

Shohna *ba Shohna*

Shoulder to Shoulder

Afghan Air Power



NTM-A
NATO Training Mission
AFGHANISTAN



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Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell, IV
 Commanding General,
 NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan
 Combined Security Transition Command - Afghanistan

On Aug. 27, NATO Air Training Command conducted its change of command. The ceremony witnessed the transfer of authority from Brig. Gen. Dave Allvin to Brig. Gen. Tim Ray. While Dave has moved on to increased responsibilities as the new Vice Wing Commander for Tanker Airlift Control Center at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, we know that Tim Ray will continue the efforts to professionalize the Afghan Air Force.

Working with the Afghan Air Force, NATC-A has made extraordinary progress over the past year. NATC-A had the vision to chart the future growth for the Afghan Air Force, which grew to more than 4,200-strong with 53 airframes. Over the next year, the Afghan Air Force will continue to grow by doubling the size of the C-27 fleet, increasing the Mi-17 fleet by half, and introducing fixed-wing and rotary trainers.

At the same time the Afghan Air Force is growing, international support has also been increasing through trainers and air mentor teams. Today, airmen from 16 nations are working shohna-ba-shohna with Afghan airmen. Additionally, command emphasis for greater gender integration within the Afghan Air Force enabled the first four female Afghan pilot candidates to complete English language training at “Thunder Lab,” subsequent training at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas and eventually pilot training at Fort Rucker, Ala. Just as Amelia Earhart inspired a generation of women in the United States, we know these future female Afghan pilots will inspire other women in post-Taliban Afghanistan.

Key to the international efforts to build the Afghan Air Force is creating an enduring institution and self-sustaining systems. Visits to Shindand Air Base reinforce this point; there, the remains of a once powerful, Soviet-built Afghan Air Force lie in ruins. With this in mind, NTM-A is investing in Shindand and building an indigenous training base to provide Afghanistan with its own world class air training center.

We respect the sacrifices that Afghan and Coalition airmen are making to develop the Afghan Air Force. With a self-sustaining air capability, Afghanistan will have the capability to support its forces in the field, respond to humanitarian disasters as it did after flooding in 2010, and serve the people of Afghanistan. Thanks to each of you for your true heroism and for your willingness to serve here in Afghanistan, to serve your nation and to serve the people of Afghanistan.

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Photo - Cover: Afghans wait for U.S. Airmen from the 438th Air Expeditionary Training Group to give instructions at Kandahar Airfield. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Angelita Lawrence)

Photo - Top: Afghan Air Force Mi-17 helicopters sit on the ramp at Kabul International Airport. Coalition Airmen here work daily to set the conditions for a professional, fully independent and operationally-capable AAF. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt Matthew Smith)

Photo - Back Cover: Canadian officers brace themselves against the force of a landing Mi-17 Afghan transport helicopter at the Kabul Military Training Facility. (Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Chris Fahey, NTM-A Public Affairs)

The Key to Securing the Future-Not Just Aircraft, but Human Capital



Brig. Gen. David Allvin.
Former Deputy Commanding General-Air

We often mark progress by numbers—new aircraft in the inventory, number of infrastructure projects completed, graduates from training courses, etc. This is certainly a valid, objective measure of progress—and by most accounts it is easy to see the progress achieved in the Afghan Air Force in the last year.

Twenty new aircraft have entered the inventory, and another twenty are scheduled to arrive within the next 90 days. The number of AAF members in training at Pohantoon-e-Hawayee has more than doubled from a year ago. Hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure builds across the whole of Afghanistan have either begun or been completed over the last twelve months. The conditions have been set to enable fixed wing and rotary wing pilot training at Shindand Air Base to begin by the end of this calendar year—symbolic of a truly self-sustaining capacity for the AAF. The list goes on and on.


The real investment—the one that will perhaps best ensure that transition is irreversible—is the investment in human capital. As this country rises up above the thirty-plus years of war and destruction, it will be the leaders that will determine the path ahead. These leaders are being “produced” through institutions such as the National Military Academy of Afghanistan and officer candidate school.

