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Canada's CH-146 Griffon and CH-147 Chinook Helicopters reach Initial Operational Capability

On March 3, 2009, Lieutenant-General Angus Watt, Chief of the Air Staff, accompanied by Colonel Christopher Coates, the Commander of the Canadian Air Wing in Kandahar, announced that the CH-146 Griffon and CH-147 Chinook helicopters had reached initial operational capability (IOC).

IOC is a declaration to Regional Command (South) that the CH-146 Griffon and CH-147 Chinook helicopters belonging to the Joint Task Force Afghanistan (JTF-Afg) Air Wing are ready to start providing a level of operational aviation support to Regional Command (South).

"I am very proud of every single member of the Joint Task Force-Afghanistan Air Wing," said Lieutenant-General Angus Watt. "In a very short period of time they have completed very demanding training, brought new aircraft into theatre, and have attained a high standard of operational capability."

The six Chinook D-model helicopters will enhance the International Security Assistance Force's (ISAF) ability to conduct air and aviation operations within the Regional Command (South) area of operations. The medium-to-heavy lift helicopters will provide an important transportation capability and increased options for the transportation of Canadian soldiers, as well as their Afghan and coalition partners.

The Chinook is a very reliable helicopter that has proven itself in both domestic and international operations. The U.S., the U.K. and the Netherlands have all successfully operated the Chinook aircraft in the challenging environment of Afghanistan. With their ability to carry large payloads and more than 30 soldiers, the Chinooks are a valuable asset and welcome addition to the ISAF aircraft pool.

"Achieving IOC is another significant step towards building the air capability that will improve the task force's transportation, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, and will contribute to mission success in Afghanistan," said Col Coates. "These additional assets will allow ISAF to reduce ground-based resupply convoys and more easily reach remote locations in challenging environments where they could be at risk of ambushes, land mines and improvised explosive devices."

The eight Griffon helicopters will be used to provide escort protection for the newly-acquired Chinooks, which will enhance CF capabilities, giving commanders the ability to move troops rapidly and with more flexibility. Griffons have been used effectively in many national and international humanitarian relief operations-including Manitoba's Red River flood in 1997, Eastern Canada's ice storm in 1998, and the United Nations effort to stabilize Haiti in 2004-and are a welcome addition to the JTF-Afg Air Wing inventory.

This achievement is an important step in fulfilling one of the key recommendations of the Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan. These helicopters will enable the Canadian Forces to better support their civilian counterparts and will assist in more efficiently and effectively progressing Canada's priorities and signature projects in Kandahar Province.

The Air Wing will continue to develop its capabilities with these platforms in order to reach full operational capability (FOC). Canada's Heron unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) reached initial operating capability on January 31, 2009. Upon reaching FOC, Canadian Forces aircraft will be declared to have met the full scope of CF air support commitment to Regional Command (South).

*Credit: Capt Steve Hawken*

Canadian and American personnel board a Canadian CH-147 Chinook helicopter at Kandahar Airfield as the Chinook prepares to conduct its first mission transporting coalition personnel to forward operating bases.