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Child becomes pilot for a day

TYNDALL AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – With his dad squarely in his sights, a 9-year-old boy pulls the trigger in the cockpit of an F-15 Eagle simulator.

“Don’t worry dad, I’m just going to do a practice landing,” Isaac Ezell said jokingly as he searched the simulated skies for his father’s jet. Isaac participated in Tyndall AFB’s “Pilot for a Day” program April 8 with the 95th Fighter Squadron here.

Isaac suffers from Asperger’s Syndrome, a form of autism. People with Asperger’s demonstrate significant difficulties with social interaction and tend to show repetitive patterns of behavior.



“This was a great experience for Isaac,” said Isaac’s father, Tech. Sgt. Joe Ezell, Operational Assessments technician at the 601st Air and Space Operations Center here. “We are very appreciative to the 95th Fighter Squadron for this special opportunity.”

As a student at Lucille Moore Elementary School in Panama City, Fla., Isaac is part of the school’s autism program.

“With April being Autism Awareness Month, the timing couldn’t have been better,” said Isaac’s mother, Helen. “Isaac was treated in such a positive light that he really feels he could grow up to be a pilot. This day opened up his view on what his future could hold.”

Mrs. Ezell is also the President of the Autism Education Center in Lynn Haven, Fla.

Isaac’s visit to the 95th included a pre-mission brief, life support demonstration, tour of the squadron, an F-15 static display and the opportunity to ‘fly’ in an F-15 simulator. The 95th also presented Isaac with a flight suit complete with name badge and a squadron patch. Before receiving the squadron patch, Isaac had to complete all his mission objectives for the day.

Tech. Sgt. Ezell expressed his thanks to the members of the 95th FS.

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PILOT**

“Capt. Caleb Haley was an awesome tour host and made sure Isaac had an amazing experience.”

Inspired by the original “Pilot for a Day” program started in 1994 at Randolph AFB, Texas, the 95th FS continues to bring this experience to several children each year.

“Our Pilot for a Day program is great way that we can give back to the local community,” said Lt. Col. Phil Campbell, 95th FS director of operations.

The program is designed to benefit children and their families who have disorders or illnesses. It is not directed at any one disorder or illness and is not restricted to children with terminal cases.

“This was the best day of my life,” said Isaac.

For more photos of Isaac’s “Pilot for a Day” experience, visit www.facebook.com/americasaoc.