We are graduating noncommissioned officers from the “1U” course and sending them off to lead the enlisted force. Professional colleges and staff courses that currently exist and those that are in development will provide the framework within which leadership development can thrive. However, academic curricula can serve as the foundation, but it takes continuous engagement to build on that base. Books can teach it, but potential leaders need to live those principles that will engender a professional organization.

It is in this area that I have been most proud of the members of NATO Air Training Command-Afghanistan as this command not only accomplishes training but also the operational partnering. In this less structured environment, the true

signs of leadership—and lack thereof—can be seen. The ability to seize the opportunities to develop young leaders, encourage and reward positive behavior—while providing disincentives for unhelpful activity—will be absolutely critical going forward. Our advisers endeavor every day to amplify the positive and demonstrate through their partnership that the investment that matters the most is that of leadership development. Those future Afghan leaders are out there, and they are looking to our advisers to recognize and help them grow to eventually secure the peace for the people of Afghanistan.

Progress in the AAF will be—by necessity—slower than its Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police counterparts. The technical skills required to fly and maintain aircraft take longer to develop. The fielding of new weapons systems will continue for three to four more years. However, leader development does not require aircraft or support equipment to progress. It requires continued vigilance and effort by our coalition advisers as well as the willingness of our Afghan partners to step up to the challenge and do the hard things that define true leadership. We often speak of striving to show the Afghans “what right looks like.” This is critically important, but I submit that they *know* what it looks like. They can see the difference between transparency and opaqueness. They know the difference between fairness and favoritism. They can identify the difference between sacrifice and selfishness.

The real key is to demonstrate to our Afghan partners “what right acts like.” Through our own actions—identifying obstacles to professionalization and working to clear them—we show the Afghans that we truly value those principles. Showing that discipline, mutual respect and fairness are the connective tissue between the airmen, their learned skills and the equipment they have been entrusted to operate is essential. It is necessary to ensure that the treasure spent and the blood spilled, by coalition and Afghan forces alike, will indeed lead to an irreversible transition to an enduring, self-sustaining force for Afghanistan. 



A quick response, or “QR” code, is a 2-D electronic barcode that can be scanned by a smart phone and used as a link to additional online content and information. In this and future issues of SbS, we will begin utilizing QR codes to link content in the magazine to online material related to the story, including videos or additional images, to enhance the reader experience. If you do not already have a QR code reader for your phone or electronic device, simply search your applications for the free add-on.

Shindand Air Base Rising on the Wings of National Efforts, International Support

by Senior Airman Kat Lynn Justen
NTM-A Public Affairs

What provides the capability for combat forces to travel greater distances by acting as a conduit to the resupply of soldiers, ammunition, equipment and fuel? What system can move forces faster and farther than their own means can carry them? And what can destroy targets no longer in range of land and sea units? An air force. In the Herat Province, Afghanistan, work is underway to develop a premier air base to execute these missions.

Shindand Air Base is slated to serve as the key Afghan aerial warfare and training installation in Afghanistan and is undergoing major construction and education projects with the direct support of NATO and Afghan personnel.

“Shindand has come a long way over the past year, and will continue to develop immensely,” said Capt. Gregory Ward, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officer in charge of engineering and advisor at Shindand.

The air base has already tripled its original size, becoming the second largest air installation in Afghanistan next to Bastion Field, also in Helmand. So far, eight miles of fence line has expanded the base by 2,900 acres to make room for new living and working areas for 3,000 personnel.

In July, Shindand also saw the opening of a strategic taxiway which allowed simultaneous traffic of fixed-wing aircraft, greatly improving mission capabilities. This August, a 112,000-square meter rotary-wing apron was opened to park dozens of helicopters. Growth does not stop there. Myriad construction projects are currently in progress to support the burgeoning air base and support personnel.

“Some of the new construction we have underway includes development on the West side to include an Afghan National Army Regional Military Training Center, small arms range and AAF Shindand air wing,” said Ward. “On the East side, they are working on a strategic airlift ramp, fuel storage, munitions storage and waste water and solid waste treatment facilities.”

