

★ ★ ★ BIG SKY FLYER



Vol. XXIV, No. 5 - July 2008

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Members of the 120th welcomed home

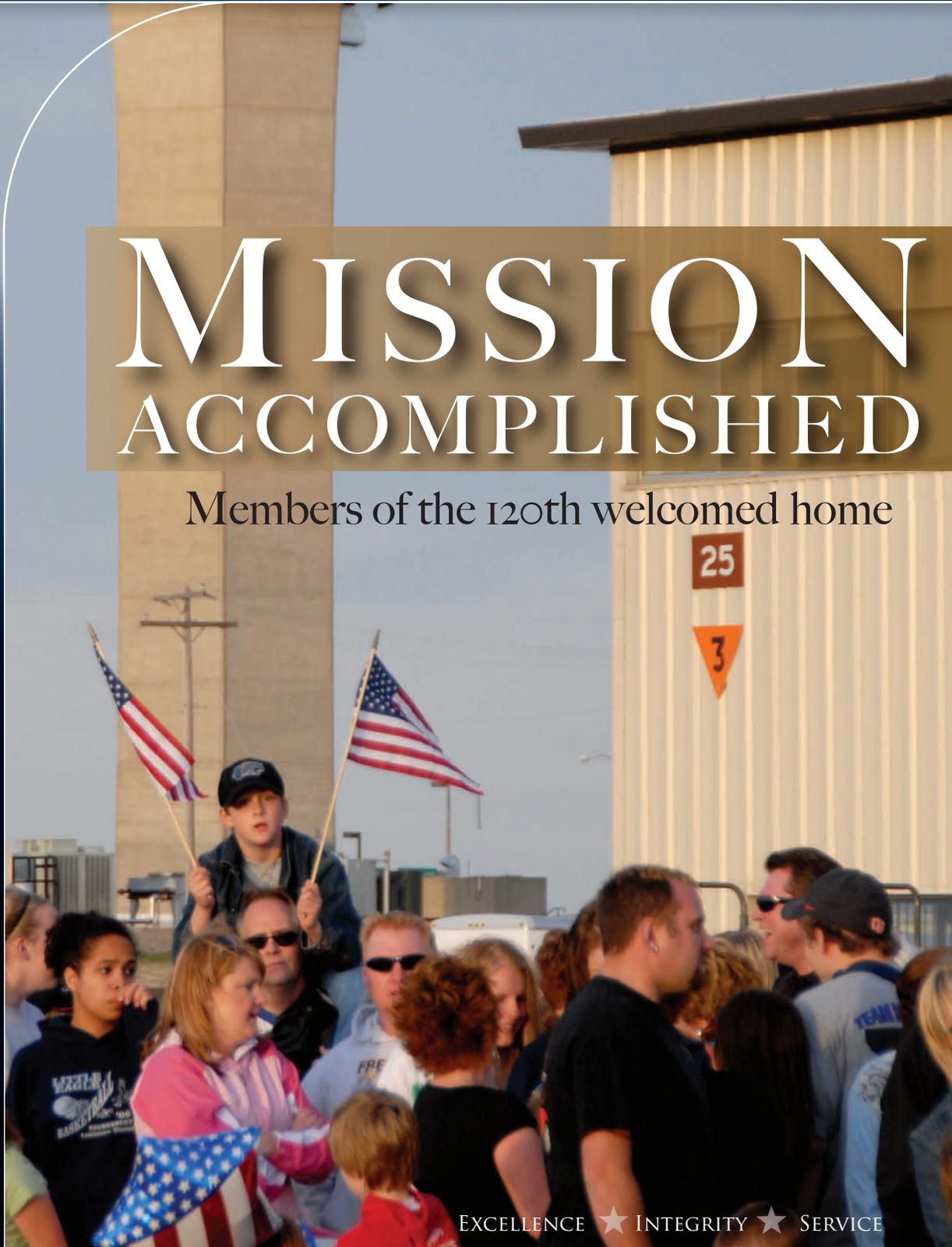
{ INSIDE }



What it takes to do our job.
Close Air Support and
dropping a bomb in Iraq.



Deployment preparation
goes way beyond just
getting on the plane.





MONTANA
AIR NATIONAL GUARD



AEF 2008



IRAQ

KUWAIT

AFGANISTAN

*"We care about our people,
and we take the time to make sure they
have everything they need."*

- Staff Sgt. Sandra Bechard



Chief Master Sgt. Steven Lyczewski
State Command Chief
Joint Force Headquarters

Forty Two Years of Change

Reflections on the Guard from the Command Chief

This will be my final article for the flyer as your State Command Chief. The time has come to say goodbye to my Guard friends and family. Although I'm retiring, I will always keep a place in my heart for the Guard, after all it has been my life.

I joined the Guard during the Vietnam era-how the times have changed. Back then, recruiters had people beating the door down to join; now, when only three out of ten youth can qualify to join the Guard, recruiters work tirelessly just to fill our slots.

The '60s were very interesting times especially in terms of how guardsmen were utilized. We were all trained to proficient standards but not delegated the authority nor utilized as effectively as we are now. Today we are a much stronger Guard.

The '70s and '80s were fun times for the 120th Fighter Wing with the William Tell load competitions and the numerous maintenance deployments to Panama and Curacao. Winning numerous national awards, the MTANG earned a reputation as a world-class organization.

The '90s brought the biggest change for the Guard as members representing every Air Force specialty code deployed around the globe in support of Operation Desert Storm. As our people worked side-by-side with their active-duty counterparts, their perception of our capabilities began to change. As our operations tempo increased and members began to perform military personnel appropriation, better known as MPA, tours, the distinctions between active-duty and reserve members blended to the battle-hardened seamless TOTAL FORCE we have today. Members may fear we are losing our identity as a Guard unit or state militia; but our legacy of service sets us apart-no one else can brag that they have served our country and its interests for 371 years. The National Guard is an equal partner in the TOTAL FORCE.

My final observation is that you are battle-hardened citizen Airmen who stand ready to deploy anywhere in the world on a moment's notice. Since Sept. 11, 2001 the operations tempo for all Montana National Guardsman has been phenomenal. If you have had a conversation with your neighbor on that fateful day, telling them that over the course of the next seven years our men and women of the National Guard would be providing 40 percent of our world-wide forces in deployments that have literally spanned the globe, they may have thought you were crazy. We share bonds forged in adversity and strengthened through friendship – the kind of esprit de corps that motivates members to drive thousands of miles throughout careers that span decades. I'm very proud of every member of the Montana National Guard and it has been my pleasure to serve with you. The remainder of this flyer is dedicated to all of you that have answered the call.

God Bless You.

Stephen D. Lyczewski



Senior Airman Michelle Myhre and Tech. Sgt. Raegen Robertson give the "thumbs-up" sign to Capt. Lee Bouma, who was participating in an alert scramble at Balad Air Base. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Christy Mason)



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Kudos to the unsung heroes of the deployment press, those behind the scenes that make it all happen.

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Training equals readiness as members are well equipped to do their duty as soon as they get off the plane.

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As the majority of the MTANG headed into the AEF rotation, a handful of Airmen deployed to other locations.

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Family support during deployment is an important part of the Air National Guard's promise of supporting the troops' mission on the home front.

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Family members and friends anxiously await the return of the deployed airmen.

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Lt. Col. Mark Scharf shares his overview of the deployment, praising the efforts of the MTANG.



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ABOVE: Staff Sgt. Steven McDonald listens as 120th Fighter Wing Commander Colonel Michael McDonald presents his pre-deployment briefing in the Larsen Room.

RIGHT: Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer meets with Tech. Sgt. Shawn Briggs prior to his deployment to Iraq.



The Unsung Heroes of Any Deployment

MTANG successfully prepares and deploys unit members

They say every war always has two fronts: the front line which does the fighting and the home front which provides the weapons, the transportation, and the personnel to ensure that everyone being sent down range is fully trained, vaccinated, and focused on doing their assigned duty.

