

## Tactical weather systems improve mission success throughout AOR

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6/12/2010 - **SOUTHWEST ASIA** -- Nothing ruins outdoor plans like bad weather - vacations, weekend getaways, sporting events and the like. The end result often entails more than mere disappointment. Lots of time, energy and money can be spent getting ready for a big shindig only to see it be totally washed out.

In much the same way, bad weather can put the kibosh on vital military operations - from movement of ground forces, to air drops and aerial refueling. This is why Air Force Forces Tactical Weather Systems maintenance Airmen deployed to this non-disclosed Southwest Asia location are seldom here. Their mission has them on a "whirlwind" tour supporting TWS at air bases and Army forward operating bases across the CENTCOM area of responsibility.

"You could say we're the 'geek squad' for TWS," said Senior Master Sgt. Robert Love, Air Force Forces Weather Systems Support Cadre NCO-in-charge. "If the local weather personnel can't fix the system, they call on us."

When called upon, the cadre of about a half-dozen Airmen, deployed from the 2nd Combat Weather Systems Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Fla., repairs weather equipment used to enhance the effectiveness of Air Force, Army, Special Forces, joint and combined operations.

At home station, the team's focus is testing, acquisition, standards and training of tactical and fixed meteorological systems. When deployed, they focus on the equipment they've sent out to the field.

"It's a rare opportunity where a person can go from cradle to grave on a weapons system the way we do," said Sergeant Love.

"Our guys travel to three different sites supporting Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom, and Southwest Asia AORs," he added. "Sometimes they have to catch fixed-wing or rotary aircraft at a moment's notice - fully loaded for combat, wearing their (individual body armor) and (advanced combat helmet), and carrying full combat loads for their weapons."

It's also not unheard of for these troops, after working on TWS equipment, to find themselves sitting on the compound's defensive fighting position during the night, he added.

"Some of the locations they travel to are extremely small, where they can literally throw a rock from one side of the base to the other," Sergeant Love said. "Couple that with the fact airlift isn't always available, there are times our guys are stuck at a location for a week or longer."

While travel to and from FOBs throughout the AOR can often be arduous and dangerous, it's also one of the things these troops like most about what they do.

"I've traveled to 30 or more sites in Afghanistan," said Staff Sgt. Dan Ruehl, WSSC-OEF NCO-in-charge. "Sometimes we take just a backpack with basic equipment, other times we take hard cases we have to lug around several places till we get to the FOB we're going to. But, traveling to FOBs, meeting different people and being in new environments is what I've enjoyed most about this deployment."



Senior Airman Jason Jarman, U.S. Air Forces Central weather systems support cadre, inspects a Tactical Meteorological Observing System computer at a non-disclosed Southwest Asia location June 7, 2010. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Kasey Zickmund)[RELEASED]

It's this kind of flexibility and tireless dedication that's been key to the team's success here.

"There's rarely any down time for them," said Sergeant Love. "They have remained motivated during their entire deployment and because of that, all three AORs' TWS are at a 99-percent in-commission rate." The team has accomplished this while also making sure they leave their operations here better than when they arrived.

"We've increased our footprint to meet the warfighters' needs," Sergeant Love said. "Before, we would travel from here to the locations, but we found that not as responsive to the warfighters' needs. Therefore, we made this base the main center, with two geographically-separated tactical centers in the OIF and OEF AORs. This allows our guys to travel faster to the location since they remain intra-theater, instead of having to travel inter-theater."

One NCO on the team said their new way of doing business benefits everyone in the fight.

"I was here two years ago, when equipment down-time was 7-10 days," said Tech. Sgt. Matthew Nece, WSSC-OIF, NCO-in-charge. "Now that we're based in-theater full-time, down-time is cut to 24-48 hours.

"I also felt more a part of the mission this time - being downrange, closer to the group I was supporting," he said. "I like being more hands-on verses being a help desk. We still do help desk support, but we also go there to deal with and train both Army and Air Force personnel."

While the Airmen of WSSC agree they have all benefitted professionally from their deployed experience here, they said they're most pleased to have been instrumental in fostering mission success throughout the AOR.

"When a system goes down, it's up to us to fix it as quickly and effectively as possible," said Senior Airman Dave Watters, WSSC technician. "If it's not fixed, planes don't fly. If readings are wrong, people can get hurt. What we do helps prevent that from happening."