
Iraqi General Visits Luke Air Force Base Flies in F-16

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Iraqi air force Brigadier General Ali Al-Aaragy enters a 63rd Fighter Squadron F-16 Fighting Falcon before a flight at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, December 15, 2008. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt Richard Rose).

Ten years ago, Iraqi air force Brigadier General Ali Al-Aaragy was flying Mirage fighters for his country's air force. This week, he was flying in a 63rd Fighter Squadron F-16 Fighting Falcon.

"It was a dream come true to fly in the F-16," the General said after his flight piloted by Lieutenant Colonel Jack Maixner, 63rd Fighter Squadron (FS) Commander, December 15, 2008.

The General, who works as his country's air force advisor to the Minister of Defense, said the purpose of his visit to Luke Air Force Base was to enhance the relationship and partnership between the Iraqi air force and the U.S. Air Force, as well as to see the current developments in training and fighter aircraft for possible procurement by his country's government.

The General spent about ten days in the United States, first visiting Randolph Air Force Base, Texas, where he flew in the T-6 Texan and T-38 Talon, two aircraft he hopes will soon be entering the Iraqi air force's inventory.

Aside from the F-16 flight which he described as "amazing," the Iraqi leader spoke with Brigadier General Kurt Neubauer, 56th Fighter Wing Commander, who explained how Luke is organized, managed, and operates. This, General Ali said, was one of the most impressive aspects of the U.S. Air Force he learned about during his trip.

I like how each air base is different and was surprised to see how they are managed, he said. I would like to copy these air bases and place them in Iraq.

Not only was the General impressed with the way Air Force bases are managed, but partnership with local communities was another factor which he said was an impressive aspect of the U.S. Air Force.

General Ali, who himself has 2,000 hours in the French-made Mirage F-1 fighter, praised the Air Force and what it has done for his country and air force in Iraq.

Our cooperation with the Coalition Air Force Training Teams has led Iraq to be able to protect the infrastructure, fight terrorists and insurgents, and protect Iraq's sovereignty, he said. The Iraqi people know that terrorism is a threat to Iraq, and right now the Iraqi army and air force enjoy good cooperation with the people in regard to reporting suspicious activities.

After his visit to Luke, the General was scheduled to return to Iraq, bringing photos and videos of his trip to not only show his government, but also the Iraqi people, the capabilities, partnership, and friendship the U.S. Air Force is giving Iraq.

I want to thank the U.S. Air Force for how they are helping us and trying to push the Iraqi air force forward, General Ali said. We are working together as one team to rebuild the Iraqi air force.

The photos and videos shot by Airmen from the 1st Combat Camera Squadron at Charleston Air Force Base, South Carolina are to be aired on Iraqi national television January 6, 2009 for the Iraqi Armed Forces Day.

Through our television channels, we will be able to show the people how the U.S. Air Force is working with us to build a new Iraqi air force, the General said.