The home front rarely gets equal credit; however, it should be without saying that their contributions are vitally important in ensuring that the tip of the spear is always sharp. They work long shifts, rationing their time equally to each and every deploying Airman. It takes one only a few moments of observing the personnel and the cargo deployment functions to appreciate the influence these individuals have for our Airmen before they board the aircraft and head into harm's way.

Passenger control is one such function of the personnel deployment function. Ensuring everyone is accounted for is a responsibility Staff Sgt. Sandra Bechard takes a great deal of pride doing. "We care about our people, and we take the time to make sure they have everything they need," said Bechard. When asked, what the most rewarding part of her job is, Bechard said, "knowing that our people are well prepared to do their duty when they leave here."

More than just weighing bags and giving seat assignments, the support function acts as a last chance to cover an Airman's immunization, hostile threat awareness, last will and testament, and vital financial actions.

At the heart of the mobility process is the deployment control center. The center serves as the Montana Air National Guard's single director for identifying, validating, and distributing tasking and information for successful deployment completion.

"Even though the Logistics Readiness Squadron is responsible for the mobility process, an effective operation relies on support from the entire base," said Lt. Maureen Maphies, MTANG's installation deployment officer. "This includes cargo and passenger movers, supply, logistics planners, and unit deployment managers," said Maphies.

"We never want to send anyone unprepared," said Chief Master Sgt. Tom Meredith, chief administrator of the MTANG clinic. The clinic ensures that all Airmen are fully immunized before leaving the base, and the vast majority of them did not need any last-minute medical attention. Meredith attributed this to the teamwork



Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Kenneth DuVall shares a light moment with Senior Airman Kelly Palomo during a pre-deployment briefing. (U.S. Air Force photos by Senior Master Sgt. Eric J. Peterson)

that the MTANG does so well. "It's because the unit deployment managers, the commanders, and the first sergeants ensure their people are completing their medical requirements, and they show up ready to go," said Meredith.

The MTANG deployed and did so without any in-processing discrepancies. "We have had zero push backs from the in-theatre processing," said 120th Fighter Wing Commander, Col. Michael McDonald. "This testifies to all the incredible preparation efforts by all unit members, their supervisors and commanders, and the unsung heroes of any deployment – the unit deployment managers," said McDonald.

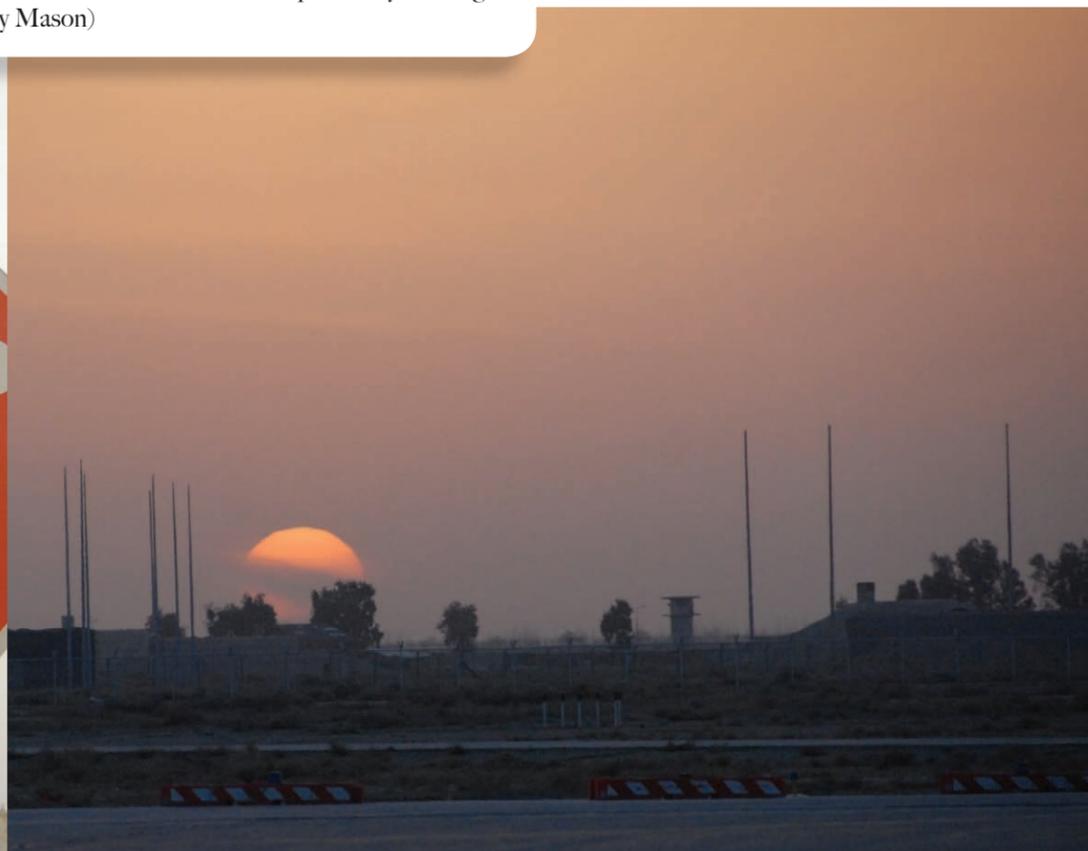
Harder to measure but equally important is the care of our family members and ensuring their many necessities are met while their loved one is deployed. Ms. Holly Wick does her job with the intensity of a prized fighter. When asked if family readiness is an important part of the mission, Ms. Wick said "Absolutely, it's extremely important." She bridges the gap between the deployed member and the family. Taking care of the family not only rallies morale but it also ensures the members are focused on their assigned duty. "It's not only important, it's an essential part of the program," said Wick.

What may be the MTANG's greatest strength is its philosophy of looking out for and taking care of each other – being a good wingman, not just saying they are. The MTANG is known nationally for its strong work ethic, the high-caliber of professionalism and leadership from its Airmen, and the strong bond that it has in helping and preparing all of its members – especially in time of state or national need.

Maj. Ricky J. Anderson
120th Fighter Wing Chief of Public Affairs.

From Montana to Iraq: Making the Transition

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Excellent Preparation and Training Equals Readiness



LEFT: Senior Airman Michelle Myhre, Senior Airman Kelly Palomo and Tech. Sgt. Polly Pearson adapt to their temporary accommodations during a stopover at Al Ueid Air Base, Qatar.

MIDDLE: Stop signs are printed in English and Arabic at Balad Air Base.

RIGHT: Spectacular sunsets are a regular occurrence at Balad Air Base. (U.S. Air Force photos by Staff Sgt. Christy Mason)

Sitting here in Al Ueid, Qatar, waiting for our final leg of this trip home, I reflect back on the experiences that I have had on this AEF rotation. I realize that every moment was unique in itself as the workings of operations were continually changing.

My position on this deployment was manning the operations desk working in support of squadron operations. This was the hub for central operations activities, which entailed working with maintenance, assigning aircraft to each mission, assisting the top three (OPS Super) with the operations of the desk, maintaining the operations of the alert status aircraft, getting the next day schedule posted, and manning the unit control center, better known as the UCC, for post-attack operations.

The training opportunities that we had were phenomenal. Being able to work with the guest help personnel from other units and the active duty forces was an eye opening experience. Each of us has been trained in the same manner but we all brought our individual experiences to each task that we shared. The individuals that I worked with were from Luke Air Reserve unit, Madison Air National Guard, Sioux Falls Air National Guard, and Des Moines Air National Guard. They were able to merge into our unit seamlessly and were a great addition to our deployment. I worked with the active duty on using computer programs which we have not used in years. Without the active duty assistance on this, relearning the programs would have been extremely painful and time consuming. Their assistance enabled me to complete my work in a timely manner.

