

MOBILE AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL MARINES STAND WATCH OVER AFGHAN SKIES

5/5/2012 By Cpl. Lisa M. Tourtelot, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (FWD)

FORWARD OPERATING BASE EDINBURGH, Afghanistan — Staff Sgt. James Fishburne and Sgt. Travis Shiflett, a Marine Air Traffic Control Mobile Team leader and an air traffic controller, respectively, with Marine Air Control Squadron 1, clear two AH-1W Super Cobras to land at their airfield aboard Forward Operating Base Edinburgh, known as FOB Edi, April 28, 2012.

The two helicopters have only just landed, but word has come that they need to be back in the air as soon as possible: an Afghan National Army soldier was injured in a vehicle accident not far from the base, and medical evacuation helicopters need close-air-support to rescue their casualty.

It is up to the members of the Marine Air Traffic Control Mobile Team, or MMT, to coordinate the efforts of Army medical evacuation crews with close-air-support from Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 369.

“We act as a liaison between the medical aircraft and the supporting aircraft,” explained Fishburne, a Waverly Hall, Ga., native. “We’re very unique in that we [are a] communications hub, especially when it comes to the support of troops-in-contact and MEDEVAC missions.”

Fishburne explained that not only does his team provide communication between assets from multiple services and nations, but they also notify aircrews as soon as information arrives about missions they might be tasked to support.

When most air traffic control teams receive word that an incident requiring air support has occurred in their area of operations, they do not inform the aircrew until that crew is officially tasked with the mission.

The FOB Edi MMT, however, carefully monitors all communication lines for any air support need. Whenever that need arises in their area of operations, the MMT gives the waiting crew a heads up. By the time that aircrew is actually tasked with the mission, they are already in their helicopters with the rotors spinning, ready to take off.

“Fifteen minutes is considered a good response time, from being tasked to taking off,” said Fishburne. “Here, we can have the aircraft off the ground in three minutes.”

In combat, this accelerated response time can mean the difference between life and death.

Super Cobra pilot Capt. Robert Mauro, with HMLA-369 and a Kettering, Ohio, native, explained that early notification and accurate information make the FOB Edi MMT especially effective.

“We couldn’t launch on our missions without ATC,” said Mauro. “They’re very good at what they do and getting us in the air quickly.”

The ATC tower must be manned 24 hours a day, seven days a week by Marines like Fishburne and Shiflett, a Richmond, Ohio, native.



Forward Operating Base Edinburgh, Afghanistan-Staff Sgt. James Fishburne, a Marine Air Traffic Control Mobile Team leader with Marine Air Control Squadron 1 and Waverly Hall, Ga., native, communicates from the air traffic control tower aboard Forward Operating Base Edinburgh with a pilot April 28. The MMT facilitates communication between ground combat units and much-needed air support., **Cpl. Lisa M. Tourtelot, 4/28/2012 6:06 AM**



Forward Operating Base Edinburgh, Afghanistan-Sgt. Travis Shiflett, an air traffic controller with Marine Air Control Squadron 1 and Richmond, Ohio, native, passes word to pilots from the air traffic control tower aboard Forward Operating Base Edinburgh April 28. The Marine Air Traffic Control Mobile Team aboard FOB Edi is responsible for coordinating communication between aircrews and ground combat elements in need of air support., **Cpl. Lisa M. Tourtelot, 4/28/2012 6:15 AM**



The FOB Edi MMT may be small, but it plays a critical role for the facilitation of the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward) mission in southwestern Afghanistan. Forward Operating Base Edinburgh, Afghanistan-An Army UH-60A Black Hawk flies over the air traffic control tower aboard Forward Operating Base Edinburgh April 28. The Marine Air Traffic Control Mobile Team provides air traffic control as well as vital communication between squadrons and ground combat elements., **Cpl. Lisa M. Tourtelot, 4/28/2012 8:03 AM**