

Dept. of Military Affairs: Wisconsin Guard combat ability on display at EAA AirVenture

Posted on Monday, Aug 21, 2023

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OSHKOSH, Wis. — Visitors and enthusiasts at the Experimental Aircraft Association's (EAA) annual AirVenture last month were able to witness elements of the Wisconsin National Guard flex their muscle during a capabilities demonstration, complete with narration and pyrotechnics.

Aircraft including the F-35 Lightning II, the KC-135 Stratotanker and the UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter supported a notional ground assault, while infantry and artillery Soldiers from the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team displayed their military proficiency. Maj. Gen. Paul Knapp, Wisconsin's adjutant general, spoke to the thousands of spectators before the demonstration commenced.

"Today we're going to share a portion of the capability our force of nearly 10,000 Soldiers and Airmen bring to the nation's defense," Knapp said. "We also play a critical dual role in supporting Wisconsin at home. You might be surprised to find out that our Guardsmen are your neighbors, colleagues and members of your community. Their time in the Wisconsin National Guard has given them unique opportunities, skills and benefits to be sought-after professionals around the state."

The demonstration was a simulated ground assault, with the F-35 Lightning II from the Madison, Wisconsin-based 115th Fighter Wing conducting strafe and precision munitions "airstrikes" on enemy positions on the airfield. UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters from the Madison-based 1st Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment delivered squads of infantry from the 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry Regiment to a designated landing zone, as members of the 1st Battalion, 120th Field Artillery Regiment fired 105-mm howitzers.

A medevac model of the Black Hawk demonstrated its hoist capabilities by lowering a medic and hauling up a litter-borne patient. The KC-135 Stratotanker refueled the F-35s in an orbit at the edge of harm's way at speeds of 350 miles per hour.

According to Lt. Col. Aaron Gulczynski, domestic operations director for the Wisconsin National Guard, the capabilities demonstration was originally intended to be a salute to Vietnam veterans, as the EAA was honoring the 50th anniversary of the end of combat operations in Vietnam.

"The demonstration went extremely well and exceeded everyone's expectations," Gulczynski said, noting that EAA officials told him the demonstration was not only the highlight of the airshows that day, but that civilian air show performers were still talking about the Guard capabilities demonstration the next day.

"I took it as a compliment when it was communicated that some attendees thought that U.S. special forces personnel were completing the demo, and were surprised to learn that the Wisconsin National Guard had this capability," Gulczynski continued. "It was great to be able to explain the missions and units within the Wisconsin National Guard, and to point out that the Airmen and Soldiers in the demo are your neighbors, friends, coworkers or family serving in the National Guard and training to perform their military specialty."

Rick Larsen, EAA's vice president of communities and member programming, coordinates AirVenture features and attractions.

"The Wisconsin National Guard's demonstration during the EAA AirVenture Oshkosh air show was one of the best all-around capability demonstrations we've had at Oshkosh," Larsen said. "It was an excellent representation of the Guard's capabilities and had all the sights, sounds and flying excitement that made it a great addition to that day's show. We appreciate the Guard's efforts to coordinate that display as well as its outstanding support to EAA AirVenture every year."

Capt. Meredith Porter, a UH-60 Black Hawk pilot, said the ground assault demonstration went "exceptionally well."

"Our organization was able to demonstrate the complex missions and precision we train for, and it was a rewarding experience for our crewmembers to share that with the public," Porter said. "It was also a great experience to work closely with the 115th Fighter Wing and the 128th Air Refueling Wing. While we are neighbors, we

don't often get the opportunity to work together stateside.”

Porter said the demonstration showcased most of the skills used in actual Army air assaults and Army medevac operations.

“Just like we would for most real-world air assault missions, we conducted extensive planning with rehearsals, and executed the mission with precision timing and formation flight, with medevac and joint fires equally integrated,” Porter explained.

While operating in the EAA airspace added some new wrinkles, Porter said it did not significantly alter how they performed.

A full-scale rehearsal was performed the day prior, July 27, at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. Gulczynski credited Maj. Lucas Sivertson, operations officer for the 147th Aviation, and Lt. Col. Ben Gerds, operations officer with the 115th Fighter Wing, for the development and execution of the capabilities demonstration.

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Matt Hipp narrated the demonstration with gusto, deftly transitioning from calling a play-by-play of the action to giving information about the equipment and history of the units.

“The F-35 is the most technologically advanced fighter aircraft in the world, using stealth technology, advanced communication, and leading-edge battlespace awareness,” Hipp said over the public address system at the EAA. “This F-35 has destroyed critical nodes of the enemy air defense system, paving the way for our air assault to begin.”

While its combat capabilities were on display, Knapp emphasized that the Wisconsin National Guard also has a state mission.

“During times of emergency, our Soldiers and Airmen bring unique experiences to local and national missions,” Knapp said. “We play a critical dual role in supporting Wisconsin at home.”

During the weeklong AirVenture, Wisconsin National Guard vehicles and equipment were on display in Boeing Plaza on the EAA grounds. Service members and recruiters from the Wisconsin Army National Guard and Wisconsin Air National Guard were on hand to engage with visitors.

Gulczynski said the EAA has requested another capabilities demonstration by the

Wisconsin National Guard at next year's AirVenture. This will require balance and skillful planning, with a significant training exercise involving the infantry and artillery Soldiers from this year's demonstration and the Republican National Convention both taking place just before AirVenture 2024.

"The capabilities demonstration at EAA was a way to highlight the proficiency of our service members, the variety of units within the state, and the different missions we train for and support," Gulczynski said. "Many hours were spent planning, preparing and practicing for this event, and it was incredibly rewarding to share this with the public, and for them to see all the opportunities available in the Wisconsin National Guard."