

# **538<sup>th</sup> AIR EXPEDITIONARY ADVISORY SQUADRON**

## **MISSION**

## **LINEAGE**

538<sup>th</sup> Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron

## **STATIONS**

Kabul, Afghanistan

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

## **COMMANDERS**

## **HONORS**

**Service Streamers**

**Campaign Streamers**

**Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

**Decorations**

## **EMBLEM**

## **MOTTO**

## **NICKNAME**

## **OPERATIONS**

2010 - KABUL -- A year of success stories continues for Airmen of the 538th Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron, who are advising Afghanistan National Army Air Corps Soldiers on the use of the C-27A Spartan, with the addition of three new aircraft, six pilots and two loadmaster advisors. "We are now fully manned and will be able to continue toward our goal of building a professional air force for Afghanistan," said Senior Master Sgt. Mike Crews , 538th AEAS superintendent, deployed from the 1st Operations Support Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Fla.

"Our team has already overcome some huge hurdles to accomplish some great things, now we just have to build on what we have already accomplished and keep it going." Since November 2009, Combined Air Power Transition Force Airmen have been training Afghan C-27 pilots and loadmasters to conduct strategic and tactical airlift, airdrops and presidential support. Advisors have a clear goal to pass on to the Afghan airmen the skills to transport cargo, people and assets vital to their security.

The C-27 is an all weather, twin turboprop, GPS-equipped troop and cargo transport aircraft. A C-27 crew consists of two pilots and one loadmaster. In the past three months, Airmen helped qualify the first Afghan C-27 pilot, Feb. 23, and loadmaster, March 28. They also flew the first ANAAC C-27 operational mission March 24. Since then, five more ANAAC soldiers have become qualified as pilots and loadmasters. The unit now has five C-27As in its fleet and has almost 20 operational missions under its belt. The new 538th AEAS Airmen hope to build on that success.

"This is a great opportunity to work with some fantastic folks," said Capt. Larry Needham, 538th AEAS instructor pilot, who deployed from Laughlin Air Force Base, Texas, a little over a month ago. "I have already begun to forge some relationships with people that I foresee lasting a lifetime. Looking at what we have already accomplished, I feel the time we will invest here will have a positive effect on the long term security of Afghanistan." A sentiment echoed by one of the newest qualified ANAAC C-27 pilots Capt. Mohammad-Shah Ahmadzai. "The commitment our advisor has shown has been good," said ANAAC Capt. Mohammad-Shah. "I have great faith in our new instructors and I have had the chance to fly with them and they show the same care for our people as our other instructors. It feels good to have people helping us to get better at flying the C-27 for Afghanistan."

For some of the new advisors being a part of this mission is something special. "Coming from Air Mobility Command to this mission has been really different ... challenging, but extremely cool," said Master Sgt. Chris Beckwith, 538th AEAS loadmaster advisor deployed from Travis AFB, Calif. "Getting to see what we are helping to build here is awesome and when I leave here it will probably be one of the highlights of my career." In the next few months 538th AEAS Airmen hope to have four or five fully-qualified ANAAC aircrews and look forward to flying increased operational missions to support Afghan security forces and International Security Assistance Forces.

"We will continue to ride this train all the way to the finish line," said Lt. Col. James Piel, 538th AEAS commander and air advisor deployed from the 6th Special Operations Squadron at Hurlburt Field. "Sustained Afghan Airlift is a goal that gets clearer and clearer each day. The Afghans are taking the steps necessary to make this mission their own and our team will be here to help them serve Afghanistan and their coalition partners." Now They Are Fully Manned: USAF airmen have been training Afghanistan counterparts in the employment of the C-27A Spartan tactical airlifter since last fall, graduating the first Afghan C-27 pilot in February, but the advisory unit they comprise has just recently achieved 100 percent manning.

