

## 609th ACOMS: not your average squadron

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Part of the definition of the word squadron is subordinate to a group. However, in looking at squadrons individually, it appears some aren't subordinate at all. According to the leadership of the 609th Air Communications Squadron, the characteristics of this squadron are more like those of a group.

Master Sgt. John Harrill, 609th ACOMS first sergeant, said one characteristic the squadron shares with most groups is having a colonel as commander.

"Most squadrons are led by lieutenant colonels but our squadron is very large and has a large area of responsibility as far as who we support here and in Southwest Asia," said Sgt. Harrill.

The squadron is made up of more than 300 members with many being deployed more than once each year, and some sections have more than 10 Air Force Specialty Codes.

Col. John Hayes, 609th ACOMS commander, said 200 of the squadron's members support a combined air operations center in Southwest Asia. This center controls air operations for all the bases in the Middle East.

"It's the best in the Air Force, and we built it," said Col. Hayes.

When these people are not deployed, they are here in various locations across the base supporting exercises and training.

The other 100 members work in the main 609th ACOMS building where the Network Operations Security Center is housed. These people handle classified and unclassified information thousands of miles away from the Air Force members they are supporting. In addition to providing communications for missions, squadron leadership also feels their squadron's job is significant to the morale of deployed members. Without the communications capabilities provided for missions, including internet, members wouldn't be able to email home to communicate with their families.

Col. Hayes said the squadron also is a great example of total force organization.

"We have active-duty members, Air National Guardsmen and contractors working together," said the colonel. "We also have a great relationship with the 226th Combat Communications Group in Montgomery, Ala. Their people are here all the time and their commander, Col. Mac McCurdy, has sat at my desk as much as I have."

Squadron leadership said their contractors are

not only subject matter experts, but also patriots who show love and appreciation for their county and the military by working with the Air Force and deploying alongside members.

Another part of what leadership said makes the squadron so diverse is its own civil engineer branch. Lt. Col. Nicky Beckwith, Air Operations Center systems chief, said the CE branch is vital to their mission because of the squadron's special needs.

"We have unique tactical, electrical and air conditioning equipment not normally on a base," said Lt. Col. Beckwith. "There is a need for special skills and the ability to deploy as needed to support efforts in theater."

When it's time to deploy, the civil engineer branch has personnel who must determine how much power is needed for facilities that will be constructed and provide air conditioning units to keep people and equipment cool. The CE branch also maintains the vehicles used to transport the equipment.

Lt. Col. Charles Thomas, 609th ACOMS deputy commander, said the squadron is the most diverse he has experienced. But what the squadron's leadership boasts about most is the quality of their people.

"Our squadron is filled with dedicated, hard working, talented Airmen," said Lt. Col. Thomas. "We couldn't be prouder of our troops."

## Eagle Eyes encourages watchful community

No matter how well trained and vigilant, law enforcement officials cannot be everywhere. The eyes and ears of Team Shaw can be helpful in preventing terrorism. After all, you know best what activities do or do not belong in and around the base, your neighborhood and community.

To enlist help in preventing terrorism, the Air Force Office of Special Investigations created and manages the Eagle Eyes program. Eagle Eyes puts Air Force and Shaw members on the anti-terrorism team by providing the information needed to recognize and report suspicious behavior.

Inputs, which can be submitted 24 hours a day, are immediately shared with appropriate law enforcement agencies and military commanders for rapid assessment and investigation as necessary.

Everyone is encouraged to stay alert to their surroundings, whether on or off base, at home or elsewhere. The first step in anti-terrorism is knowing what to look for. Always keep an Eagle Eye out for these suspicious activities:

■ **Surveillance:** Someone recording or monitoring activities, including the use of cameras

(both still and video), note taking, drawing diagrams, writing on maps, or using binoculars or any other vision-enhancing device.

■ **Elicitation:** Anyone or any organization attempting to gain information by mail, fax, telephone or in person about military operations or people.

■ **Test of security:** Any attempt to measure reaction times to security breaches or to penetrate physical barriers or procedures.

■ **Acquiring supplies:** Purchasing or stealing explosives, weapons, ammunition, uniforms, decals, flight manuals, passes, badges or any other controlled items.

■ **Suspicious persons out of place:** People who don't seem to belong in the workplace, neighborhood, business establishment or anywhere else. This also includes suspicious bor-

der crossings, stowaways aboard ship, or people jumping ship in port.

■ **Dry run:** Putting people into position and moving them about without actually committing a terrorist act such as a kidnapping or bombing. An element of this activity could also include mapping out routes and determining the timing of traffic lights and the flow of traffic.

■ **Deploying assets:** People and supplies getting into position to commit the act. This is the last opportunity to alert authorities before the terrorist act occurs.

Community involvement is vital to safety from terrorism. If any suspicious activities are observed, call the 20th Security Forces Squadron Law Enforcement Desk at **895-3669**. Once the call is made, the law enforcement desk will alert the Office of Special Investigations. *(Information courtesy of the Office of Special Investigations.)*

