

# Predators, Reapers take flight and break flying record

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HOLLOMAN AIR FORCE BASE, N.M. -- The 29th Attack Squadron, 9th Attack Squadron, and the 6th Reconnaissance Squadron set a non-combat record October 2, by flying six MQ-9 Reapers and four MQ-1 Predators simultaneously during a training mission at Holloman Air Force Base, N.M.

The 29th ATKS, 9th ATKS and the 6th RS recently increased their training capacity to 10 lines. A line consists of the aircraft, a ground control station and all maintenance and flight personnel required to keep an aircraft airborne. This capacity ensures they are capable of meeting U.S. Air Force remotely piloted aircraft aircrew training requirements. These three squadrons train all U.S. Air Force MQ-1 and MQ-9 aircrew members.

Col. Kenneth Johnson, 49th Operations Group commander, said, "In the last year alone, the work the operations and maintenance RPA teams accomplish every day has grown by two-thirds, from six to 10 lines."

This is in accordance with Gen. (ret.) Norton Schwartz, former U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff, who said that ultimately, he believes it is conceivable that the majority of aviators in the Air Force will be flying remotely piloted aircraft.

Capt. Andrew [last name withheld due to operational security concerns], an MQ-9 pilot at the 9th ATKS who participated in breaking the record said, "I'm just one person out of the dozens it takes to make this record possible. I share in the pride of my fellow squadron mates and maintenance folks who have done a lot of work to get us here. It's also a testament and validation to the direction of the Air Force. The role of RPAs is only going to increase."

The record-setting training flights were manned by 10 crews composed of instructors and students, both pilots and sensor operators. The typical flight time for an RPA is around eight hours, and multiple training missions are flown during that time.

Johnson said, "We finally have the physical capacity to accomplish our mission to increase programmed flight training and develop the best possible RPA crew members."

Holloman AFB serves as the gateway to the RPA career field as the Air Force's premier training base for RPA pilots and sensor operators.