Manning the UCC brought in the opportunity to use the training I received at home station. Although the circumstances varied from our practice scenarios, it seemed like second nature as I train on this during every exercise. I had multiple opportunities to activate the UCC. One of these opportunities was after an attack to the base, in which the operations complex had to evacuate due to an unexploded rocket which was located in our sector. After being told to evacuate, we needed to do a head count. It was at that time that I jumped back into the UCC mode and got a 100 percent accountability of the personnel that were in the complex at the time. Once this was accomplished, it was a matter of ensuring that the personnel were informed on the current happenings and when it was all clear to return to their work areas.

On one occasion, while having coffee at the Green Bean Café, I spoke with a young Army soldier who explained to me about his 18 month deployment. The one thing he repeated several times was that how comforting it was to hear our jets over head when things were happening and knowing that they had friends in the air watching over them. So a big kudos to each of you. It takes each and every one of us doing our little part to get the planes in the air. They felt "SAFE".

In summary, I felt confident and competent while performing my duties in Balad thanks to the many hours of training that I received back home. It's reassuring that our many hours of preparation, exercises, and, planning are used very effectively to fight the Global War on Terror.

by Master Sgt. Helen Morin
120th Operations Flight

All in the Family

Family Members Share Iraq Experience

The 120th Fighter Wing has long been considered a family tradition by many members serving in the unit. Sons and daughters followed their parents' lead by seeking a career with the Montana Air National Guard. So it was no wonder that the recent deployment to Iraq would include numerous guardsmen that were closely related to one another.

The overseas airlift carried an assortment of father-son or daughter combinations, brothers and cousins—all who volunteered to serve with their close relations during the deployment.

This was the third trip to Iraq for Tech. Sgt. Brian Bartz, a munitions systems specialist. However, this time he deployed with his son, Senior Airman Josh Bartz. "It was really different; for one thing it just made me feel old, because he's there too. I'm used to the kids being home. So it was different. I was more worried about him than myself", said Bartz.

The father-son Bartz team found some quality time to spend together during their limited off-duty hours at the recreation center playing ping pong and darts. "He never beat me in a game of ping pong, and he took one game of darts from me. We're both really competitive and that part was fun—him trying to get a game from me. So that was neat. We didn't have too much time, so that was the main thing we did", said Bartz.

Some family members of those deployed expressed concern about having multiple members of their families deploy to a war zone at the same time. Airfield Manager, Tech. Sgt. Polly Pearson deployed with her cousin, Staff Sgt. Christy Mason, who was assigned to the Intelligence Section. "Our family, they were a bit concerned, but I think they were less concerned because there were two of us going together. We felt that we could just support each other stronger as family. I think they were more assured that there were two of us there", said Pearson.

Patriotism and service to country also played a large role in the decision that family members made as volunteers for the Iraq deployment. Master Sgt. Tiffany Franklin deployed with her cousin, Staff Sgt. Josh Archer. "My cousin, Sergeant Archer, actually went over in 2004 when my husband went, and so they had both already been there. And so my husband stayed home this time and it was my turn to go and serve my country. It's great that we can all deploy together and share those experiences together", said Franklin.

Whether it's a close community or just family pride, there is a sense that the 120th Fighter Wing really is a family organization, regardless of the shared ancestry among its members. Holly Wick, Family Program Coordinator, shares her personal family experience with her job at the wing. "I tremendously consider the Montana Air Guard a family organization, I've known that for several years, I have two members in my family, my two sisters have been in the Air Guard

for several years and I have a couple of cousins that are in the Air Guard. Everyone up here—even if you're not blood related, acts like they're related, just because of that kindness and caring, so I really do think we're a special family up here", said Wick.

"It's a family organization, especially, when people are having problems or people are needing something, there's a lot of people that come out of the woodwork that would help, so it's definitely a family organization", said Franklin.

Senior Master Sgt. Eric J. Peterson
120th Fighter Wing Multimedia Manager



Cousins Staff Sgt. Joshua Archer and Master Sgt. Tiffany Franklin served together at Balad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Christy Mason)



ABOVE (Left to right) Senior Airman Ryan Caldwell, Senior Master Sgt. Dave Gifford and Staff Sgt. Jason Caldwell were one of the father-son combinations deployed to the desert.



BELOW (Left to right) Staff Sgt. Ethan Clum and Senior Airman Mellisa Galardo joined their father Senior Master Sgt. Joel Clum on the deployment to Balad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Air Force photos by Staff Sgt. Christy Mason)

The VP's Visit

Vice President Cheney Speaks to the Troops at Balad

Vice President Dick Cheney met and spoke to servicemembers fighting the war on terrorism from Balad Air Base and Logistics Support Area Anaconda March 18.

Before addressing the base populace during a rally, the vice president sat down to breakfast with a select group of military members.

"It was an honor to be able to represent my service, the Navy, during breakfast with Vice President Cheney," said Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Michael Powell, the leading petty officer for customs at Balad Air Base. "It was good to see he is a real person and genuinely cares for us and what we do."

During a joint servicemember's rally at Holt Stadium, the vice president spoke to troops about his appreciation for what they do and how they are making a difference.

"I want you to know that we appreciate you and your comrades. We never take you for granted," Vice President Cheney said. "We are inspired by the tremendous work that all of you have done on this deployment and I bring greetings from home and good wishes to all of you on behalf of the President of the United States George W. Bush. On the president's behalf, I want to thank all of you for being part of an extraordinary American team here in Iraq."

The vice president also discussed the importance of the Balad Air Base and LSA Anaconda missions.

"This is one of the biggest bases in the country and the work that goes on at Balad and Camp Anaconda, around the clock, seven days a week, is absolutely critical to the mission America has undertaken here," he said. "Balad is one of the busiest airports anywhere and it is the main staging area for the massive logistical operations that we need in this theater."

The words of praise were well received by Senior Master Sgt. Richard Garcia. As the 332nd Logistics Readiness Squadron Aerial Port Flight superintendent, he knows firsthand about the busy operations tempo on the Balad Air Base flightline.

"I think it's always inspiring for leadership to meet with the people who are actually executing policy and to let them know that their leadership is right there with us," Sergeant Garcia said. "We believe in the cause and what it stands for, we all have a mission and together we can make a difference. We all come together each day and provide front-line troops with the equipment necessary to promote the nation's policies and beliefs."

The vice president praised the execution of duty American servicemembers fighting the war.

"From the very beginning, we have had high expectations of the men and women serving here," he said. "We've given you a lot of work to do, and often times a very small amount of time in which to do it, you more than met our expectations."



"Each one of you has accepted serious duties in a challenging part of the world and the job you do here has a direct impact on the security of the United States," he said. "The work we are doing right now provides the best chance for the security for our friends, allies and partners and for the people of the Middle East region."

Not only were the actions of the military members lauded by the vice president, but also their friends and families were as well.

"Service above self is the military way of life and that goes, of course, for everybody back home who has a loved one in the armed forces," he said. "Especially in wartime, our military families understand full well what it means to make sacrifices for the good of the country."

Vice President Cheney's visit coincided with the fifth anniversary of the week the U.S. led a coalition to liberate Iraq from the regime of Saddam Hussein.

"Tyranny in Iraq was worth defeating and democracy in Iraq is worth defending," he said. "All Americans can be certain, we intend to complete the missions so that

another generation of Americans doesn't have to come back here and do it again.

"You, as veterans of this fight, will always be honored and respected for what you have done to defend your country," he told the crowd. "When you look back on this deployment, you'll be able to say that (while you were) here, you did some of the hardest work of your life, some of the most important work of your life, some of the best work of your life and you did it all for your country."

At the end of his speech, the vice president awarded two Bronze Stars for Valor to Army Soldiers for their heroic acts.

