

444th AIR EXPEDITIONARY ADVISORY SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

444th Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron

STATIONS

Shindand, Afghanistan

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

On a disc Azure, over mountains and plains Brun, detailed Sable, a golden eagle in flight Sable, feathered of the second, Buff and Natural, beak and feet of the fifth, detailed of the sixth, talons of the third, all within a narrow border Yellow. Attached below the disc, a Blue scroll edged with a narrow Yellow border and inscribed "444 AEAS" in Yellow letters. **SIGNIFICANCE:** Ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The golden eagle in the foreground symbolizes the strength and valor of the warrior ethic instilled in the students. The mountains depicted in the background symbolize the bedrock of knowledge developed in training and the difficult journey of training.

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

3/25/2012 - **SHINDAND, Afghanistan** -- Afghan maintenance crews marshaled a team of three U.S. instructors paired with three Afghan students as they took to the morning skies in three separate Cessna 183 aircraft, marking the first undergraduate pilot training sorties in over 30 years in Afghanistan, March 24. Advisors with the 838th Air Expeditionary Advisory Group are teaming with civilian instructor pilots from Lockheed Martin's sub-contractor i3 to conduct this first UPT course to produce Afghan pilots for its air force.

The flights were conducted without having to send pilots to foreign training programs outside the country. "This is the first time that the UPTs have been held in Afghanistan," said Lt. Col. James Bands, 444th Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron commander. "The main goal here is to transition all of the training to the Afghans, so these first students are key to the success of a fully independent Afghan air force."

Prior to starting UPT, the students were enrolled in language training in which they are required to achieve an English language competency score of 80 or above on a scale of 100 points, before being allowed to move on the initial flight screening.

The three AAF student pilots are among the first seven to graduate from the IFS here, where they were evaluated on their potential to successfully complete pilot training. "The students were the first generation of pilots to be properly trained and graduate IFS," said Bands. "We used the IFS and UPT modeled after the programs used in the States to instruct and develop new pilots for the AAF."

The students will spend the next six months flying in the Cessna 183 before transitioning to the Cessna 208 Grand Caravan. Afghan air force personnel will spend a total of about 10 months in upgrade training to graduate from the fixed wing UPT program.

Maj. David McManaway, 444th AEAS assistant director of operations and instructor pilot, said that he was really pleased with the students' progress. "I was very impressed with the students' preparation and professionalism. Right off the bat, I could easily see the effort these students put into their studying," said McManaway. "They knew their stuff, which means they possess the motivation required to become Afghanistan's newest pilots." The students,

however, faced many challenges before they ever left the ground which may have hindered their dreams of becoming pilots.

"The students endured months of English training, which is not an easy process, to get to the level they are today. So grooming the pilot candidates so they're eligible to start UPT is the hardest thing they have done so far," said McManaway. In addition to their ELC scores, the students were evaluated on various maneuvers both in and out of the air to include mission briefs, pre-flight checks and the actual flying of the aircraft. All training sessions and flights are documented and used to track a student's progress throughout the UPT program.

"We use paper-based training records to document the student's progression over time," said Bands. "This will help us determine which students will continue flying these aircraft and which ones will return to instruct other AAF pilot candidates in one of the two aircraft." Afghan air force Lt. Wahlid Noori said that he appreciated everything that he has learned and was thrilled with today's flight.

"It was perfect. To perform the duties we've been practicing every day for months is very rewarding and being able to fly makes the long hours of studying worthwhile," said Noori. The students' experiences from this day forward will qualify them for their future roles, commented advisors. "These students are consummate professionals, extremely intelligent and highly motivated; the perfect fit for UPT. These students will not only become instrument-rated pilots but they will also become the future leaders of Afghanistan," said McManaway.

1/20/2011 - SHINDAND AIR BASE, Afghanistan -- The Afghan Air Force saw a new milestone recently with the opening of the pilot training program here. The first Afghan pilots began their eight-week instruction course early in January with an aggressive four-day academic schedule before beginning flight instruction on the Mi-17 Hip H.

"We are helping the Afghans develop a training program that's going to build the foundation of their Air Force for the future," said Lt. Col. James Mueller, 444th Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron commander. Home of the AAF training center, Shindand has taken vital steps to achieving its goal of becoming the pilot and aircrew training center for the country. The training center provides upgrade training; teaching co-pilots how to be aircraft commanders; and eventually turning existing Afghan pilots into instructors. "I think that with any air force, the backbone is the schoolhouse," said Staff Sgt. Justin Shults, 444th AEAS flight engineer advisor. "Here, we are producing future pilots, flight engineers and crew chiefs."

Officials hope this training will develop into a home-grown, self-sustaining facility, eliminating the need for Afghan pilot candidates. At this time, the candidates leave the country to receive formal instruction at places such as Fort Rucker in Alabama. At present, the students enrolled have already received their wings but need familiarization with the Mi-17 helicopter. The Mi-17 is a hearty aircraft that suits the severe landscape of Afghanistan.

"It's a great aircraft for what they use it for," Sergeant Shults said. "It hauls a lot of weight, a lot of people and it's very durable - especially in the hills of Afghanistan and its low-lying deserts. We like to call it 'The Tractor' because it's, no kidding, a John Deere that can hover."

The burgeoning base has plans to expand its Mi-17 fleet in order to amp up the amount of training conducted here. The training center was developed to give the AAF the opportunity to focus solely on training; whereas in Kabul, training was balanced with the operational flying mission.

