

French Captain joins 41st RQS as exchange officer

by Airman 1st Class Spencer Gallien
23rd Wing Public Affairs

7/28/2008 - **MOODY AIR FORCE BASE, Ga. (ACCNS)** -- For the first time in U.S. Air Force history, a French helicopter pilot recently joined the 41st Rescue Squadron here as part of a three-year exchange officer program.

Capt. Guillaume Vernet, who flew the SA 330 Puma before the exchange program, is assigned to the 41st RQS as a pilot.

In France, Captain Vernet belonged to the Escadron d'Helicopteres 01.067 Pyrenees. The unit is part of the French Air Force and is stationed in Cazaux Air Force Base, France.

Captain Vernet entered the familiarization phase of the exchange program in October 2007, when he traveled to Kirtland AFB, N.M.

"I spent my first few months becoming familiar with U.S. Military customs as well as the English language," said Captain Vernet. "Then in December 2007 I began my HH-60 training."

From December 2007-May 2008 Captain Vernet trained on the HH-60 with the 58th Special Operations Wing en-route to becoming the first French pilot to be sent to the United States and first exchange officer helicopter pilot to be sent in an operational unit in the HH-60 helicopter pilot community.

"The Puma is an older airframe with limited capability compared to the Pavehawk," said Captain Vernet. "One of the more difficult aspects to flying the HH-60 airframe was learning to use the added capabilities of air refueling."

After the French captain finished his training, he was ready to join the 41st RQS.

"I'm extremely excited to be here," said Captain Vernet. "The 347th Rescue Group is known throughout the world as the premiere CSAR unit--this is exactly where I wanted to be."

Capt. Russell Cook, 41st RQS pilot, who is Captain Vernet's flight commander, feels that the squadron has the right man for the job.

"The French Air Force sent one of their best and brightest," said Captain Cook. "He's definitely the right guy at the right time; he's doing awesome so far."

Although "Capitaine" Vernet has yet to fly with the squadron, he pointed out that he can't wait for his chance to get back in the pilot's seat.

"I haven't flown since the schoolhouse at Kirtland," said Captain Vernet. "I'm chomping at the bit to finish up my



MOODY AIR FORCE BASE, Ga. -- Captain Guillaume Vernet, recently joined the 41st Rescue Squadron as part of a three-year Officer Exchange program. Captain Vernet began his tour at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M., while he was being trained to fly the HH-60G Pavehawk. Capt. Vernet is the first French pilot to train with the HH-60 air frames. (U.S. Air Force photo by SrA Javier Cruz Jr)

training so I can continue to train on the HH-60."

During Captain Vernet's tour, he will not only train with the 41st RQS, but also deploy.

"During my time here, I am part of the squadron, which means I do the same exact training, I will deploy like any other American Airman in the 41st RQS, with the exception of deploying to Iraq, and I will participate in the exercises," said Captain Vernet.

Although Captain Vernet will be deployable, he will not be deploying to Iraq if a tasking for the 41st RQS were to come about.

Among some of the things the Captain is looking forward to include participating in a large-scale exercise like Red Flag.

"Two things I really look forward to is participating in a large exercise and deploying the way the U.S. Air Force does," said Captain Vernet. "I also would like to be qualified to be an instructor on the HH-60 by the end of my three-year tour."

Capt. Scott Adams, who is part of the 55th RQS at Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz., will also travel to France as part of the exchange program.

Captain Adams currently flies the HH-60 but during his time as an exchange officer in France he will fly the EC 725 Caracal, in the EH 01.067 Pyrenees. The Caracal is a new airframe that was especially designed for French CSAR.

"This is really a great program for both of the Captains," said Captain Cook. "Captain Adams and Captain Vernet are really being given a great opportunity to learn and teach about different countries militaries and customs."