"I can't describe the feeling I had when he awarded me the Bronze Star," said Army Spc. Veronica Alfaro, a 2nd Platoon senior medic. "It is definitely a moment I will always remember and cherish. I will never forget it."

by Staff Sgt. Ruth Curfman
332nd Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

ABOVE: Vice President Dick Cheney speaks to uniformed service members at Logistics Support Area Anaconda on Balad Air Base, Iraq, March 18, 2008. Cheney was in the area visiting with service members deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

BELOW: 75 deployed members of the Montana Air National Guard were in attendance during Vice President Cheney's speech. (U.S. Army photos by Sgt. Gary Hawkins)



Bombs on Target

A four-part series detailing the people, the technology, and the precision of dropping bombs in Iraq.

Building the Bomb

Editor's note: This article is the first in a series.

One of the Air Force's key capabilities is precision targeting. Here at Balad, Airmen hear the sound of freedom roaring overhead throughout the day and watch as F-16 Fighting Falcons rip across nighttime desert skies, afterburners ablaze, into the battle space to put bombs on target.

This process actually begins, however, far from the runway. The first step in precision targeting is the act of building bombs, which is the responsibility of the individuals assigned to the 332nd Expeditionary Maintenance Squadron Munitions Flight, also known as ammo flight. These individuals are responsible for inspecting, storing, building and transporting munitions.

They also supply all the munitions required for flight missions here in the area of responsibility, while maintaining a certain amount of munitions in storage at all times.

"The operations folks call us up and tell us what they want and we make it happen for them," said Tech. Sgt. Cory Eggen, 332nd Expeditionary Maintenance Squadron Munitions Flight munitions systems technician.

Once all the components are delivered from the munitions storage area, the first step in the bomb building process is inspecting each component for serviceability.

The most commonly used bomb at Balad, the GBU-38, has between six to eight individual components that all must be inspected, said Tech. Sgt. John Williams, 332nd EMXS weapons systems technician.

One inspection, in particular, for GPS-guided tail fin kits, is done using a laptop computer loaded with diagnostic programs to ensure the bomb's computer elements are working correctly, said Tech. Sgt. John Williams, 332nd EMXS weapons systems technician. Through the laptop, Airmen can configure the bomb for different types of aircraft and push software upgrades to the computer system within the fin kits.

The tail fin kits, while part of a deadly weapons system, are as sensitive as they are tough. Ammo technicians must be extremely careful when handling the fins because a fall from a distance of just 12 inches could totally destroy the \$20,000 component, said Staff Sgt. Daniel Wall, 332nd EMXS weapons system technician.

After all the components are inspected and ready to go, a line is formed to assemble the components to make a fully configured bomb.

"The average build requires six to eight members on the line, but depending on the amount of munitions needed, there can be as many as 12 workers on the assembly line and three supervisors to ensure the bombs are built, loaded and inspected properly," said Tech. Sgt. Travis Heidbreder, 332nd Maintenance Group munitions quality assurance inspector.

"Bombs come in several different components," Sergeant Eggen said. "Depending on what the mission requires, we have different types of fuses, different types of tail kits, nose kits and fuse options. It all depends on the mission they're going for."

Some of the most commonly built bombs here at Balad are the GBU-38, GBU-31 and GBU-12. The bombs ammo flight Airmen build are more than just 500 pound weights loaded with explosives. These technologically sophisticated bombs, such as the GBU-38 and GBU-31, when configured with the Joint Programable Fuse, are cockpit programable to detonate in the air, on impact or delayed on impact, and can steer themselves to programmed coordinates within ten feet of a target. This type of technology helps prevent collateral damage and the unnecessary loss of life -- a top priority of Coalition Forces.



Weapons system technicians configure their bombs prior to a mission. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Christy Mason)

"We have the new BLU-126 Low Collateral Damage Bomb, which is a 500 pound bomb filled with a smaller explosive charge so we can target one building in a populated area, without damaging surrounding infrastructure due to the reduced blast radius," Sergeant Heidbreder said.

According to the U.S. Central Air Forces Command, more than 4,000 munitions, excluding cannon rounds, were expended in 2007 in Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom. It's the weapons (munitions) systems technicians here and other bases in the AOR who helped make those numbers possible.

"I love this job because we're saving American lives and it's the real deal," said Staff Sgt. Todd Certain, 332nd EMXS munitions technician. "Troops depend on us to take care of the situation for them."

by Staff Sgt. Mareshah Haynes
332nd Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

Target

Loading the Bomb



LEFT: Armament system specialists fit a Montana Air National Guard F-16 with bombs.



RIGHT: A Montana Air National Guard F-16 stands ready to scramble while on alert at Balad Air Base, Iraq.

Editor's note: This article is the second in a series.

The call goes out and people begin to scatter. There's a sense of urgency in the air that can almost be felt, like static electricity that makes the hair on your arms stand up. The pilots and crew chiefs are preparing for the mission -- to rumble like thunder overhead and strike their targets from the sky like lightning.

Thanks in part to armament systems specialists like those assigned to the 332nd Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, the lightning strikes its target with precision.

"A lot of people think we just attach the bombs to the racks," said Master Sgt. Cliff Hamon, 332 EAMXS Viper aircraft maintenance unit noncommissioned officer in charge.

"There are a lot of things we do to ensure they actually hit their targets," said the sergeant deployed from Hill Air Force Base, Utah.

Armament systems specialists, commonly known as weapons loaders, are responsible for maintaining, loading and troubleshooting weapons systems as well as loading them onto aircraft. They also load and service aircraft gun systems on F-16 Fighting Falcons, said Staff Sgt. Peter Yuenger, 332 EAMXS Viper AMU armament systems specialist, who is deployed from Hill AFB.

One particular weapons system component armament systems specialists maintain is alternate mission equipment, which attaches to the wings of an aircraft and, in turn, creates a means to attach munitions.

"When they [planes] have scheduled maintenance, we'll turn them in and we'll completely strip the jet; there won't be any AME on it," said Tech. Sgt. Delbert Schoonover, 332 EAMXS Viper AMU armament systems specialist. "When we get it back, we have to reinstall the AME and do then do a reliability check before we can accept any bombs to hang on the aircraft."

Each weapons loading crew consists of three members who fill positions numbered one through three.

The first position is the supervisor, who ensures the whole operation is going smoothly and according to checklist procedures. The person in the second position assists the supervisor and is responsible for the tools required for the load. The person in the third position transports the munitions to the aircraft. Together, the three Airmen perform function checks, load the bombs onto the aircraft and make sure they're properly configured, Sergeant Yuenger said.

The entire loading process, on average, can take anywhere from 45-90 minutes.

"It all depends on the crew who's doing it, which munitions have to be loaded and if there's a press for the aircraft to be loaded in a specific amount of time," Sergeant Yuenger said.

The mission requirements, directing which munitions should be loaded and in what configuration, are generated by the theater commander and relayed to the crews by the expeditor, Sergeant Hamon said.

The expeditor manages the people on shift and sets loading priorities according to the flying schedule and timelines. He or she coordinates with munitions flight Airmen to get the bombs, missiles and bullets as well as chaff and flare (used as countermeasures when aircraft are fired at) required to load the aircraft.

While the weapons loaders need to be able to perform their duties in a fast and efficient manner, safety is a priority.

"A lot of career fields train on an annual or semi-annual basis," Sergeant Hamon said. "In our career field, we train and certify on weapons safety and handling on a monthly basis."

Another responsibility of an armament systems specialist is maintaining the avionics storage management system, which allows the aircraft to communicate with the load on board such as GPS-guided munitions.

"The aircraft has a computer box in it that sends a signal throughout the aircraft," Sergeant Schoonover said, describing the avionics storage management system.

Yet sometimes problems arise with the mission-critical system. "You can have a malfunction anywhere through the wire harness or the wing span or a circuit card gone bad in the box," said the sergeant who is deployed from Hill AFB.

"It's like the engine light coming on in your car," Sergeant Yuenger said. "You know something is wrong, but you don't know what it is."

It's the weapons loader's job to locate the problem and correct it.

