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Canadians join KAF Express

by Capt Paul Kim

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KANDAHAR AIRFIELD — In the skies over Kandahar Province, Canada's Joint Task Force – Afghanistan (JTF-Afg) Air Wing is making a big impression on operations and improving the safety of Canadian and allied soldiers.

CH-146 Griffon tactical helicopters and CH-147 Chinook transports from the JTF-Afg Air Wing are now flying with "KAF Express", the ISAF helicopter pool that moves coalition and Afghan personnel from Kandahar Airfield to destinations throughout the province. After less than three months of operations, the wing has already moved more than 1 200 passengers who would otherwise have had to travel on Afghanistan's deadly roads.

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"One of the reasons why the wing is here is to deny, or at least limit, the enemy's ability to strike at Canadians and allied personnel by moving them through the air instead of on the road," said tactical helicopter pilot Captain Christine Salt. "Every day, we grow in capabilities as we bring more equipment and resources on line, as well as develop expertise in flying operations in Afghanistan. Every mission we fly, we learn something new and incorporate that into how we do things."

"The only disappointment I've heard," said mission specialist Sergeant Michael Scott, of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, "is from people we had to turn away because of priority and limited space." Passengers are loaded according to operational priority, which is set by higher HQ and not by rank, said Sgt Scott, who pointed out cases where a corporal was seated ahead of a senior NCM or an officer. "We will do everything we can to get our guys where they need to go with their kit," he said. "We have had to do some creative loading in the past few days due to the types of loads we have been handling."

Formally stood up December 6, JTF-Afg Air Wing grew out of a key recommendation of the Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan that called for a Canadian aviation capability designed primarily to move troops.

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Date Modified: 2009-04-17