When it comes to training, NATO and Afghan forces have learned from history and understand that it takes more than just the building of facilities and the providing of equipment to create an air force. Education and the capability to pass knowledge on to future generations is the key to success,

and NTM-A and Afghan trainers play a pivotal role in the air installation’s development mission.

“I view the NATO training mission as central to ISAF Joint Command’s plans for transition, when ANSF can assume responsibility for general security in Afghanistan,” said Col. John Hokaj, Air Expeditionary Advisor Group and Shindand Air Base installation commander. “The air advising and pilot training mission of the 838 AEAG will develop within the Afghan Air Force those qualities necessary to become a self-sustaining and enduring contributor to security and stability in Afghanistan.”


The development of Shindand and the Afghan Air Force is a work in progress and coalition forces are slated to stand shoulder to shoulder with their Afghan counterparts during the growth process.

“We won’t finish building the Afghan Air Force until about 2016,” said Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell IV, NTM-A commander. “The trainers within the Afghan Air Force side of the house are definitely going to be on the ground throughout that time period while we finish up their last capability to take the lead for air operations here in the country.”

Recently, top ANA and NTM-A leadership visited Shindand to assess the development, provide solutions to challenges and show support for Afghan and coalition members working toward the lofty goal.

“I am very appreciative of all the work that is being done at Shindand and am impressed by the quality of work here,” said Gen. Sher Mohammad Karimi, ANA chief of general staff. “I want to be here for the ribbon-cutting when the facilities are complete, and our soldiers can live and train in these superb facilities.”

The growth of an air force presence is imperative to the country’s security, assisting a global community seeking to put an end to the war on terror and provide a basis of security for future generations.

“From a sleepy forward operating base in the middle of nowhere, Shindand has grown into an air base that will support the Afghan National Army and Afghan Air Force for years to come,” said Ward. 



The wreckage of numerous vehicles and aircraft in the “bone yard” on Shindand Air Base in the Herat Province are the remnants of once operable Soviet supported Afghan Air Force and a stark reminder of the consequences of developing a military without the skills and training to maintain logistical and structural systems. (U.S. Air Force Photo Senior Airman Kat Lynn Justen)

Thunder Lab produces Afghan Air Force ‘Best of the Best’

by Capt. Jamie Humphries

For Afghan Air Force 2nd Lt. Yar Mohammad, it’s always been a dream to serve his country in the AAF. Coming from Laghman province in eastern Afghanistan, the 25 year-old Afghan lieutenant now has that chance thanks to a program here called “Thunder Lab.”

Stood up May 2010, Thunder Lab immerses select AAF lieutenants into English language training with a goal of improving their comprehension prior to pilot training. Currently, 17 male students and eight female students live at the lab with U.S. and British mentors in an effort to supplement English skills they’ve learned at Kabul English Language Training Center (KELTC).

Created by former Vice Commander of the 438th Air Expeditionary Wing, Col. Creig Rice, Thunder Lab has three focus areas. The first area is to develop professionalism and officership, which will ultimately prepare the officers for follow-on training. Second is to instill a sense of teamwork and understanding that as a group, they can accomplish more than as one individual. The third focus is to improve English comprehension levels.

In October 2010, the lab fully integrated the first four Afghan female officer candidate school graduates who are now in San Antonio at the Defense Language Institute program. Once they obtain the minimum score necessary to advance from DLI, the students will continue to rotary-wing pilot training at Fort Rucker, Ala., with hopes of returning to Afghanistan to support the AAF in the Mi-17 helicopter.

“When students first arrive at Thunder Lab, there is an initial reluctance of males and females to mix,” said British Flt. Lt. Luke Meldon, Royal Air Force. “However, with the full-time nature of Thunder Lab, and with various team building exercises, students very quickly begin to form new friendships, regardless of gender.”

Selection Process

Male students first begin their military training at the Afghan National Military Academy and the females attend the Afghan National Officer Candidate School. During the final phases of those courses, AAF leadership selects a pre-determined number of students to fill positions in the Afghan Air Force. Those students are then sent to the initial Air Operations Course at Pohantoon-e-Hawayee or the Afghan Air Force’s “Air University.” After finishing courses at PeH, some students begin English immersion training at KELTC. Those identified as pilot qualified and meeting a basic English competency level are then interviewed by Thunder Lab staff for possible entrance into the program. If lieutenants volunteer and are found to meet the standards set by Thunder Lab staff, they are brought into the program on a volunteer basis.

