

438th AIR EXPEDITIONARY ADVISORY GROUP

MISSION

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438th Air Expeditionary Advisory Group

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Kabul, Afghanistan

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8/25/2010 - KABUL, Afghanistan -- Communication is a process where information is channeled and imparted by a sender to a receiver via some type of medium. Over time, technology has progressed and has created new forms of communications and without it; our lives in the U.S. will come to halt. Yet, in Afghanistan, communication can be an extreme problem, but not necessarily a part their daily lives or mission.

In a country that's telecommunications system is small, fragmented, and dilapidated, four members of the Combined Air Power Transition Force are making a difference by advising the Afghan Air Force communications professionals to make them effective in managing the communication missions for the Kabul Air Wing and Detachments and its personnel across Afghanistan.

These communications advisors are Major Sanjoy Malhotra from Headquarters Air Combat Command at Langley Air Force Base, Va.; Master Sgt. Jack Wilbanks from Transportation Command at Scott Air Force Base, Ill., Master Sgt. Leigh Newstead from 90th Communication Squadron at FE Warren Air Force Base, Wyo. and Mr. Al Diaz from Pennsylvania. Their role is to ensure their Afghan counterparts are properly equipped and trained to effectively manage and sustain the Kabul Air wing and its Detachments missions across Afghanistan.

Major Malhotra described the advisors approach, "From the team perspective, we took a lot of things back to basics to establishing fundamentals and foundations, so they could create processes and structure that has help them establish the continuity, sustainment, so they can do the communication mission on their own."

An average day begins in the morning; Maj. Malhotra goes over and sits down with the Communications Squadron commander to assess how things are going. During their conversation, they discuss some of the issues and good things that are going on in the squadron which supports the Afghan Air Force. Then they go over some of the identified issues that they are working together such as network growth, how to effectively take care of the AAF network needs and other areas that are in need. They also discuss how the Afghan personnel are being trained, so they can ensure communications forces are mission ready. They look over some of the initiatives to include personnel accountability, setting up processes to improve service, growth, and professionalism.

"We are able to talk with them to see how they operate and a lot of times, they have a better idea on creating their own solutions...and that is what we try to leverage", said Major Malhotra.

The squadron can currently handle over 80 percent of the communications mission today which is a positive step towards self sustainment. It entails radio network (air-to-ground/ground-to-ground), computer network, telephone, crypto, plans, visual Information, and other functional areas. When compared to the U.S. standard, they still are lacking; however, they are meeting or exceeding the tasking from AAF Commander and Ministry Of Defense of Afghanistan. They are respected among their peers and have built a strong reputation on professionalism and ensuring mission completion.

Afghan communications professionals do a good job at taking care of their required daily mission and tasks; however they are challenged in the planning, policy, and standards realm. CAPTF advisors are there to help show the importance of standards and planning. They hope to pass on the U.S. Air Force concept of centralized control with decentralized execution. The Afghans understand it; however making it routine takes time and persistent.

When talking about some of the success, Master Sgt. Jack Wilbanks explained one example, "The AAF helpdesk is now able to open up tickets using the web which has automated the process. They used to do everything manually ... tickets that they can't fix are elevated to the next level."When talking about his deployment, Major Malhotra states, "It's a cliché, but I must say the 'people' have made this deployment memorable. I have seen both positive and some

negative, which has impacted my deployment in a positive manner. Although, I must say, this is one of the toughest missions because you are working "shoulder-to-shoulder" with Afghans on building their Air Force. You are tested every day!"

The CAPTF advisors are assisting the Afghan communications squadron to take ownership of sustainment of the missions by helping them set up structures and processes to acquire training, manning, and equipment. The Afghans can take care of their daily missions for communications today; however, they still need help sustaining and keeping the communication force mission ready by fixing broken equipment and maintaining the communications assets used by the AAF.

Major Malhotra talks about the future, "The Afghan Communications squadron should be fully functional within a few years if we continue to build on what the previous advisors have done. What we want to achieve is to leave a really good picture for the next team, so they can be successful. I hope they will be in a position to start making progress in planning, strategy and structure."

4/23/2012 - KABUL, Afghanistan -- Afghan pilots now have a state-of-the-art MI-17 simulator here to hone their aviation skills in a safe environment. Air Force Lt. Col. Chas Tacheny, the deputy commander of the 438th Air Expeditionary Advisory Group, said he has been involved with bringing the MI-17V5 No-Motion Level 5 Simulator to Afghanistan since July 2011 and he is impressed with the end result.

"In 21 years I don't think I have flown in a better simulator. Afghanistan has an extremely challenging environment for helicopters," he said. "The high altitudes in Afghanistan push the performance envelope of the MI-17."

The colonel said the simulator provides a remarkable reproduction of the Afghanistan air space. He said it is important that the aviators are able to practice their craft in a low-risk environment.

Instructors are able to recreate numerous types of challenging weather conditions through the simulator. Aviators are also able to train on night operations using night vision goggles and formation flying. Tacheny said they are also able to practice brownouts during landings which are one of the biggest risks to aviators in Afghanistan. The dusty climate here can cause these dust storms to kick up with no notice and often blind pilots to all of their visual reference points.

These situations have been the cause of a few helicopter crashes in Afghanistan, explained Tacheny, who said being able to practice dealing with a stressful situation in a simulator is invaluable. "In our history in Afghanistan we have gotten a lot of experience dealing with difficult situations," he said. "We can put before the Afghans those challenging scenarios and not have to worry about hurting personnel and damaging aircraft. We can repeatedly do this to further develop their capabilities."

Tacheny said a certain percentage of the flight deck had to contain original equipment that is in the actual MI-17 helicopters. He said this level of realism will provide positive benefits as well.

"The Afghans are touching the actual controls," he said. "So when they go to fly the aircraft there is not a habit transfer issue because it is the same material." Afghan air force 1st Lt.

Nasrullah Khosti said he has enjoyed his time in the new simulator and he feels it is an important step for his country.

"Every air force has to have simulators," he said. "This helps us fix our problems before we get in the aircraft."

He said the training he has gotten from advisors has been crucial to his development as an aviator. "The advisers are very kind people and they help us a lot," he said "They have motivated us and shown us how to be the best pilots possible for our country." Afghan air Force 1st Lt. Waheed Sediqe was impressed with his time in the simulator as well. He said it felt just like he was in the helicopter. He is excited to use it help him accomplish his life-long dream. "I'm very excited to be a pilot for my country, it has been my wish since I was a child," he said. "Every day when I wake up and I put on my uniform I'm proud. Because today is a day I can help my country."

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.