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Italian flight student earns coveted award

MILTON, Fla. -- The Distinguished Graduate Certificate of Merit was awarded for the first time in more than two years by Training Air Wing Five on board Naval Air Station (NAS) Whiting Field March 27.

Ensign Davide Caporale, an Italian Navy student pilot, earned the award, which is reserved for less than one percent of all student pilots.

Over 1,300 students have graduated since someone last performed well enough to earn the certificate. All U.S. and international students trained by the U.S. Navy are eligible for the award at each training wing.

“Ensign Caporale’s award of the Distinguished Student Certificate of Merit is a great achievement deserving of personal accolade,” said Col. Gary Kling, Training Air Wing 5 commodore. “I am very proud of him for his sustained superior performance in both the academic and flight phases of multiple syllabi.”

Italian student pilots train side-by-side with their American and other International counterparts. After completing primary pilot training Italian students then go on to complete both advanced multiengine and advanced helicopter training. In all three phases Caporale performed in at least the top 98.93 percent of the class. In advanced helicopter training, he earned a perfect 80.0 out of 80.0 in his Navy Standard Score (NSS), which is the curved scoring formula on which flight students are graded.

“I think I succeeded because of my great passion and dedication for this awesome profession,” said Caporale. “Since I joined the Italian Navy, I've tried to do my best to improve day after day, learning from other's mistakes and asking a lot of questions. I've also been striving to be my worst judge, because I knew it was the best way to improve myself during and after every single flight.”

According to the Italian Naval Attaché to the U.S, Capt. Valter Zapellini, this is a noteworthy honor.

“Flight school requires a lot of effort and dedication and it's not easy to carry on even for the students that are truly passionate for this challenging profession,” said Zapellini. “Undergoing such difficult training using a foreign language is utterly outstanding. Being awarded for your performance in such a demanding training environment, even with that language handicap, is truly remarkable.”

Zapellini also noted that Italian flight students have a new standard to strive for.

“The Italian Navy students have an excellent reputation and typically get all kinds of awards in all phases of training, but this is the very first time one of them is rewarded with the Distinguished Graduate Certificate of Merit,” Zapellini explained. “This sets a milestone and a new goal for the Italian Navy students that have just started their wonderful voyage.”

Caporale was grateful to receive the award.

“I'm really honored to receive this certificate; I wasn't expecting to have the qualities and ability to reach this award.”

His instructor's comments on his grade sheets were proof of his high performance.

“Flawless check flight,” wrote Marine Capt. Cody Scot, his instructor on his first solo check-ride. “This has to be the finest check-ride I have given to date. (The) Student Naval Aviator is well ahead of the airplane and executes maneuvers with style and grace.”

Caporale's first flight in a helicopter seemed to go equally well according to instructor, Lt. Matthew Goodavish. “He was able to immediately pull up into a hover, takeoff, and land all within Course Training Standards,” wrote Goodavish in the grade sheet.

Caporale will join the First Helicopter Group at NAS Sarzana in Tuscany, Italy to fly the EH-101 Merlin.

“I will continue to do my best in Italy, as much as I can,” said Caporale. “I just can't wait to start to fly this incredible aircraft and to pay back the remarkable opportunity the Italian Navy gave me.”

The Italian Navy, along with other international partners, train with the U.S. Navy through programs managed by the Naval Education and Training Security Assistance Field Activity (NETSAFA). The goal of NETSAFA is to foster and strengthen enduring international partnerships.

According to Kling, NETSAFA is meeting their goal.

“Even greater than the award is how this serves as a testament to the deep and meaningful partnership we've developed with the Italian Navy over many years,” Kling said. “We have the distinct privilege of developing future leaders and warriors here at Training Air Wing Five during the early days of their flight leadership training, then sending them off to stand shoulder-to-shoulder

in conflicts across the globe. I am honored to serve with all of these fine officers, and look forward to the many accomplishments they will share together in the future.”

For more information on the Navy’s international military training visit <https://www.netsafa.navy.mil/>

For more information on naval training visit <https://www.netc.navy.mil>

By Ensign Michael Torres, Naval Education and Training Command Public Affairs