“Thunder Lab is an intense leadership and language training environment. It is a must for each student to be a volunteer for the program. This gives the program the best chance of success,” said Lt. Col. Daryl Sassaman, officer in charge of Thunder Lab. “Those that are volunteers usually will put forth as much effort as required to achieve the end goals, which are professionalizing the AAF and increasing each student’s English comprehension level to a score that qualifies them for pilot training.”

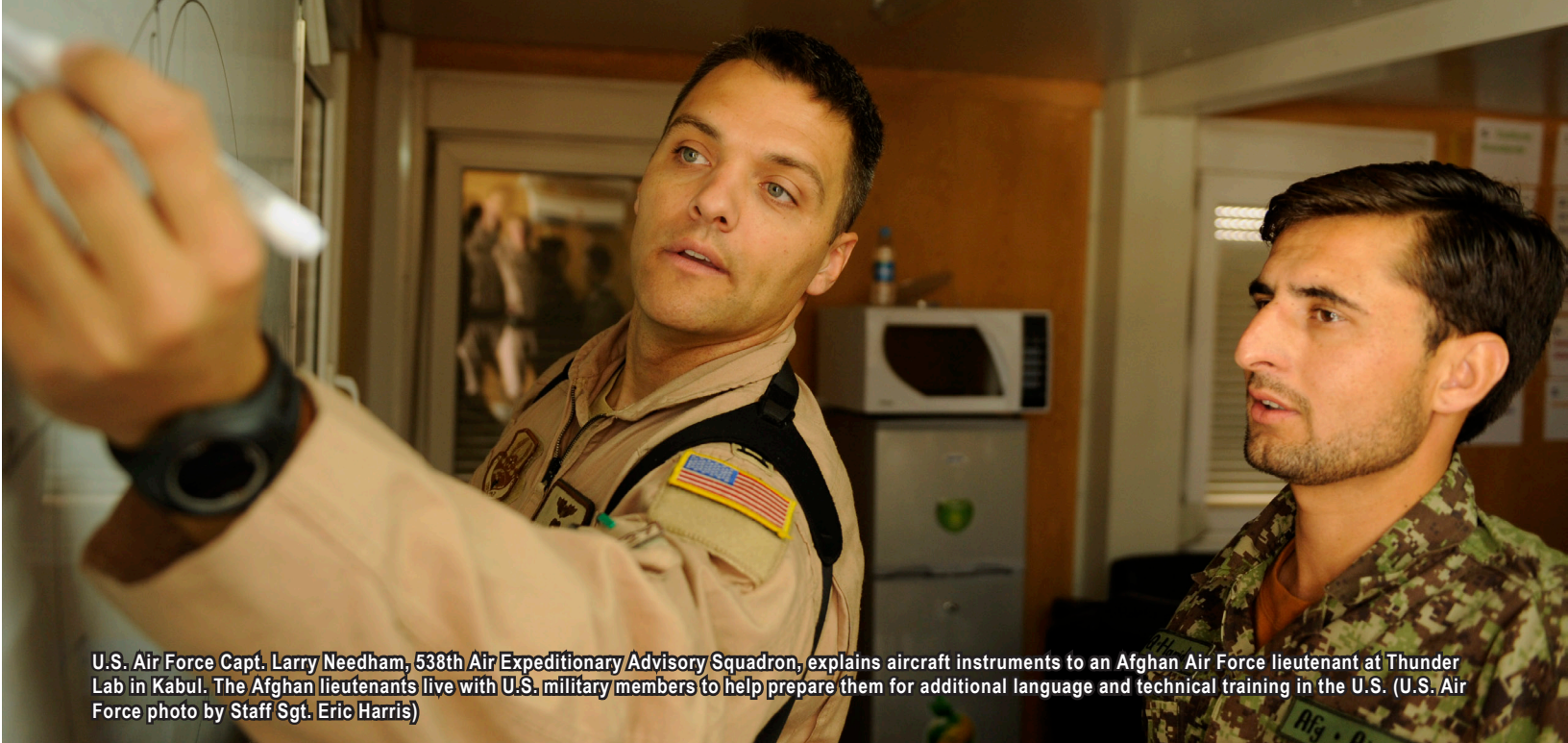
Daily Routine

A typical day for Afghan lieutenants and mentors begins at 5:00 a.m. with formal physical fitness training. Students are broken down into two groups each performing a workout on alternating days. The groups conduct a regimented fitness program with class leaders aimed at improving their physical strength and cardiovascular fitness.