"The point of Shindand Air Base is to make sure we can focus on training only," the sergeant said. The curriculum includes contact maneuvers, normal procedures for take-offs and landings, different mission profiles and emergency flight procedures. "We're trying to hone the base skills of these pilots,"

Sergeant Shults said. "With any helicopter, you have to be proficient. We're training them to a standard to get them comfortable with the emergency procedures in the event they do experience one."

This training is helping the Afghans develop a thorough plan stressing the importance of vigilance while executing the mission safely. "If we do not fly safely, we will lose all our aviation (capabilities) and we won't have anymore pilots," said AAF 1st Lt. Ehsanullah, a pilot who studied in Russia. As they master these skills in the air, the AAF will have the capabilities to more adeptly aid the Afghan National Army in the ground fight. "We are teaching them these skills so they can apply that in the cockpit ... and support the (ANA) as required with their flying skills," said Maj. Drew Grigson, 444th AEAS advisor. "It's so important that we can help our Soldiers without enemy risks," the AAF lieutenant added. "On the highway they will shoot us and make some explosions but (in the air) we can kill them without as much risk."

Another goal of this training program is to grow until it can become a self-sufficient. This will enable NATO forces to draw-down activity in the country. Until then, the instructor corps is comprised solely of U.S. Air Force personnel. As more Afghan pilots undergo the pilot training program here, the course will gradually shift to an All-Afghan instruction program with U.S. personnel primarily shifting their focus on mentorship. "We plan to run as many Afghan pilots through this course as possible so we can start to transition the instructor responsibilities over to the Afghans," Colonel Mueller said. The training program is giving the Afghans not only confidence in their capabilities as Afghan Airmen, but also instilling pride and hope for the future.

"We are going to leave them a peaceful Afghanistan and grateful people," Lieutenant Ehsanullah said. "They will be thankful people without war, without attacks, without explosions for the future." With high hopes for the training program in place, the advisors look forward to graduation with anticipation. "Hopefully in eight weeks, they can walk away from here, go back to their home units and say, 'Hey, look what I can do,'" Sergeant Shults said.

4/4/2011 - SHINDAND AIR BASE, Afghanistan -- True to the 11th Wing principals of vigilance, precision and global impact, deployed members of the 1st Helicopter Squadron are improving the world one pilot at a time as they train members of the Afghan Air Force. A milestone in the development of the Afghan Air Force, the first Afghan pilots began their eight-week instruction course early in January with a four-day academic schedule before beginning flight instruction on the Mi-17 Hip H.

"We are helping the Afghans develop a training program that's going to build the foundation of their air force for the future," said Lt. Col. James Mueller, 444th Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron commander. Home of the AAF training center, Shindand Air Base officials have taken steps in achieving their goal of becoming the pilot and aircrew training center for the country of Afghanistan. The training center provides upgrade training that teaches co-pilots how to be aircraft commanders that eventually turns existing Afghan pilots into instructors.

"I think that with any air force, the backbone is the schoolhouse," said Staff Sgt. Justin Shults, 444th AEAS flight engineer adviser, deployed from the 1st Helicopter Squadron at Joint Base Andrews, Md. "Here, we are producing future pilots, flight engineers and crew chiefs."

Officials hope this training will develop into a homegrown, self-sustaining facility, eliminating the need for Afghan pilot candidates. At this time, the candidates leave the country to receive formal instruction at places such as Fort Rucker, Ala. Currently, the students enrolled have already received their wings, but need familiarization with the Mi-17. The Mi-17 is an outstanding performer in the diverse landscapes of Afghanistan, officials said. "It's a great aircraft for what they use it for," Sergeant Shults said. "It hauls a lot of weight, a lot of people and it's very durable -- especially in the hills of Afghanistan and its low-lying deserts. We like to call it 'The Tractor' because it's, no kidding, a John Deere that can hover."

Base officials plan to expand the Mi-17 fleet to increase the amount of training conducted. The training center was developed to give the AAF the opportunity to focus solely on training; whereas in Kabul, training was balanced with the operational flying mission, officials said. "The point of Shindand Air Base is to make sure we can focus on training only," Sergeant Schultz said. The curriculum includes contact maneuvers, normal procedures for take-offs and landings, different mission profiles and emergency flight procedures. "We're trying to hone the base skills of these pilots," Sergeant Shults said. "With any helicopter, you have to be proficient. We're training them to a standard to get them comfortable with the emergency procedures in the event they do experience one."

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The training program is not only giving the Afghans confidence in their capabilities as Afghan Airmen, but also instilling pride and hope for the future. "We are going to leave them a peaceful Afghanistan and grateful people," said AAF Lieutenant Ehsanullah, an Mi-17 pilot. "They will be thankful people without war, without attacks, without explosions for the future." With high hopes for the training program in place, the advisers look forward to graduation with anticipation. "Hopefully, in eight weeks, they can walk away from here, go back to their home units and say, 'Hey, look what I can do,'" Sergeant Shults said.

As part of the NATO transition of combat operations to Afghan armed forces, advisors are training the Afghan air force in more sophisticated operations. At Shindand Air Base in western Afghanistan, advisors with the 444th Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron have integrated nighttime operations into the flight training activities for Afghan airmen, according to a March 26 release. Each Afghan student now going through undergraduate pilot training must complete 17 hours of night vision goggle training during night flights in an MD-530 light helicopter, states the release. The Afghan pilots learn distance estimation, depth perception, and relative motion while using these devices. The Afghan helicopters now carry modifications to support the night flights, including radar altimeter upgrades, infrared position lights on the tail and fuselage, and IR search lights, states the release. The current class, with eight students, is the largest class yet-and only the third class overall-to go through the training at Shindand, according to the release. The training squadron operates six MD-530 helicopters. 2013

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

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Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.