The 538th Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron at Kabul "has already overcome some huge hurdles," said SMSgt. Mike Crews, squadron superintendent who deployed from the 1st Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field, Fla., noting that "we are now fully manned and will be able to continue toward our goal of building a professional air force for Afghanistan." In addition to qualifying the first pilot, and a month later, the first loadmaster, the American airmen shepherded the first Afghan C-27 operational mission in March and subsequently have qualified five more pilots and loadmasters and flown another 19 operational missions. The fledgling Afghan C-27 force has grown to five aircraft. 2010

10/29/2010 - KABUL, AFGHANISTAN -- The NATO Air Training Command-Afghanistan's 538th Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron held its change of command ceremony at the Afghan Air Force base in Kabul, on October 28, 2010. Lt. Col. C. Michael Smith assumed command from Lt. Col. James Piel. Lt. Col. James Piel was the architect advisor of the Afghan Air Force's 373rd fixed wing squadron.

His 14 month deployment spanned many milestones and accomplishments, none greater than the establishment, training and qualification of C-27 loadmasters. "I think the loadmaster training has been our biggest accomplishment because we didn't just make loadmasters. We took some guys with some basic loadmaster skills, and we turned them into both flight engineers and loadmasters. These guys have never had any formal English language training. Most of them have a high school education at best-and that is the very educated one-and now they run a cockpit, a C-27 cockpit.

They run checklists, they move switches, they handle emergency procedures, oh and by the way, they also do all the cargo and passenger handling in the back. It is double duty. And they have been forced to learn all of this in English with no training," Piel said. He credits the loadmasters' success to three things: the previous advisors who selected and nurtured the most capable An-32 crew members, the Afghans desire to learn and his handpicked superintendent Senior Master Sgt. Mike Crews.

"They weren't even a crew position three years ago. They would grab maintainers or ground support personnel or whatever to basically ride in the back of the airplane to make sure passengers didn't open doors. That was essentially what they were doing. There was no restraining cargo, there was no weight and balance done, there was no systems knowledge, no seat belts," Crews said.

"So we have taken these guys and brought them to a westernized standard where not only do they know how to restrain cargo, perform weight and balance to make sure the aircraft is safe to fly but now they are acting as flight engineers as well knowing the systems in depth on the airplane. So they have gone from standing still to full speed in a very short period time and it's amazing what they have done." "We have to fly into our combat role but we can't forget about where we've been and what we're doing...just because you are combat ready and ready to go do that air drop mission doesn't mean you still don't have to practice it, still don't have to go do touch and goes to make sure you can land, run through the checklists properly don't try to skip steps", Smith said.

"They have been flying for years. They have previous experience as an air force but it is a different type of air force and in modern day with the equipment we have we need to make sure

we know what we are doing and we don't skip steps in order to get there." The Afghans are moving away from the An-32 and transitioning to the more modern C-27 aircraft. The Spartan is well suited for Afghanistan's mountainous terrain and limited road network. These obstacles make air power critical to the mobility of the Afghan National Security Forces. A C-27 can carry up to 20,000 pounds of cargo and fuel and operate on unimproved airfields as short as 3,000 feet, which allows access to airstrips unreachable by most fixed-wing aircraft. Now with 19 qualified crew members, seven of which are loadmasters the future of the 373rd looks bright. They now have seven C-27 Spartans on the flight line and are anticipating the delivery of two more in the next week.

Newly trained pilots will start returning to Afghanistan at the rate of one to two per month starting in January 2011 and the screening process for pilots will soon begin in their junior year at the National Military Academy of Afghanistan. Previously 45 percent of pilot candidates were disqualified for medical reasons. Looking back Piel explains it like this, "The year went by blazingly fast, but at the same time we were so busy every single day that you couldn't see your progress and what was happening around you because you were so deep in the middle of the dust storm. So now, as we are starting to drive out of the dust storm a little bit and look back and see the house that's standing behind us, it's a pretty good feeling."

2/24/2010 - KABUL, Afghanistan -- From overseas contingency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, to recovery missions in places like Haiti and New Orleans, or aiding scientific research in Antarctica, airlift has a global influence.

