

Firefighters get \$10,000 in donated equipment

by Master Sgt. Andrew Gates
407th Air Expeditionary Group Public Affairs

6/27/2006 - **ALI BASE, Iraq (AFPN)** -- Firefighters here have received nearly \$10,000 in donated equipment that will improve the Airmen's comfort and protection, thanks to the help of several nonprofit organizations, families and friends.

Firefighters received the ballistic liner suspension system, an upgrade to the Kevlar helmet.

"Most of today's Kevlar helmets were designed to protect soldiers from gunfire and flying debris," said Tech. Sgt. Paul Jacques, 407th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron, who served as the point of contact for the donation. "These upgrades make a good helmet significantly better."

Additional benefits include making the helmet more comfortable and stable, keeping the helmet from dropping over the eyes, Sergeant Jacques said. It is primarily these benefits that make them desirable for firefighters. The upgrade consists of shock-absorbing pads and a new strap system that improves comfort and stability. The adjustable plastic strap system replaces the current canvas chin-strap, and Velcro strips lock the pads in place. A nape strap keeps the helmet from sliding forward.

For organizations that have primary missions outside the wire, the military pays for the upgrades, Sergeant Jacques said. Other servicemembers who wish to get the upgrade may do so, but must pay out of their own pockets.

"At \$100 a shot, this can be somewhat cost prohibitive to young Airmen," Sergeant Jacques said.

"None of our firefighters were issued these upgrade kits at home. Since they help keep the helmet from sliding forward over the eyes, they can be exceptionally helpful to us if we need to protect ourselves from attack when responding to a fire," Sergeant Jacques said. "They are also extremely useful for people on our rescue air mobility squad who may be tasked to go off base."

Sergeant Jacques worked with people from Operation Helmet, the International Association of Firefighters and Professional Firefighters of Massachusetts to obtain donations to buy the upgrade kits for the firefighters here.

"The IAFF donated \$5,000 just for upgrade kits for the 47 407th ECES firefighters -- 18 of them are IAFF members," Sergeant Jacques said. "Families, friends and other IAFF members donated another \$4,000.

"To date we received 90 upgrade kits and more are on the way," he said. "Our initial goal was to get these just for the fire department, but we are now giving these upgrades to other members in civil engineering. We hope to have that done by the end of the month."

Operation Helmet has donated more than 8,300 helmet upgrades to troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, or preparing to deploy there, according to its Web site.



Staff Sgt. David Meyers (left) and Tech. Sgt. Paul Jacques install the ballistic liner suspension system upgrade in a Kevlar helmet at Ali Base, Iraq. The sergeants are firefighters assigned to the 407th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron. (U.S. Air Force photo/Master Sgt. Andrew Gates)

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