq and helped locate and identify countless roadside bombs around the southern Afghanistan town of Marjah. 

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— Phil Yacovoni, Defense Contract Management Agency Special Programs South director

The push for better intelligence in Afghanistan comes as violence continues to surge, particularly the placement of improvised explosive devices. In April 2010, insurgents planted 1,058 makeshift bombs, compared with 435 in April 2009, according to the Joint IED Defeat Organization. Intelligence gathered by the MC-12W has led to:

- Capturing 60 terrorists and criminals in Iraq
- Killing or capturing 20 insurgents in Afghanistan, including four commanders
- Capturing a Taliban commander responsible for helping suicide bombers travel in eastern Afghanistan
- Locating and identifying roadside bombs around the southern Afghan town of Marjah in advance of a Marine-led offensive in March.

The first MC-12 Liberty aircraft in theater taxis out of an aircraft hangar for its first combat sortie June 10, 2009, at Joint Base Balad, Iraq. The Air Force’s new manned intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance platform, the MC-12 is designed to directly support ground forces with real-time intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Tiffany Trojca)