With all their responsibilities, the armament systems specialists assigned to the 332 EAMXS Viper AMU, are integral in helping the Air Force maximize its key capability of precision targeting.

"You feel like you have a really big part in what's going on [with the war]," Sergeant Yuenger said. "There's a saying in this career field, without weapons it's just another airliner."

by Staff Sgt. Mareshah Haynes
332nd Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

"Without weapons, it's just another airliner."

A pilot with the 332nd Expeditionary Fighter Squadron flies a combat mission over Iraq. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Jeff Stoermer)



Litening Targeting Pod (LTGP) Laser Target Designator.

JADAM GBU 38 Version 1 "Smart Bomb". A GPS guided 500lb. munition.

Guiding the Bomb

Editor's note: This article is the third in a series.

The artist stands at his easel, paint brush in one hand, palette in the other. With the strokes of his brush, he makes the image come to life for the observer. The abstract idea is transferred from the artist's mind, through his hands, to the paint brush and materializes on the canvas.

"We're the artists who paint the picture for pilots of what they can expect to see when they check on [their radio] with their JTACs [joint terminal attack controllers] and what the Army is doing on the ground," said Army Sgt. 1st Class Mark Gorden, 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing Ground Liaison Office noncommissioned officer in charge.

Army GLO personnel, along with Air Force JTACs, work jointly with the Air Force and Army personnel to communicate with F-16 Fighting Falcon pilots here. This coordinated effort results in the deliberate and precise use of munitions.

The GLO is comprised of Army artillery and infantry personnel, assigned to Air Force units, who brief pilots before combat missions regarding the situation on the ground.

"Being that I'm an infantry guy by trade, and I've done all these missions before over the last 20 years, who better to explain, [the situation from an Army point of view to the pilots]" Sergeant Gorden said.

The responsibility of the GLO is to "translate" the Army-specifics of operations to Air Force pilots before they go on missions.

"We're all supposed to be somewhat fluent in joint terminology, to include Army terms, but I don't have all of them, particularly as they evolve here in Iraq," said Lt. Col. Kenneth Ekman, F-16 Fighting Falcon pilot and chief of safety who is deployed from Shaw Air Force Base, S.C. "One of the great things that a GLO does is they take Army terms and, even more importantly Army symbology, how they mark their maps, and turn it into 'pilot speak.' They really are interpreters for us."

"I explain to them the number of personnel on the ground, how many people are actually going to go to this building to do the take down and how many vehicles will be in blocking positions to prevent anybody from supporting," Sergeant Gorden said

Once the pilots leave the base and they reach the mission air space, the JTACs take over giving situational awareness of the ground mission to the pilot. Because of the fluidity of the battle space, in the time the pilot is briefed by the GLO and then checks on with the JTAC, the situation can completely change.

JTACs are tactical air control party Airmen, assigned to an

Army unit to advise ground commanders on the best use of air power and communicate with pilots from the ground, once they reach the area of operation.

"Our job is to integrate with an aligned Army unit and provide close air support, to integrate Air Force [assets] into the Army's scheme of maneuver," said Staff Sgt. Marshall Bohnman, a JTAC assigned to the 1st Expeditionary Air Support Operations Squadron.

The JTACs use radio equipment and computer software to communicate with troops on the ground and pilots in the air. They have programs that allow them to see what the pilot sees from the air and allows them to send precise coordinates to the aircraft of where munitions should be dropped.

"In any conflict where you're going to be dropping precision fires in close proximity to friendly forces, you have to have a trained, certified, qualified individual to do that," Sergeant Bohnman said. "If you want to drop bombs, we're absolutely vital in a close fight."

"Ultimately, my job is to be overhead to provide reconnaissance and fire power, so that he wins any kind of fight that erupts in his area of operation," Colonel Ekman said. "My job is to be there on time and give whatever support they need."

JTACs are the link of communication between the Army commanding officer on the ground and the Air Force pilots in the sky. They let the pilots know if they're cleared to hit the target or if they should follow the targeted personnel to gather more information.

"Whoever is in charge is going to say, 'yes, you can engage this target' or, 'no, collateral damage is a concern, I don't want to injure civilians, so this time I just want you to track them,'" Sergeant Bohnman said. "He [the commanding officer] is the one telling us whether we can or cannot [engage], but we're the ones who are actually certified to pass that clearance."

The GLOs and JTACs embedded with the Air Force and Army respectively, are examples of U.S. military sister service members working together toward the same goal.

"The last time I was here, we got hit with RPGs (rocket propelled grenades) and we lost couple of guys," Sergeant Bohnman said. "I called in some F-16s and they did a really low show of force. Once we got back I had guys coming up saying it felt good to know we had such awesome fire power overhead watching our backs.

"That's a great feeling to know you have a positive impact on the battlefield and we're helping save friendly forces on the ground," Sergeant Bohnman said.

by Staff Sgt. Mareshah Haynes
332nd Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

The responsibility of the GLO is to "translate" the Army-specifics of operations to Air Force pilots.

Dropping the Bomb



LEFT: 1st Lt. Ken Peterson, a 332nd Expeditionary Fighter Squadron F-16 Fighting Falcon pilot, packs his helmet in preparation for a mission.

MIDDLE: 1st Lt. Peterson secures his 9 mm sidearm.

RIGHT: 1st Lt. Peterson boards his jet before flying a mission. F-16 pilots are the final link in the chain of events required to put precision-guided munitions on target. (U.S. Air Force photos by Staff Sgt. Mareshah Haynes)



4 "We can strike only the bad guys and have minimum impact on the [good] citizens of Iraq."

Editor's note: This article is the final in a series.

The time has come for the mission to be executed. The pilot advances the F-16 Fighting Falcon to the mission area, soaring across the desert terrain at 500 mph, like the proud and magnificent creature the jet was named after. Just like a falcon locks its gaze on its prey, the pilot locks his sensors on the target and the bomb is released. It meets the target with precision, destroying only a single building while the surrounding structures remain untouched.

Though it may take only seconds from the time the pilot presses the button until the bomb hits its target, there's a lot of intense planning involved. The process actually begins several hours before.

It all starts with an air tasking order from the Combined Air Operations Center where operations are planned and coordinated, said 1st Lt. Ken Peterson, an F-16 Fighting Falcon pilot assigned to the 332nd Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, deployed from the Montana Air National Guard.

"If there's a preplanned strike, [the CAOC] is going to take a look around the area in question and determine what weapon we want to use and if we use that weapon how we want it to detonate," he said.

Before embarking on their missions, pilots are briefed on topics including weather, intelligence information and what the ground situation is like where the pilot will be. After the briefings, the pilots don all their gear, including a side arm, helmet and survival vest containing a radio and spare batteries, GPS system and water pack weighing nearly 45 pounds, said Maj. Jason Green, an F-16 pilot assigned to the 332nd Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, deployed from the Montana Air National Guard. They wear all of this while controlling the aircraft from the cockpit, where they have about as much room as a person in office chair.

A typical mission for fighter pilots from Balad lasts four to five hours, Lieutenant Peterson said.

Once the pilots reach their mission space, they check in with the joint terminal attack controller, who walks them through what's going on in the area.

Based on how many and what type of weapons the aircraft is carrying, JTACs can figure out how large or small the affected area will be if a munition is deployed, the lieutenant said.

One of the main priorities of the pilots and JTACs is getting the bombs exactly where they want them. Part of the decision making process is understanding where friendly assets are located and attack restrictions.

Oftentimes, if the risk of collateral damage is too high, pilots are directed not to drop their munitions. They may be directed to gather information or just present a show of force.

Targeting is a deliberate, finite process that is very strict and

exact in the rules of engagement.

"Just the other day there was a target we could've easily blown up with a bomb, but there would've been far too much collateral damage, so we had to hold off," Lieutenant Peterson said.

Many of the flying missions include providing close air support for conveying service members on the ground seeking out improvised explosive devices and insurgents. The Fighting Falcons have the capability to fly, fight and win in air-to-air and air-to-ground combat and in less than perfect weather conditions.