During the afternoon, students continue to attend training before returning to the lab for their afternoon profes-



Afghan Air Force Pilot Candidate 2nd Lt. Masooma Hussaini receives flight simulation instruction at Thunder Lab at the Afghan Air Force Base compound in Kabul. Masooma and three other pilots candidates were the first women to graduate from Thunder Lab and are currently continuing their training at the Defense Language Institute in San Antonio. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Brian E. Christiansen)



U.S. Air Force Capt. Larry Needham, 538th Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron, explains aircraft instruments to an Afghan Air Force lieutenant at Thunder Lab in Kabul. The Afghan lieutenants live with U.S. military members to help prepare them for additional language and technical training in the U.S. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Eric Harris)

sionalism and leadership lesson aimed at increasing their officership, cultural understanding and military knowledge. This class was developed based on feedback provided by graduated Thunder Lab lieutenants, DLI instructors and AAF advisers. During this course, students learn new skills such as leadership, followership, time management, teamwork and communication.

“One of the main mission areas of the 438th AEW is to help professionalize the AAF. What a great opportunity to help shape the future of the AAF by instilling in its young leaders the sense of leadership and professionalism,” explained Sassaman.

After leadership class, students form up for dinner with all members of the team and staff to discuss their day. Staff members indicate this is an important time to work on the students’ conversational English in a non-classroom environment.

“Dinner is not just about learning to speak better English, but building relationships that will last a lifetime,” said Maj. Anthony Graham, 438th AEW and part-time mentor. “The interaction we have with each other will help effect the future of the AAF. Learning English is secondary to building relationships. Our goal is to help build a better Afghanistan.”

Thunder Lab Cadre

Currently, the lab employs three full-time mentors, including two British Royal Air Force officers and a U.S. Air Force officer-in-charge. In addition, there are five part-time mentors at the lab who have regular jobs throughout the Kabul International Airport compound but live at the lab and help with activities in the morning and evening. The mentor’s ranks range from senior airman to lieutenant colonel and represent the U.S. Air Force, Navy and British RAF.

The staff also includes two members from the Afghanistan-Pakistan Hand program, who live and teach at Thunder

Lab. The mission of Afghan Hands is to build long-lasting, positive partnerships with Afghan entities and civilians in order to demonstrate the International Security Assistance Force’s commitment to building capacity and capability within Afghanistan and deny support among the Afghan people to insurgents.


The lab also brings in senior-leader guest instructors in an effort to provide a different perspective on AAF efforts. This effort aims to demonstrate to the students the commitment shared between the U.S., Great Britain and AAF.

Thunder Lab: The Future

July 7, four Afghan female pilot candidates made history by becoming the first to graduate from Thunder Lab. After graduating, they traveled outside Afghan borders for the first time in their lives to San Antonio with the goal of finishing DLI and pilot training. This stop is another step in their journey to become pilots in the AAF.

In an interview with the Associated Press after arriving in the United States, one of the four pioneers explained what she hopes to achieve for women across Afghanistan.

“We’re going to open the door for ladies in Afghanistan,” 2nd Lt. Sourya Saleh said. “It’s a big deal for us to open this door for others. These other ladies who have the dream and think they can’t do it, we want to show them [they can].”

According to Thunder Lab staff, the future of the lab is bright and will soon integrate into the AAF’s hub for pilot development located in Shindand with a goal of making the base the “crown jewel” of the AAF. The mission and focus of the lab won’t change, but the number of students that it trains will increase. 

