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MQ-9 Reaper arrives at 178th Wing

SPRINGFIELD-BECKLEY AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, Ohio — Airmen from the 178th Wing landed an MQ-9 Reaper at Springfield-Beckley Air National Guard Base on Monday. This marked the second consecutive year the unmanned aerial vehicle has flown to the base. The exercise, known as Advanced Wrath, is designed to enhance the operational capabilities of the MQ-9 Reaper while supporting a variety of joint operations with other agencies.

This year's event is scheduled to include coordination with the Coast Guard for search and rescue efforts in the Great Lakes and support for research and development for the U.S. Special Operations Command. The exercise also featured training with the Air Force Research Laboratory, the Federal Aviation Administration, and the Ohio Department of Transportation.

U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Benjamin Retherford, project manager for Advanced Wrath said the exercise aims to bolster the U.S. Air Force's objectives.

The purpose of Advanced Wrath is to prove the Air Force's Agile Combat Employment concept," Retherford said. "It allows us to test the MQ-9's capabilities in a variety of mission sets and demonstrate how it can work alongside multiple agencies."

The joint training exercise brought together Air National Guard members from the 178th Wing based in Ohio, 174th FW based in New York and 248th CAOS based in Mississippi. Coast Guardsmen from the 9th District Command, and personnel from the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency are scheduled to be involved as well.

"This is our wing's push to hopefully get the MQ-9 Reaper back here in Springfield," Retherford said. "That's the big push, is to have some sort of stateside mission in coordination with the research labs on Wright Patterson Air Force Base."

Retherford said that the proximity of the 178th Wing to AFRL on WPAFB makes it a prime location for conducting advanced research and testing on unmanned systems.

"We're in a unique position to support both national defense operations and cutting-edge research, which is why Springfield is a critical location for these kinds of exercises," Retherford said.

U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Zachary Eaton, 178th Operations Support Squadron commander, said the base's proximity to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and its cutting-edge research facilities makes it an ideal location for advanced research and unmanned system testing.

"It's important that we operate out of Springfield because it demonstrates our ability to support domestic operations," Eaton said. "Whether it's tornado response or operations like the search and rescue missions we're conducting on Lake Erie, Springfield gives us the capability to serve the region effectively."

The base's location near key research centers is advantageous, Eaton said.

"Being so close to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, where the Air Force Research Laboratory and Lifecycle Management Center are located, having that close proximity where they can just physically drive to Springfield to test things on the MQ-9 or other future platforms is huge," Eaton said.

This year's exercise is scheduled to have the first-ever live munition drop from the MQ-9 Reaper at the Jefferson Proving Ground in southeast Indiana. The event could mark a significant milestone for the 178th Wing, which has been working to expand its capabilities since the loss of its F-16 Fighting Falcons in 2010.

"We're going out to the Jefferson range for the first time with an MQ-9 this year, and dropping two GBU 12 inert munitions," Retherford said. "They're 500-pound bombs. And that'll be the first for the Jefferson range, actually, which is really cool."

The 178th Wing is expected to conduct search and rescue training with the Coast Guard in Lake Erie, Ohio. The MQ-9 Reaper is able to perform multiple roles enhancing the capabilities and readiness of the wing.

"We will be working with the Coast Guard for personnel recovery in the Great Lakes Region," Retherford said. "It's kind of an amalgamation of skills and things that the MQ-9 Reaper can do."

This marks a significant step forward as the U.S. Air Force works to enhance its fleet and readiness. The exercise intends to show how the MQ-9 Reaper could be effectively utilized in both defense operations and rapid response to natural catastrophes.

"This exercise is a critical step in getting MQ-9s back here, as we work to support both national security and natural disaster response missions," Retherford said.

The exercise this year is scheduled to introduce several new initiatives, including counter-unmanned aerial system testing to advance research and development efforts for both state and national agencies.

"We are teamed up with NGA and Riverside Research to conduct counter unmanned aerial

systems testing with the MQ-9 and close coordination with the Ohio Department of Transportation and Ohio UAS Center," Eaton said. "We are launching drones in Springfield and then using the MQ-9 to track those drones and collect the data."

The Ohio Air National Guard aims to bring together every airframe in the state to Springfield for the exercise.

"We're trying to get Toledo to send down one of their F-16s and Rickenbacker to send out a KC-135 to have a showcase of Air National Guard air power while we have the MQ-9 here in the state of Ohio," Retherford said.

This demonstration intends to highlight the Air National Guard's commitment to showcasing not just the strength and versatility of its aircraft, but the vital role they play in ensuring national security. As technology evolves, Ohio remains a key player in shaping the future of air power.

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Note: Media outlets that wish to cover the exercise should contact Master Sgt. Shane Hughes by email at michael.hughes.37@us.af.mil or by phone at 513-885-7665.

For any additional information or questions, please reach out to the 178th Wing Public Affairs Office at 937-327-2216 or 178.WG.WG.PA@us.af.mil.