131st Fighter Squadron first F-15 unit to use SPYDR
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104th Operations Support Flight Airmen install SPYDR into a pilot's helmet Sept. 18, 2021, at Barnes Air National Guard Base, Massachusetts. The SPYDR system provides an audible warning when a pilot's oxygen saturation drops below a specific threshold, enhancing their safety and tactical capabilities. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Camille Lienau)

The 131st Fighter Squadron became the first F-15C Eagle unit to employ SPYDR by Spotlight Labs Sept. 2021, at Barnes Air National Guard Base, Massachusetts.

SPYDR is a system for pilots and aircrew that uses sensor technology to detect and monitor physiological changes, such as hypoxia. If there is an emergency, the helmet insert will warn the pilots in real time, improving the pilot’s safety while flying.

“The SPYDR system provides a safety system that is extremely important to operations in an F-15C,” said Lt. Col. Michael ‘Shot’ Glass, 131st Fighter Squadron commander. “Due to our operational and tactical need to fly at high altitudes, F-15C pilots run a higher risk of falling victim to cabin decompression.”

According to the Spotlight Labs website, the only indication of hypoxic incapacitation has been training pilots to recognize their symptoms.

Glass said this can be a difficult task when a pilot is in combat and SPYDR increases their tactical capabilities.

“The most dangerous type of decompression is slow and/or insidious which is difficult to detect by the pilot, especially if he or she is engaged in tactical maneuvering or combat,” said Glass. “SPYDR provides us an audible warning of when our oxygen saturation drops below a specific threshold and alerts the pilot that he or she may pass out soon unless a lower altitude is achieved immediately.”

Dustin Yee, Defense Innovation Unit project manager, is one of the individuals that helped connect the Department of Defense with Spotlight Labs, ultimately leading to this lifesaving technology being used by pilots at the 104FW.

“DIU finds commercial solutions for Department of Defense problems,” said Yee. “This project was born from the need to prevent unexplained physiological episodes. DIU was able to connect with the commercial world to find vendors who could provide solutions at a rapid speed. In this case, we went from problem curation to a recommendation, to the field in under three years.”

Yee said the project expands beyond the 104FW and the Air National Guard. He said the project has been a joint effort to include the Air Force Life Cycle Management Center, Naval Air Systems Command, and Naval Advanced Medical Development. He went on to say that the system has been used by pilots in multiple airframes.

Being able to help facilitate the success of the project is something Yee said he feels good about.

“It feels extremely rewarding,” said Yee. “Even more so that we were able to have these devices in the hands of those who have been directly affected by unexplained physiological episodes in just a few years.”

For Glass, having the technology in hand is something he said will help ensure success in the sky for pilots.

“SPYDR gives us the confidence to execute the high-altitude tactics we need to be effective at air superiority,” said Glass. “Knowing there is a system monitoring to help keep us safe gives us a tactical advantage.”

104th Operations Support Flight Airmen install SPYDR into a pilot's helmet Sept. 18, 2021, at Barnes Air National Guard Base, Massachusetts. The SPYDR system provides an audible warning when a pilot's oxygen saturation drops below a specific threshold, enhancing their safety and tactical capabilities. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Camille Lienau)
November is Native American Heritage Month, a time to honor and reflect on Native American contributions to our way of life and our military history.

Among those contributions, one of the most unique stories is that of the Navajo Code Talkers – a group of over 400 men from the Navajo nation responsible for an unbreakable code that helped the United States gain a strategic advantage in the Pacific theater during the World War II.

In the earlier part of World War II, US troops found their military codes were being perpetually broken by the enemy. This made it difficult to enact any substantial strategy as any major military move was being forecast with enough notice to defend against it.

A World War I veteran named Philip Johnston grew up in the Navajo nation as part of a missionary family and suggested that their language was complex, unknown outside of the region, and difficult to decipher, making for an excellent military code.

The project was green-lighted and on May 5, 1942 the first 29 Code Talkers reported for duty. They were assigned with the first division of the U.S. Marines and from there developed their code based on the Navajo language.

This code contained different words for the 26 letters of the alphabet and different phrases for commonly used terminology, (for example, the word “Toh-Dineh-ih,” which translates to Sea Force.) The Navajo code was dynamic, evolving over time, and would continually include new phrases and words for phonetic sounds – making it even harder for outside forces to crack. Ultimately, over 400 code talkers were involved throughout the course of the Pacific Theater, participating in every Marine assault from 1942 to 1945.

Despite how successful their program was for the war effort, they received very little recognition for their efforts due to the classified nature of the operation. It wasn’t until 1982 that President Ronald Reagan designated August 14th as Navajo Code Talkers Day to celebrate their contributions. Later, as further recognition, the Code Talkers were awarded with Congressional Gold and Silver medals in 2001.
Headlines and Highlights
104th Public Affairs Office

- Fire Prevention Month
- Serving community in dual roles
- Picnic table donated to Wellness Center
- Trunk or Treat
- Chamber of Commerce breakfast
- Wediko School tour
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Retention Office Manager, Tech. Sgt. Bento Fernandez, (413) 636-2291
Worcester Area Recruiter, Tech. Sgt. Brian Whitman, (413) 237-4525
Western Mass Recruiter, Tech. Sgt. Ernest Smith, (413) 237-0982
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Welcomes

Airman Basic Elizabeth Sarnacki - CPTF
Airman Basic Patrick Garnier - LRS
Airman Devon Daniels - LRS
Airman 1st Class Robert Boulanger - AMXS
Airman 1st Class Alexander Laine - OSF
Airman 1st Class Alexander Majewski - MXS
Senior Airman Nicholas Ottoson - SFS

promotions

Airman 1st Class Brianna Becotte - LRS
Airman 1st Class Luis Soto Soldevilla - CES
Senior Airman James Tigs - CF
Senior Airman Bailey Canady - SFS
Senior Airman Dominic Iasiro - CES
Senior Airman Kelsey Robare - AMXS
Senior Airman Christine Smith - MXS
Senior Airman Emily Warren - MXS
Senior Airman Darik Frye - SFS
Staff Sgt. Shane Mastello - MXS
Staff Sgt. Sean Nolan - EOD
Staff Sgt. Robert Maxton - AMXS
Staff Sgt. Jaime Daigle - MXS
Staff Sgt. Christopher Allen - OSF

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