The over-watch and close air support capability the pilots provide gives ground forces the assurance they need that if they get into trouble, aircraft above them can provide immediate, measured and lethal delivery of weapons, the lieutenant said.

"The F-16 is a tremendous close air support platform," Lieutenant Peterson said. "We get up there and do anything we can for [the Soldiers on the ground]. I think they can rest a little easier knowing there's an [F-16] up there."

The mission of precision targeting doesn't rest in the hands of just one squadron or group. It's a combined effort between many organizations. Without the munitions specialists, weapons loaders, JTACs and GLOs, the mission would be impossible to complete.

"It [losing the GLO, JTACs, weapons loaders or munitions specialists] would end the mission for us; we're just the part that's on the end," Lieutenant Peterson said. "You take an F-16 with no weapons on it; it doesn't do anybody much good. Or say you take the GLO out; we won't know what's going on. You take any of that away and it becomes extremely ineffective for us, we probably wouldn't even be able to go out there and do it, it would be just a waste of gas."

Because of the dynamic and interactive teams the Air Force has at Balad and throughout the area of responsibility, it can continue to impact the Global War on Terrorism with the key capability of precision targeting.

The lives of the Iraqi civilians U.S. and coalition forces are trying to protect are valuable and a deliberate decision making process is used to help prevent the unnecessary loss of human life.

"It's tremendous that we can go out and drop a bomb on a house and not blow up the house, but destroy everything in the house," Lieutenant Peterson said. "It allows us to be a lot more effective, especially on the hearts and minds side that we can strike only the bad guys and have minimum impact on the [good] citizens of Iraq."

by Staff Sgt. Mareshah Haynes

332nd Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

No Comm, No Bomb

Comm members four month deployment overview



Tech. Sgt. Branson J. Bentley poses near the 332nd Expeditionary Communications Squadron shield at Balad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Christy Mason)

For the past few weeks, the 120th Fighter Wing has been welcoming home our deployed Airmen from the latest AEF assignment. We in Communications would like to welcome back Tech. Sgt. Christopher Wilson and Staff Sgt. BJ Bentley who deployed during the holiday season and have finally returned from a four-month plus tour in Iraq. Wilson and Bentley were assigned to the 332nd Expeditionary Communications Squadron, 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing, Balad Air Base, Iraq. I had a chance to talk with them about their deployment experience and how they helped complete mission requirements while at Balad.

Normally, getting ready for a four-month deployment is a difficult task, but doing so during the holiday season added another factor to the process.

Bentley recalled his experience. "This was my first TDY to Iraq so getting ready for the deployment and making sure I was ready to go really distracted me from the fact that it was the holiday season. I left on Christmas Day but I made sure my family still had a good Christmas."

Wilson had a more familiar approach to getting ready. "This was my fourth time heading to the desert so I had almost everything lined up. Getting the family set, checking vehicles and making sure the house would be okay while I was gone. Trying to anticipate anything that might need attention while I was gone so my family didn't have that extra burden, on top of me not being there proved to be beneficial. Thankfully no major issues came up, he said."

Once they got settled into their new homes they didn't waste any time getting to work.

"I was flat-out busy. I worked what turned out to be 16-hour shifts as the NCOIC for the base infrastructure shop. We were responsible for all the voice and data lines, secure and non-secure, that kept 30,000 troops connected. I worked with Airmen from five different AFSC's, both active duty and reserve forces merged into one shop (the newly formed infrastructure shop) for the first time during this deployment. My team was responsible for a 2500 copper pair splice for the base telephone switch which had to be moved due to flooding in the underground manhole

system in the February Iraq rains. Also, we upgraded five hardened aircraft shelters for a variety of users to include our own deployed 120th Fighter Wing personnel and the intelligence shops. This proved to be a challenging and rewarding project as we ran over ten miles of category-5 cable for voice and data, and fiber optic line for the SIPRNet, for these buildings alone. Total for the deployment, we installed or repaired over 25 miles of category-5 and approximately 15 miles of multi and single mode fiber. Training those in the shop who were unfamiliar with the handling and termination of the fiber was rewarding as that is something that they can now take back to their home units and benefit from the deployment", said Wilson.

Bentley added, "I was the NCOIC for the tech control facility. We provided computer support to over 22,000 joint-war fighters and maintained 300 classified and unclassified theater circuits. Our 99.9 percent reliability rating supported around 32,000 combat sorties and the transportation of over 46,000 tons of cargo. I had the chance to engineer a 'first of its kind in the AOR' remedy tracking application that provided 100 percent visibility of all communication projects. It helped streamline the process of completing work orders and fixing information technology issues around the base."

Wilson and Bentley both felt that their assignments greatly contributed to the overall effectiveness of base operations and helped streamline mission completions by guaranteeing reliable communication systems and services.

"If we didn't do our job and the network or lines went down, or a user gets disconnected that makes it that much harder to get the planes off the ground. We don't fly the planes but we make sure the guys who do are able to do so," Bentley said.

Wilson comments, "You know... 'You can't bomb without Comm.'"

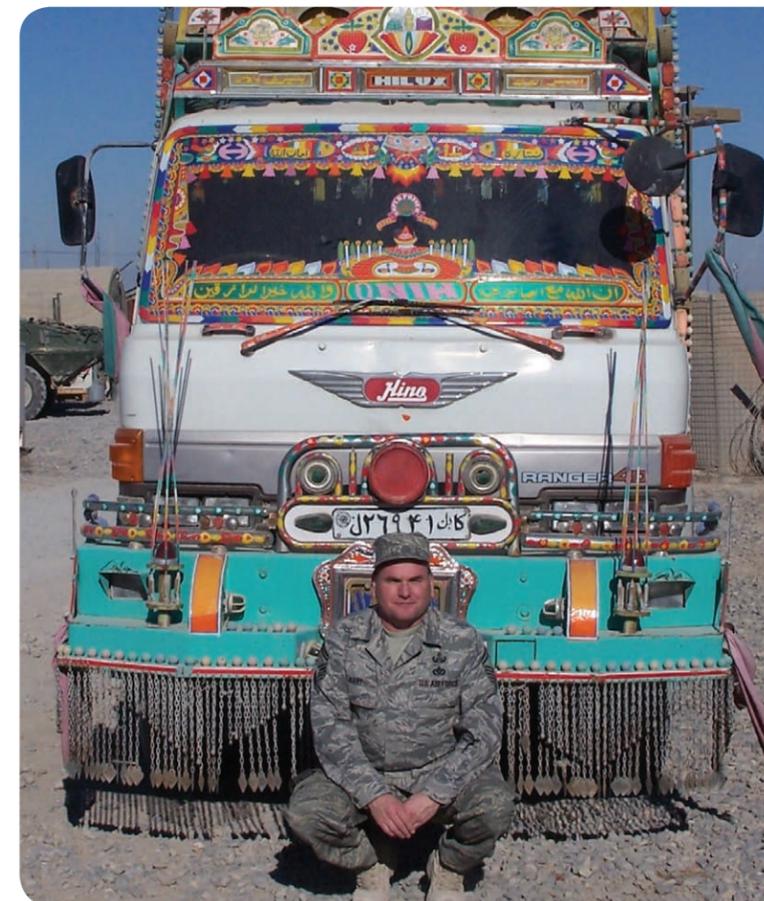
Everyone in communications is happy to see our guys return home safely and hear that their deployment was a success.

Wilson sums it up, "I truly believe that every deployment is what you make of it. If you go with a good attitude thinking that I'm going to learn something, teach something and enjoy myself, I will. I'm thankful for the opportunity to deploy and serve, but it sure is nice to be back on Montana dirt."

Staff Sgt. Sean Keighley
Information Management Specialist

TOP: Lt. Gen. Gary North, the Air Component Commander for U.S. Central Command, poses for a photograph following dinner with Master Sgt. Chris Wilson at Balad Air Base, Iraq.

