



Airmen assist Iraqis with maintenance training

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8/5/2009 - **CAMP TAJI, Iraq** -- *This is the first in a three-part series about Airmen deployed to Camp Taji, Iraq, where they assist in training members of the Iraqi air force in helicopter maintenance, gunner and piloting skills.*

Whether it's on the flightline, in a hangar or in a backshop, members of the Iraqi Air Force are learning to fix their own helicopters, thanks to American Airmen who have shown them how.

The Airmen assigned to the 721st Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron take great pride in their goal:

"Once they can fix their own aircraft, they can make sure they're providing air support for their own forces," said Lt. Col. Mike McNerney, the squadron commander deployed from Fairchild Air Force Base, Wash.

The 721st AEAS assigns one American Airmen to each of the necessary maintenance fields. They do less hands-on work and more advising as the Iraqis do much of their own repair work.

As far as the maintainers who keep the birds flying, fixing helicopters isn't a new concept.

"We're not going to teach them anything new about the actual repair of their aircraft," said Master Sgt. Chris Scott, a helicopter crew chief deployed from Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. "What we can do is suggest ways to improve their processes. Like using the supply line channels to order parts rather than stripping them off of other helicopters."

Another challenge has been to create training records for the Iraqis, which will create certified documentation on the skill levels of Iraqi Airmen. The program is modeled after the Air Force's specialty knowledge test.

"We need the older guys in the squadron to start teaching the younger generation," Sergeant Scott said. "If we can get them to take responsibility for their troops, they'll take a much more active role in their training."

And that will just mean more and more effective maintenance airmen, Sergeant Scott added.

American Airmen are also assisting the Iraqis to create a phased approach to fixing aircraft parts. For help with that aspect, Tech. Sgt. Andrea Walton turns to American Soldiers and their facilities.

Sergeant Walton is a non-destructive inspection instructor. She routinely visits the Army's NDI backshop to show her Iraqi students how to use the specialized tools to find microscopic cracks and flaws in aircraft parts.

"It's a team effort out here to get the Iraqis better trained," said Sergeant Walton, deployed from Whiteman AFB, Mo.

"I'm proud to work and serve with her," said Pvt. Gzwaan Majeed, one of Sergeant Walton's students. "She shows us the step-by-step way to find cracks. She's a good teacher."

Her students get an abundance of on-the-job training with NDI techniques, which will ensure the Iraqi helicopter squadrons are able to perform their missions.

"With NDI, we're able to locate problems before they become bigger issues," Sergeant Walton said. "What we want the Iraqis to develop is a routine way of inspecting aircraft parts at regular intervals. If a flawed component makes it onto an aircraft, it could be a disaster."



U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Andrea Walton, a non-destructive inspection (NDI) instructor with the 721st Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron, assists an Iraqi air force maintenance student use specialized tools to find microscopic cracks and flaws in aircraft parts during a training visit to the Army's NDI backshop at Camp Taji, Iraq, July 13, 2009. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Michael B. Keller) (Released)

Whether it's establishing a quality assurance program, training records or streamlined processes, Airmen are working directly with members of the Iraqi Air Force to ensure their helicopters are able to fly.

The Iraqi Air Force flies the Mi-17, Mi-171, UH-1 Huey and Jet Ranger helicopters from Taji Air Base. In addition to training maintenance and aircrews, the Iraqi squadrons defend infrastructure and resources in Iraq. They're also charged with providing air power for their troops on the ground, defending the populace from insurgents and providing stability.