

ATAC FLIES FIRST MIRAGE F1

CONTRACT ADVERSARY OPERATOR MAKES WELCOME PROGRESS

TEXTRON AIRBORNE SOLUTION'S Airborne Tactical Advantage Company (ATAC) marked the first flight of one of its ex-French Air Force Dassault Mirage F1s at its base at Alliance Airport, Texas, on August 22. It came a month to the day after high-speed taxi tests of the aircraft — two-seat Mirage F1B registration N601AX (ex-French serial 502). A company statement said that the flight lasted 30 minutes and was conducted as 'an initial acceptance flight'.

The fighters arrived at ATAC's Adversary Center of Excellence (ACE) from June 2017 as the company

acquired 63 Mirage F1s from France, along with support equipment and 150 engines, in September 2017.

It was part of ATAC's latest move to be in a position to respond to a huge USAF requirement for contracted aggressor training support under its adversary aircraft requirement for training its combat forces. Contractors will be permitted to provide support with several aircraft types including third and fourth-generation fighters and requirements include operations at speeds of up to Mach 1.5 and altitudes up to 50,000ft. The contracted aircraft must be compatible with captive air-to-air

training missiles and electronic countermeasures pods and around half will require a radar with a range of up to 80nm (148km).

Only US-based companies are permitted to bid as prime contractors and aircraft will be flown by American civilians. However, the aircraft can be sourced from Western nations or from 'threat countries'.

Since 1994, ATAC has been providing contractor air service training support for the US Navy. ATAC Kfir and Hunters have become regular inhabitants of various navy fighter squadrons' parking ramps as they provide a range of training services to both the fleet and to fighter squadrons. ATAC has

trained US Navy, marine, air force and army aircrews, ship crews, and combat controllers in the air-to-ship, air-to-air, and air-to-ground arenas.

ATAC has achieved significant success with the US Navy, supporting a minimum of 4,500 flying hours annually using its Hunters and Kfirs, with each of its pilots being either a US Navy, US Marine Corps or USAF fighter pilot; most are instructors and typically they are either TOPGUN, aggressor squadron or USAF Weapons School patch-wearers.

In a statement, ATAC said that 'it intends to return as many of the high-performance tactical fighter aircraft to service as practicable'. It added: 'ATAC/ Textron investments in standing up all necessary functions in advance of government contracts demonstrates our commitment to the mission and ensures ATAC will be ready to meet the [Department of Defense] needs from day one.'

UNIT NEWS

- The US Navy's Electronic Attack Squadron 131 (VAQ-131) 'Lancers' officially become an expeditionary EA-18G Growler squadron on October 1 having vacated Carrier Air Wing Eight. This paves the way for VAQ-144 (name still to be announced) to be established in Fiscal Year 2023. **Mike Crutch**

- Air Force Reserve Command's 920th Rescue Wing will host an HC-130 retirement event at Patrick AFB, Florida, on November 1. The wing's 39th Rescue Squadron operates the last legacy HC-130N variants of the Hercules and will transition to the newer HC-130J in 2020.

- US Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak, Alaska's transition from the HC-130H to the HC-130J was completed when its fifth Super Hercules arrived on July 30. Tail number 2002 was the seventh HC-130J to have its legacy Mission System Suite (MSS) replaced by the Minotaur MSS+. It provides increased capabilities for the aircraft's sensors, radar and intelligence-gathering equipment.

- The 4th Special Operations Squadron's last armed AC-130U gunship was retired to Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona, for storage with the 309th Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group on August 19, 2019. The squadron's remaining 'Spooky' gunships at Hurlburt Field, Florida, have already had weapons removed in preparation for their upcoming retirement.

- Air Force Reserve Command's 920th Rescue Wing recently deployed three HH-60G Pave Hawks to the Horn of Africa. In addition to these helicopters, which are operated by the wing's 301st Rescue Squadron, pararescue personnel from the 306th Rescue Squadron were deployed to Camp Lemonnier in the Republic of Djibouti. The latter unit is assigned to the 943rd Rescue Group at Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona, as a geographically separated unit of the 920th. While deployed in support of the Combined Joint Task Force — Horn of Africa, the units are assigned to the 449th Air Expeditionary Group as the 303rd Expeditionary Rescue Squadron.

RUSSIAN 'HIND' MH-60S

The US Naval Aviation Warfighting Development Center (NAWDC) at NAS Fallon, Nevada, has started flying MH-60S BuNo 167822 in a scheme representing a Soviet-era Mi-24 'Hind'. It was photographed at Fallon in August. **Jurgen van Toor/4Aviation**



FINAL RC-12X GUARDRAIL CONVERSIONS

Northrop Grumman has completed work on several RC-12X Guardrails at Sacramento McClellan Airport in recent weeks. Sub-contractor DynCorp completed aircraft serial 93-0701 in September as one of the last pair to be reworked, and the facility there was scheduled to close on November 1. **Jim Dunn**

