

FOREVER YOUNG!

Portuguese Air Force Chipmunks: a 60+ year career



The Portuguese AF Chipmunk-era took off in 1951 with delivery of the first of (eventually) seventy-six aircraft to the *Escola Militar de Aeronautica* (Military Aeronautical School), based at Sintra. These DHC-1 Chipmunks then replaced obsolete de Havilland DH82 Tiger Moths in Portuguese service since 1934. In 1986, marking 40th anniversary of the de Havilland Chipmunk, thirty-seven DHC-1 aircraft still remained in operational use with the once more reformed *Esquadra de Instrução 101*. Aircraft attrition, on an average two DHC-1s annually, was mainly attributed to the age and modification-standard of their Gipsy-engines.

In October 1987, the *Força Aérea Portuguesa* decided to purchase eighteen Aérospatiale TB-30 Epsilon turboprop trainers to replace the obsolete – and out-dated - DHC-1 Chipmunk trainers. Having received its first Epsilon trainer in February 1989, *Esquadra 101* regained its operational training-status in December

1989. All DHC-1 Chipmunks were then withdrawn from operational service as FAP's elementary pilot-training aircraft after delivery of the final TB-30 Epsilon in 1989 and conversion of Esq101's pilot instructors on these new French-made trainers at Sintra/BA1.

Seven old and redundant de Havilland DHC-1 Chipmunks were then transferred almost immediately to the *Academia da Força Aérea* (AFA), also located at Sintra/BA1, to be used as target towing aircraft. In 1987 were purchased Aérostructure ASK-21 gliders, assigned to AFA's *Esquadra de Voo 802 'Águias'* (aka *Eagles*) responsible for initial screening and aerial training of students attending the *Academia*.

A profound reform of FAP's flying training syllabus, implemented in 1997, anticipated the renewed introduction of seven modified DHC-1 Chipmunk-trainers, evaluated as optimal cost-benefit alternatives for FAP's initial pilot screening programme, the so-called *Estagio de Selecção para o Voo* (ESV).

Estagio de Selecção De Voo

Esquadra de Voo 802's main mission of selecting candidate pilot-cadets for the AFA and FAP kicks off annually late July with the arrival of (on average) thirty male/female candidates, all wanting to attend the AFA and become an operational FAP-pilot. Having already passed psychotechnical, physical and medical testing outside the AFA, the instructor pilots of '802' will assess during a 12-day period the 'flying stamina' of each of these young candidates.

At first, the AFA-pilots cadets, under close supervision of their instructors, are given a three/four days academical instruction course, exclusively focused on the DHC-1 Chipmunk. An inflight guide, aircraft checklist and technical operating manual would be handed to these youngsters for self-study and a preliminary exam, which they have to pass with a >75% score before entering the actual inflight screening. Being the only military user of the Lycoming-powered DHC-1 Chipmunk,