BELOW: Senior Master Sgt. Ben Mart poses in front of some well-adorned local transportation that he experienced during his deployment to Afghanistan



Service and Support

Services Flight deploys members to Kuwait

Units often feel the pain of being separate or different from the rest. And while our individuality is what defines us and can strengthen the 120th Fighter Wing as a whole, the differences are never felt as keen as when we deploy - especially to different locations.

Early in 2008, the 120th, as a whole, prepared and executed a deployment as part of the AEF rotation. Not for the first time did the Services Flight discover they would be separated from the pack. In fact, since that fateful day in 2001, the 120th Services gang has never participated in an AEF and gone to the same base as everyone else. They are always sent to a different location, or not at all.

Such was the case this year when five members supported ECS operations at Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait. Master Sgt. Jeff Simpson, Tech. Sgt. Jesse Enriquez, Staff Sgt. Tanya Robinson, Senior Airman Sarah Mathis and Senior Airman Tracie Clark supported services operations at the base from January until May. Their deployment had the group leaving earlier than the main body, coming home later and going to a different place altogether.

Never one to complain or argue, these members of the services flight stepped up to the plate and strived to provide the best support service they could. "Montana guard people really shined," said Enriquez. He talked about his experience overseas in an optimistic manner. "The experience wasn't what I thought it would be. The jobs weren't too difficult and I enjoyed the different places I worked at which included the recreation center, the Oasis Morale Center and the 5K fun run," said Enriquez. "There was an activity every day to help keep morale high."

"I'm glad I did it," said Mathis. Her experience was fun at times and Mathis enjoyed attending a concert that included the Pussycat Dolls and Jessica Simpson as well as a comedy event hosted by Carlos Mencia. "The best part of the deployment was getting to

know people she might never have otherwise met. It was hard too. I missed my family and my husband," said Mathis.

"I was disappointed we did not get a cultural tour while stationed there but I had fun coordinating at the recreation center and making sure everyone had something to do," said Robinson.



Senior Airman Tracie Clark prepares to hand out fitness gear. (US Air Force Photo)

While Clark was not available to comment, Simpson rounded out the deployment picture by returning with a big smile on his face. "As a loyal patriot, I wanted to be part of this Iraqi Freedom effort. I thought it was a positive experience in that respect," said Simpson. He was assigned as a dining facility manager and this job offered him some interesting experiences. While traveling to the monthly food manager's meeting at a nearby Army base, Simpson recalled seeing camels and sheep being herded by shepherds living in tents. "I also met with the Kuwaiti Minister of Defense and chatted with



TOP: Senior Airman Tracie Clark and her companions meet some local citizens while in Kuwait. (US Air Force Photo)

MIDDLE: Tech. Sgt. Ryan Whithorn stands ready to move some freight. (US Air Force Photo)

BOTTOM: Services members at The Rock. (US Air Force Photo)

him about hunting," said Simpson.

Simpson said his high point also included being able to get other 120th Services members assigned to the duty positions they wanted. "It feels good to know I helped someone, and I gained some experience managing the dining facility on the base by coordinating work schedules, addressing management issues and working with third country nationals from Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and Nepal," said Simpson.

Every deployment carries the same low point as Mathis pointed out earlier. Missing family and loved ones is very hard and everyone deals with this in their own way. Fortunately, many are able to keep in touch with family via email and telephone morale calls. Simpson shed light on another way to get through the hard times. He agreed that his low point was missing family. "It's just the nature of the beast, the Lord gave me strength and the right perspective on things as I walked with Him in His word and prayer," said Simpson.

The members have returned safely and with valuable career experience to share with the others. "In speaking to them throughout the deployment the morale was way high. They all had jobs that kept them busy and had a purpose. I'm very proud of the way the 120th Services Flight Airmen answered the call to duty," said 120th Services Flight Superintendent, Chief Master Sgt. Marty Leonard.

Now that everyone has returned safe and sound there will be no rest for the weary. Most of them are now preparing to join other services flight members in preparing for services combat training at Dobbins Air Reserve Base in Marietta, Georgia. As one chapter in the book of military life closes, another begins.

Staff Sgt. Crystal Langford
120th Services Flight Craftsman



Family Support Works Overtime

Holly Wick Leads the Effort to Educate and Inform Family Members

Mission support equals mission success. Family support during deployment is an important part of the Air National Guard's promise of supporting the troops' mission on the home front. Many people helped and continue to help me assist our airmen's families while they are protecting us in order to help with the mission's goal of success.

Dorrie Hagen, the National-Guard State Family Programs Director, all of the VPOC's (Volunteer Point of Contact), MPOC's (Military Point of Contact), MTANG Booster Club, Senior Staff, and the rest of the 120th Mission Support gang were essential in keeping our families lives as normal, smooth running, and the problems somewhat more manageable with lots of caring hands.

Among the issues, we had numerous TriCare questions, a few frozen pipes, more than a handful of Red Cross calls, a family flown to the bedside of a very seriously ill member, and a baby born via satellite link with a proud dad watching every step of the way. It is an amazing experience to be part of a "family within the family" atmosphere. Everyone was willing to pitch in and rally to the aid of the next family in need, no matter the time of day.

The Great Falls community also showed its support in many ways during this deployment. One example of this assistance was the kindness of Dale Stewart and Riley Hader, who helped me and Booster club member, Traci Hronek, stuff over 200 bags of goodies filled with donated items from Van's IGA, Schultz's, Ryan's Cash & Carry, Pepsi, Grocery Outlet, Pat Cooper, and Todd's Window Tinting. Westside Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 5590 also provided donated drinks and doughnuts the night our troops left. Another great example was the caring hearts of the



ABOVE: Ms. Holly Wick conducts a family support meeting at East Middle School for family members of guardsmen prior to the deployment. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Master Sgt. Eric J. Peterson)

BELOW: Capt. Tiffany Heaton talks with her son, Kody, during one of the family events held during the deployment. (U.S. photo by Master Sgt. Rose Bennett)

owner and staff of Bison Ford, who provided some of the refreshments for the homecoming celebrations. Bison Ford called a few days prior to the arrival of our unit, and offered assistance in this form. The American Legion Post 341, Gary Howard-Commander, was at every event and provided education and assistance throughout the deployment cycle. Lastly, many businesses posted signs around town thanking and welcoming back our troops.

As we continue to deploy more of our members, and welcome them back, I appreciate everyone who supports our efforts in the family programs.

Ms. Holly Wick
Wing Family Program Coordinator



While We Serve

Awards program for your civilian employer

FORT HARRISON - While preparing for a deployment a service member and their family can find assistance utilizing any number of various programs the Department of Defense provides to ensure the transition from civilian life to military deployment and back again to civilian life is as smooth as possible. After, or even during, a deployment many service members ask the question... "Is there some way that I can show my civilian boss how much their support has meant to me?"

YES! The Montana Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve has just the solution for any service member asking this question. ESGR sponsors and maintains an active awards program with several different types of awards to recognize all levels of support given by a service member's civilian employer.

Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve is a Department of Defense organization established in 1972 to promote cooperation and understanding between reserve component members and their civilian employers.

One of the more popular awards available to the service member to use in recognizing their civilian employer is the My Boss Is a Patriot Award. Your employer will receive a Department of Defense certificate of appreciation and a patriot lapel pin presented by an ESGR volunteer.

The MBIAP award is the first level award in a multi-level awards system offered by the ESGR at both state and national levels. After an employer has been nominated for the MBIAP award, he or she may be eligible to receive or be nominated for additional state/national level awards; the Above and Beyond Award, the Pro Patria Award and possibly the Employer Support Freedom Award.