Airmen with the 538th Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron are sharing the power of airlift by advising Afghanistan National Army Air Corps C-27 pilots and loadmasters here. Since November 2009 the squadron's 16 Airmen advisors, including nine pilots, five loadmasters and a flight engineer; and their Afghan counterparts have flown more than 40 sorties and logged more than 169 flight hours in C-27 and AN-32 cargo aircraft, which are like a smaller version of the C-130 Hercules.

"Training on these aircraft and integrating these job skills is key to a successful transition in Afghanistan," said Lt. Col. James Piel, a St. Louis, Mo., native, deployed from the 6th Operations Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Fla. "Being able to move troops and cargo is crucial to any nation's success, but in Afghanistan (which is 75 percent mountainous terrain) airlift will be vital to their nation's security."

Ensuring the Afghan pilots are at their best, the 538th AEAS is making history requiring Afghan pilots to attend the Defense Language Institute in San Antonio and graduate from pilot training at Columbus Air Force Base, Miss., before they qualify as C-27 pilots.

"This is a tremendous time for my country, my family and for me," said 1st Lt. Faiz M. Ramaki, ANAAC C-27 pilot, who is the first Afghan pilot to graduate after the nine-month U.S. pilot training course in more than 50 years. "I couldn't be happier about my mentors and what they are doing for us. I feel confident that with their help, I will be ready to fly missions on my own."

This sentiment is shared by his primary mentor, Lt. Col. Paul Bedesem, 538th AEAS chief of training and C-27 instructor pilot, who will be giving Lieutenant Ramaki his check ride. A check ride evaluates the skills a pilot needs to fly safely and without supervision.

"Lieutenant Ramaki is a remarkable individual," said Colonel Bedesem, who is deployed from Randolph AFB, Texas. "Unlike most of his peers he was an Afghan citizen with no prior piloting

experience who used his own initiative and drive to make it to this point. "He is a great example of the future of Afghanistan and I am proud to be a part of and a witness to history," he said.

With a mission to train Afghans to conduct strategic and tactical airlift, airdrops and presidential support, advisors have a clear goal to pass on the valuable lesson in transporting cargo, people and assets vital to Afghanistan's security.

One new lesson for Afghan pilots is the value of the loadmaster.

"The concept of a loadmaster is new to them and they are finding out how valuable a loadmaster is to any mission they fly," said Senior Master Sgt. Mike Crews, 538th AEAS superintendent deployed from Hurlburt Field, Fla. "They are learning daily how to use them, especially when it comes to preflight checks and ensuring checklists are followed," he said. "The best part is we are always moving forward. They show improvement daily."

Currently, Afghan pilots only fly training missions but in April, 538th AEAS officials plan for them to fly their first operational mission. "It is an exciting time to be here," Colonel Piel said. "We and the Afghans have big plans for airlift in Afghanistan. "We are fortunate to have some of the best and most experienced Airmen training our Afghan counterparts," he said. "It allows us to make great strides in our training and gives the Afghans the opportunity to excel

The Afghan air force flew a C-130 training sortie without aid from US advisors for the first time, announced Air Forces Central Command. "Me and my crew were very excited and very nervous about this flight, to do it without any help of others and an all-Afghan crew," said Col. Aimal Sayedi, AAF Fixed Wing Squadron commander, of the June 16 flight. "That's a very big step," he said. The C-130H flew from Kabul to Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, on this mission. "The air force is back to life and we can do cargo, [casualty evacuation], and passenger movement from one province to another province," added AAF 1st Lt. Khial Sinwari, co-pilot on the flight, after the sortie. Air Force instructors from the 538th Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron have been training Afghan crews to operate the C-130H for the past 11 months. The Afghans conducted the self-sufficient flight eight months sooner than expected, according to AFCENT's June 18 release. The AAF received its first C-130 last October, after the United States scrapped the deal providing refurbished C-27As. 2014