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Release No: 177
Oct. 1, 2010

Lieutenants complete inaugural language training

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RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE, Texas - Twenty-five of the Air Force's newest second lieutenants recently completed the inaugural class of focused language training at Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala., as part of the Language Enabled Airmen Program.

The Language Intensive Training Event, or LITE, was held at the Air Force Culture and Language Center over the span of four weeks and conducted by resident instructors from the Defense Language Institute. Classroom training included the strategic languages of Russian, Chinese, French, German, Modern Standard Arabic and Spanish.

The focused language training is available to volunteers in LEAP to take advantage of the time between participants' commissioning and arrival at their initial career skills training and builds on language abilities gained as part of their accessions experience through either ROTC or U.S. Air Force Academy.

Through various surveys and examinations, to include the Defense Language Proficiency Test, the improvement in language proficiency by graduates exceeded initial expectations. Seventy-five percent of LITE graduates have shown an increase in DLPT scores since their baseline testing a month earlier.

"The results have been astounding," said Jay Warwick, Air Force Culture and Language Center director. "This program fills two voids - it strengthens the Air Force inventory for language-enabled Airmen and provides them the opportunity to maximize their time in between operational assignments."

Maxwell AFB is one of fifteen locations where LITE training was conducted this summer. Other venues included language schools at Offutt AFB, Neb., Oakland and Monterey, Calif., Brazil, China, Costa Rica,

France, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Morocco and Ukraine.

As volunteers in the Language Enabled Airman Program, the lieutenants enter a long-term, structured program using a combination of internet-based methodologies and immersion training in order to maintain their newly enhanced language skills.

"These graduating Airmen are now a part of a social network," said Lt. Col. Brian Smith, deputy director of the language department, "capable of feeding, motivating and encouraging each other with new ideas about language learning as they move forward in their careers."

Zach Hickman, the director of sustainment and maintenance, said the toughest part of learning a language is keeping up with a language.

"In the past, Airmen had the opportunity to go on a language immersion but then were left to their own devices to keep up their new language skills," he said. "LEAP is designed to correct this deficiency by instituting a structured developmental curriculum to ensure participants maintain skills they have gained."

Those who achieve a proficient score on the DLPT can qualify for a monthly stipend, which varies depending on the tested proficiency and the language taken.

In September, the culture and language center conducted its second LEAP selection board for 2010. Approximately 260 volunteers were selected from more than 400 candidates, which included representation from Air Force academy and ROTC cadets graduating in 2011 as well as active-duty officers. Program officials plan to select 400 volunteer officer participants each year and continue work on developing a similar program for enlisted members and Air Force civilian employees.

For more information on language qualifications and application procedures for the spring board, visit <http://culture.af.mil/leap.html>.