The level of award given depends on the level of support of policies and practices of the civilian employer in the workplace. To learn more about the different level of awards available, please refer to the ESGR website www.esgr.mil

Nominate your employer today, and show them how much their support to Montana's men and women in uniform means to you and all citizens of Montana.

by Ms. Carla Lott
MT ESGR Representative



HOME SWEET HOME

Hero's Welcome Greets Returning Airmen



When Family Program Coordinator Holly Wick planned, organized and coordinated the homecoming celebration for the return of the deployed airmen from Iraq, she had to duplicate her efforts. That's because the two aircraft that were tasked to deliver the precious cargo of loved ones home to their families arrived days apart. The C-17 military aircraft containing the majority of the airmen was scheduled to arrive in Great Falls first, but suffered mechanical problems and was delayed for several days. Meanwhile, the contracted civilian airlift that was originally scheduled to arrive in Great Falls last, landed at Great Falls International on April 30, three days ahead of the C-17.

Keeping the deployed member's families and friends updated on the aircraft schedule changes became Wick's greatest challenge to producing a successful welcome home ceremony. She utilized all of her available resources, including her work and home telephones to make sure that families had access to the latest information. "My phone rang non stop for probably five or six days straight, so that was the biggest challenge, but it was a great suc-

cess", said Wick.

According to Wick, the preparations for welcoming the airmen home began shortly after they deployed. "We started planning it about the second after we got the troops off to leave to Iraq. The Montana Air National Guard Booster Club was instrumental in helping me every step of the way, working hand in hand, getting the volunteers", she said.

The families were invited to come up to the base two hours prior to each scheduled aircraft landing to participate in numerous informational briefings concerning health, reunion and money issues. The Family Program also created a kid's corner to give the children an opportunity to create a welcome home banner for their returning airmen. Local businesses also contributed to the effort by providing refreshments for the gathering of families as they

ABOVE: Friends and family gathered on ramp in front of the Main Hangar to greet the returning Airmen.

ABOVE LEFT: Major Scott Smith is elated at the chance to hold his son, Justin.

ABOVE RIGHT: Airmen disembark the aircraft under the blue Montana big sky. (U.S. Air Force photos by Senior Master Sgt. Eric J. Peterson)

waited for the aircraft to land.

The weeks of planning by Wick, the members of the MTANG Booster Club and other volunteers eventually paid off as unit members were finally reunited with their families. "It was a great feeling, actually, It was nice to get home", said Chief Master Sgt. Tim Huffman, who served as NCOIC of the deployment. "We were a few days late getting out of there, and that was trying. I thought they did a good job of planning everything when we got here. It was pretty short and sweet, the families were here and they were ready to let the people go and come process the next day", said Huffman.

For each of the returning aircraft, Governor Brian Schweitzer, Montana's Adjutant General Major General Randy Mosley, 120th Fighter Wing Commander Colonel Michael McDonald, members of the senior staff and unit members joined family and friends on the ramp to provide a hero's welcome to the returning veterans of the Global War on Terror.

The returning airmen appreciated the outpouring of support that greeted them as they exited the aircraft and met with their family and friends. "It was nice, it was really good, it felt like we counted", said Tech. Sgt. Polly Pearson, who served as an airfield manager in support of squadron operations while in Iraq. "Our deployment counted and the community cared that we came back. So it was really good", she said.

"I just got goosebumps", said Master Sgt. Tiffany Franklin, who served in the role of commander's support staff for aircraft maintenance and operations. "The first thing that I saw when we flew over was the American flag hanging off that fire truck, and I just teared up, and you saw all of the people and it was incredible, it was an awesome feeling," she said.

Holly Wick is proud of the work that the Family Program volunteers and MTANG Booster Club accomplished to ensure that there were not one, but two successful large-scale welcome home ceremonies. "I had tears in my eyes, probably like everybody else, because it just felt so good to have that big group back. And then, I took a deep breath and just looked at everybody and saw the smiles and the hugs and all the little kids, it was so cute. Knowing that I played even just a tiny part in that role, I was very happy about that," she said.

The main body of the deployment has safely returned home, but the Family Program Coordinator's job continues as many members of the Montana Air National Guard remain on duty serving in distant locations throughout the world.

Senior Master Sgt. Eric J. Peterson
120th Fighter Wing Multimedia Manager

Reflections on a Job Well Done

Lt. Col. Scharf praises the efforts of Team Montana

In late February, the Montana Air National Guard deployed for over 60 days to Balad Air Base, Iraq in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, part of an Air Expeditionary Force rotation with the Wisconsin Air National Guard and the Iowa Air National Guard. This was a tremendous accomplishment each and every member of the Montana Air National Guard should be proud of—and it was this entire team effort I would like to reflect upon as we enter

number of the shops placed our Montanans as shop chiefs—a clear testament to your professionalism! The ultimate compliment we received is we DID NOT stand out—we transparently stepped in with our active duty counterparts, rolled up our sleeves and got the job done without raising any eyebrows or requiring extra “attention” from the very busy leadership. That is the true statement of professionalism in this day and age of the “Total Force”.

That’s really the most important message I want to bring to you—this Montana Guard Team—the entire team, did the job, and did it well. We prepared properly, and we supported our nation, our state, our fellow military service members, and our fellow Montana Guardsmen. Every single one of you had a role in this success—be proud of what you accomplished and learned. Remember those lessons for the next time we are called upon—because that’s our job—doing what our nation asks us and doing it right. Well done, Montanans!

Lt. Col. Mark Scharf,
186th Fighter Squadron Commander

ABOVE: Lt. Col. Mark Scharf served as the commander of the deployed Montanans.

BELOW: The barrier art that summarized the final deployment of the Montana Air National Guard F-16s to Balad Air Base, Iraq. The painting was made by Senior Master Sgt. Steve Lynch. (U.S. Air Force photos by Staff Sgt. Christy Mason)

a long awaited Montana summer.

We began preparation and training for this deployment well over a year prior to the actual arrival into theater—nobody simply “shows up” for this type of event—we are expected to be fully proficient in our wartime tasking and be ready to conduct warfare correctly the very first day in theater until the day we leave. Every single agency on base had a hand in this preparation and we must recognize their efforts in the overall success.

Once in theater, we took over operations seamlessly as our sister Guard unit departed Balad. During our 60 days in theater, we operated 24/7—there was never a letup in the schedule unless caused by weather. We flew just under 600 sorties during our deployment supporting coalition forces with numerous shows of force (low and fast flybys), over-flights and surveillance using our targeting pods, and when called upon, we delivered weapons with deadly accuracy supporting our forces on the ground. The final item on a pilot’s “step briefing” at the operations desk was to “Save Good Guys and Kill Bad Guys” and I’m proud of the effort each of you made to contribute to those ends.

This deployment was different for the wing in another way. Even though our manning document was built so we could operate as an independent organization (much like we did in 2004 at Balad) we were split up and integrated into a very large and complicated active duty Air Force Expeditionary Wing. This meant most of us answered to an active duty boss instead of our expected Guard leadership. The 332nd Expeditionary Wing at Balad was huge and is still growing—three F-16 squadrons, several Predator squadrons, a C-130 squadron, a Combat Search and Rescue Helicopter squadron, the transient air lifters, plus the other services across the base, and all the support organizations—it was a big, busy place, and we were spread out all over the base. I was pleased with how well we “fit in” to this construct. I was even more proud of your leadership when a



TOP LEFT: Capt. Lee Bouma taxis his F-16 out to the runway at Balad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Christy Mason)

TOP RIGHT: Lt. Col. Vincent Bakke climbs aboard an F-16 prior to performing a mission over the skies of Iraq. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Christy Mason)

MIDDLE: Members of the deployment gathered together for a group shot prior to leaving Balad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Master Sgt. Tim Day)

BOTTOM: A sunset fades over Balad Air Base, as seen from the top of a hardened aircraft shelter at Balad Air Base. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Christy Mason)



*"This Montana Guard Team—the entire team,
did the job, and did it well. We prepared
properly, and we supported our nation, our
state, our fellow military service members, and
our fellow Montana Guardsmen."*

-Lt. Col. Mark Scharf





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