Afghan Airmen, Coalition Provide Education to AAF Members

by Capt. Jamie Humphries

The goal of an independent and operationally-capable Afghan Air Force cannot be met without specialized literacy, English and technical skills being taught by Afghans themselves. Pohantoon-e-Hawayee, the Afghan Air Force's "Air University," is working toward completion of these requirements.

Pohantoon-e-Hawayee, or "PeH," is the largest training institution for the AAF and includes professional military education, literacy classes, English skills and technical training specific to an AAF member's military occupational specialty. The school was originally established January 2008 as a branch school for the Afghan National Army Air Corps and has since evolved over time to become the Afghan Air University.

The school currently has 593 students enrolled from all over Afghanistan in various classes and is the primary in-processing point for all training conducted in the AAF. The school has 107 AAF members on staff, with 29 working to become instructors and the rest serving as staff support, such as registrars, logistics experts, facilities managers or military training instructors.

"Since 2008, there have been approximately 4,000 class graduates from different courses at PeH," said Lt. Col. Ryan Nichols, commander of the 738th Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron. "We currently have 58 courses offered in a variety of areas to include technical proficiency training, literacy and English."

'Training the Trainers'

A point of emphasis for the school, as explained by the staff at PeH, is the ability to grow trainers who will be able to

instruct fellow Afghan Air Force members.

A five-month training course is currently underway for 29 members of the AAF to teach them how to instruct their own courses with little oversight by coalition staff members. The Afghans in the instructor course receive specialized training on the use of computers and how to be an effective teacher. Intensive English training is also part of the curriculum.

Upon graduation, staff members hope the group has a strong foundation to operate independently.

"We hope these soon-to-be graduates understand the importance of their mission here and will continue toward a path of professionalism," said Nichols. "We see a lot of promise in each of these airmen and this is a solid step in developing the capability for the Afghans to sustain their own force."

Literacy

NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan has made literacy a top priority. All basic trainees across the Afghan Army, Air Force and Police receive mandatory literacy training to bring them to a 1st grade level. Those students entering the AAF are tested to determine their level of literacy. If a course is needed, a phased approach is implemented, with a goal of students working to a 3rd grade literacy level.

"There isn't one job in the AAF that can be done without being able to read," said Nichols. "We need them to be at least at a 3rd grade standard to allow for a technically proficient air force."

Afghan contractors teach the literacy courses with a goal of improving the country-wide literacy rate of only 14 percent.



Afghan Air Force listens to instruction at Pohantoon-e-Hawayee, the AAF's "Air University," listen to their instructor as he teaches them about fire safety. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew Smith)



Afghan Air Force firefighting students at Pohantoon-e-Hawayee, the Afghan Air Force's "Air University," listen to their instructor as he teaches them about fire safety. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew Smith)

Overall, literacy programs across the Afghan National Security Forces have trained more than 100,000 soldiers, airmen and policemen.

English Instruction

In addition to basic literacy, another high priority is teaching the Afghan Air Force trainees English—the international language of aviation. Currently, there are more than 300 AAF students enrolled at the Kabul English Language Training Center, with a goal of being able to speak conversational English.

Members of PeH work side-by-side with Defense Language Institute staff members at KELTC by providing administrative support, logistics and basic course management. Contractors also work with DLI instructors, supplementing English instruction to the AAF members of all ranks and specialties.

Not only does PeH offer set classes for members at KELTC, they are also able to offer courses needed if an organization deems it necessary to educate their office employees.

“We can offer just about any course at any time if the need arises,” said Mahar.

Advisers from PeH, working at KELTC, were critical to the advancement of the first four Afghan female lieutenants to move from KELTC and onto further English training at the DLI in San Antonio. The numbers speak for themselves, say members of PeH, as they continue to push students through the training pipeline and onto further specialized training.


Technical Training

The technical training offered at PeH can best be compared to that received at the U.S. Air Force's key training bases. The training is offered to all ranks and constitutes the entry-level courses necessary to further an airmen's career in the AAF. The courses typically take an average of three months to complete, but depending on the mission specialty, could take more time.

“If you look back, we've had more than 1,000 graduates from technical training,” said Nichols. “After technical school, the students go to their primary unit in the AAF where they complete on-the-job training necessary to continue their career progression.”

