

# Iraqi Pilots Fly Prime Minister for First C-130 Mission

By U.S. Army Sgt. Lorie Jewell — MNSTC-I Public Affairs

**BAGHDAD, Iraq** – Two days after their first training flight on a C-130 cargo plane, a crew from an Iraqi Air Force squadron was back in the cockpit Feb. 12 for their first mission: flying Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi round trip from Baghdad to As Sulaymaniyah West.

The Iraqi pilot who flew the aircraft described the mission as a great honor, one he was grateful to participate in. Allawi arrived at the landing zone by helicopter and quickly greeted the Squadron 23 crew as he boarded the cargo plane.

“It’s a big job,” said the pilot, who asked not to be identified for security reasons. “It’s a great thing to do, and we appreciate the Americans help in getting us trained to do this.”

The Iraqi crew included an engineer, load master and navigator along with the pilot. They just happened to be on the flight schedule when Allawi needed transportation, said Maj. Mike Frame, a U.S. Air Force pilot with the 777th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron who is training the Iraqis with five other U.S. crew members from the squadron.

“They were randomly picked,” Frame said, smiling as he put his arm around the pilot. “He is their best pilot, though.”



The Iraqi Air Force has three C-130 cargo planes in its fleet, gifts from the United States.

-Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Lorie Jewell



Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi greets Master Sgt. John Spillane, a loadmaster with the 777th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron as he boards the Iraqi Air Force C-130 to be flown by an Iraqi aircrew.

-Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Lorie Jewell

Frame said he feels fortunate to have the job of helping train members of Iraq’s Air Force and witnessing it taking shape.

“How many times does anyone get a chance to do something like this?” he said. “It’s just amazing.”

Getting the crew members up to speed to fly C-130s wasn’t too difficult, Frame said. All have prior experience, they just didn’t have the opportunity to maintain or expand their skills until Saddam Hussein was no longer in power, he said.

“The crews are much better than we expected,” Frame said. “They just need some time to get acquainted with the new plane and new flying procedures.”

The Iraqi crew completed a training mission Feb. 9 – their first time ever in the cockpit of a C-130 – in which they flew five other crews from their Talil, Iraq-based squadron to Amman, Jordan. Four of the crews are going through training in Amman; the fifth continued on for Hercules simulator training in Little Rock, Ark.

The United States gave Iraq three C-130 cargo planes in January to help incorporate airlift capabilities into their Air Force. The planes were overhauled and given new exterior paint jobs, which included Iraqi flags on the tail sections.