Courses offered include basic loadmaster, aircraft ground equipment, firefighting and basic instructor courses. Many times, students graduating from the courses are the first to do so, making the achievements at PeH even more impressive.

With nearly 1,600 students graduating per year, the future, says the staff at PeH is bright, but not without a lot of hard work ahead.

“We have high expectations but can't necessarily force our mentees to follow suit,” said Mahar. “We are working hard to educate the AAF and its members here at PeH. There's a lot of hard work and effort going on here, and I'm glad to say I contributed to its progress.” 

Afghan Pilots Meet America's Aviation Legends

by NTM-A Public Affairs

Some of America's most legendary astronauts met with four of the officer trainees who represent the future of the Afghan Air Force.

Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the moon, and former NASA astronauts Gene Cernan and Jim Lovell, met the Afghan Air Force trainees during a visit to Camp Eggers, home of NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan. The group discussed the space environment, what aviation platforms the Afghan pioneers would fly and both groups' mutual love for flying.

"Passion is important in every occupation," said Armstrong. "A person without it can never beat a person with it ... and it's encouraging to see this young [Afghan] group's enthusiasm and excitement."

After meeting the American astronauts, the Afghan officers just beginning their aviation careers expressed excitement at the opportunity to meet and talk with those

who have reached the absolute peak of aeronautical achievement.

"I'm overwhelmed and extremely excited," said Lt. Fatama Abteen, one of a small handful of female Afghan Air Force trainees. "It's hard to communicate how much this means to me."

"In school," said Afghan Lt. Khan Agha Ghaznavi, "I had so many questions about space that my teachers could not answer. To actually meet these great men who have actually been to the moon and could answer my questions directly ... it's overwhelming. This was such a historical day for me, and I'll remember it forever."


Training for the Afghan aviators is assigned to the 738th Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron, a NATO coalition unit that advises Afghan Air Force commanders and senior staff. 



Photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew Smith

AAIU Conducts First Integrated Counter NARC Operation

by Capt. Jamie Humphries

Members of the Afghan Ministry of Interior's Air Interdiction Unit met a major milestone with the completion of their first fully-integrated counter narcotics operation alongside a coalition aircrew.


The mission was flown by Afghan AIU Special Forces pilots and targeted a large drug lab and one ton of illegal drugs were destroyed during the raid in Achin District in Nangahar province.

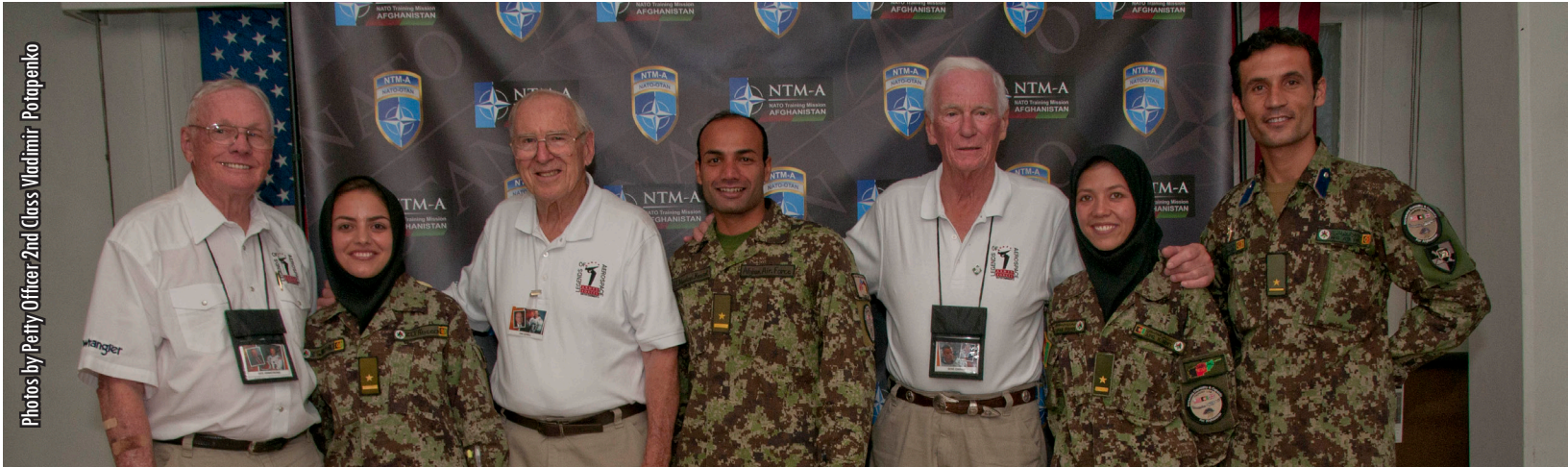
"Today's mission proved that U.S. and U.K. training is working and the AIU is a step closer to achieving its own dedicated counter narcotics operations with its Afghan partners," said British Maj. Stephen Davies, AIU Executive Training Team executive officer.

The AIU is a counternarcotics aviation unit that provides general helicopter support to the Afghan National Police. The AIU also executes deliberate counter narcotics operations with partnered special operations forces.

With 20 Mi-17 helicopters currently in the AIU inventory, crews conduct training and operational missions in support of the MoI in conjunction with the Afghan National Police and other counternarcotics forces throughout Afghanistan.

The specialized AIU enables counter-narcotics police to reach what would otherwise be completely inaccessible parts of Afghanistan, with the helicopters providing added security and the element of surprise.

"Today is the first time that Afghan AIU aircrew have flown partnered coalition counter narcotic operations," said Col. Fahim Ramin. "This partnership has been achieved through the dedication of our coalition training team combined with the hard work of my AIU aircrew to achieve this level of success. We plan to build upon this achievement and integrate further into these types of specialist aviation operations in order to further develop the capability of the AIU." 



AAF Receives First Fixed-Wing Trainers

by Capt. Jamie Humphries

The first three aircraft slated as initial trainers for the Afghan Air Force undergraduate pilot training program arrived at Shindand Air Base marking an historic day for Afghanistan and its nascent Air Force.

Three Cessna 182 Turbo aircraft are the first of six to be delivered to the AAF as initial flight training aircraft. Six additional Cessna 208B's are scheduled to arrive over the coming months as the fixed wing follow-on trainer.

In addition to the fixed wing program, there will be six MD-530 light helicopters delivered later this year devoted to the rotary wing portion of UPT. These aircraft, along with six Mi-17 helicopters, will be used for advanced follow-on training. The initial instructor cadre of the training program is staffed by U.S. Air Force, coalition and Afghan instructors.

In 2009, the Afghanistan Ministry of Defense selected its first group of pilot candidates on which to build its future air force. Absent any indigenous training resources or facilities, the future pilots were sent to the U.S. where they were enrolled in language immersion training, followed by undergraduate pilot training with the U.S. Air Force.

“Six years ago we had nothing, and today we are receiving our first three training aircraft,” Major General Abdul Wahab Wardak, Afghan Air Force commander, stated in his speech during the arrival of the C-182T's. “I once looked out to see our air force scattered across Afghanistan. Today we have brought

our air force back together here at Shindand—the only air force training base in Afghanistan.”

Wahab went on to thank the coalition and all of the advisers for helping them reach this historic occasion.

Officials also indicated the arrival of these first aircraft is a momentous step towards the creation of a self-sufficient, Afghan led flying training center of excellence at Shindand Air Base, a crucial step in the development of a fully independent and operationally-capable air force.

Shindand will not only be the center for pilot training, but will eventually serve as the training center for much of the AAF. Included in the training center will be maintenance, language and professional military education as well as training and support functions for the skills necessary to sustain base and flight-school operations.

“This is a huge task, developing an entire UPT program from the ground-up, to include infrastructure, aircraft, maintenance and personnel. It is of the utmost importance to ensure it is done right in order to establish long-term sustainment of the AAF,” said Lt. Col. James Mueller, 444th Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron commander. “The U.S., Italian and Hungarian Air Forces as well as the U.S. Army and civilians are working hand-in-hand with our Afghan counterparts to ensure the future success of Shindand AB.”



