

123 INTELLIGENCE SQUADRON



MISSION

The 123rd Intelligence Squadron mission is to conduct imagery analysis, production, and dissemination fulfilling Component and Joint intelligence requirements. The Squadron produces multimedia intelligence products through wet film and enhanced digital image processing. The 123rd also provides skilled warfighters to support point measurement, imagery intelligence measurement and signals intelligence production for U-2, Predator, and Global Hawk Distributed Common Ground System operations worldwide.

LINEAGE

123 Reconnaissance Technical Squadron
Redesignated 123 Intelligence Squadron

STATIONS

Adams Field, Little Rock, AR
Little Rock AFB, AR

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM



MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

In 1989, the 123rd became involved in the National Guard Counter Drug Program.

In 1993, upon becoming a part of the Air Intelligence Agency, the name was changed to the 123rd Intelligence Squadron. The squadron is authorized 85 billets, 79 enlisted and 6 officer.

In 1996 the unit was placed under the national C-26 program. The squadron serves ten specially equipped C-26 assigned to various Air National Guard units throughout the country and is providing 65 percent of their imagery production requests. The 123rd provides aerial film processing, printing and intelligence for local, state and federal law enforcement agencies including the FBI, DEA, and others at no charge to the agencies. The squadron facility is one of 28 Joint Reserve Intelligence Centers located throughout the country.

A multi-service endeavor, the Joint Reserve Intelligence Connectivity Program is in response to Assistant Secretary of Defense guidance to "improve the use and management of reserve forces". During unit training periods, reservists from the Office of Naval Intelligence and 123rd imagery interpreters work side by side enabling the two services to work on intelligence issues utilizing secure systems in pursuit of national requirements.

"We process over 90 percent of all C-26 aerial photographs in the United States for all agencies involved in drug interdiction," said Capt. Lee Gentry, acting operations officer at the 123rd IS. The C-26 shoot aerial photographs over suspected U.S. drug sites using a KS-87 camera mounted underneath the plane. Drug interdiction agencies send the film to the 123 IS where it is processed, then sent to the photo imagery shop. Imagery analysts identify targets for law enforcement.

"We've identified quite a few drug fields," said Gentry. The 123rd IS also identifies crack houses and methamphetamine labs, said Master Sgt. Randy Chambers, an active Guard member who works as both an imagery analyst and photo processor. Success has forced more drug dealers to grow marijuana crops indoors. According to posse comitatus law, the active

duty military can't act as a police force against U.S. citizens. The 123 IS, acting as a state agency, though, has some authority to assist the governor of Arkansas and other agencies in the battle against drugs. It's a delicate balancing act.

When an A-10 crashed in Colorado in Mar 1997, members of the 123rd IS were sent to Langley AFB, VA, to work with the 480th Intelligence Group, analyzing U-2 imagery. As part of the effort to find the missing A-10, they analyzed more than 60 rolls of film.

In 1999, 37 members of the 123rd were activated under the Presidential Selective Reserve Call-up to support Operation Allied Force and were deployed to seven locations. Fourteen members were sent to the 480th IG at Langley AFB, VA. Others supported operations at Aviano AB, Italy, Ramstein AB, Germany, JAC Molesworth, England, Offutt AFB, Neb., Beale AFB, CA, and Kelly AFB, TX. While assigned to the 31 OSS at Aviano AB, four 123rd imagery analysts were the first to use the "National Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA) in a box" during wartime. With maps detailed down to individual buildings, fields and streams loaded on a laptop computer, "NIMA in a box" dramatically decreased the time it took for imagery analysts on Airborne Command and Control Center EC-130 aircraft to talk pilots to targets or guide rescuers to a downed pilot. While normally not assigned to flying duty, 123 IS imagery analysts logged over 400 combat hours aboard the ABCCC.

The 123rd Intelligence Squadron continues to provide world-class imagery analysis and exploitation to numerous agencies and organizations throughout the intelligence community. The National Guard Bureau's vision for the 123rd Intelligence Squadron is for it to expand into an intelligence group comprised of a group support staff, an intelligence operations squadron, and an intelligence support squadron. A direct result of the outstanding work that has been performed; the unit has been identified by the National Guard Bureau as one of four Air National Guard imagery intelligence squadrons to receive the communication connectivity and exploitation equipment necessary to perform component, joint, and combined intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions.

This equipment enables the squadron to exploit intelligence data in near-real time from U-2, Predator, Global Hawk, and other intelligence gathering platforms, and disseminate reports, graphics, and other formats to theater commanders, major commands, and units in direct contact or approaching hostile forces. The 123rd Intelligence Squadron has supported the National Guard counter-drug program for many years and continues to make an impact in the interception, detection, and interdiction against drug trafficking.

In the past year, the squadron has continued this support as well as providing additional support in homeland security. The unit supported this program during the Tempe, Ariz., presidential debate, providing imagery and analysis to law enforcement and the Secret Service along the United States border with Mexico and Canada, all the lock and dams in Arkansas, power production plants (to include nuclear), and state and federal government buildings. This support has identified security requirements that will provide greater safety and security to the occupants and citizens of America.

The unit continued to support Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom, and Noble Eagle through voluntary deployments. Members of the 123rd Intelligence Squadron were

deployed to 1st Air Force, Tyndall AFB, Fla.; United States Central Command, MacDill AFB, Fla.; United States Air Forces Europe/European Command; the 480th Intelligence Wing, Langley AFB, VA.; Balad Air Base, Iraq; and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba supporting the Combatant Status Review Board. The members who have supported these deployments distinguished themselves and the 123rd Intelligence Squadron; and the members and the unit have been requested by name to continue to support the global war on terrorism. 2004

12/20/2006 With their eyes focused on computer screens, intelligence analysts from the Arkansas Air National Guard's 123rd Intelligence Squadron are keeping watch over the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan as they process intelligence live for the nation's warfighters. The unit began analyzing intelligence in near-real time for its customers Dec. 15.

"With the capability here now, we 're able to perform our mission internally," said Lt. Paul Needham, 123rd IS assistant director of operations. "We also ... bring more experience, typically an older workforce, to the intelligence field. The customer loves it. " While the capability to support live missions is new for the 123rd, it's something the unit's members have been doing for years at other bases.

In the late 1990's, some unit members deployed to Europe while others deployed to stateside locations to support operations in Kosovo. Since the terrorist attacks of 11 Sept. 2001, unit members have deployed to active-duty Air Force units to analyze intelligence, causing a strain on their families and civilian employers while the members were away—some for two years or longer. With the digital revolution, intelligence analyst airmen don't have to be on or near the front lines.

Data is collected from a platform, turned into ones and zeroes, sent to a distributed ground station, analyzed and returned to the user, usually within a matter of minutes. The lieutenant's staff of Guardsmen typically have anywhere from five to 15 years of experience in the intelligence business. "We 're pretty much providing the full spectrum of support to the warfighter," he said. "It could be anything from sitting on a house to watching troops in contact (with the enemy)."

Currently, the unit has nearly 40 members on Title 10 orders, working around the clock in shifts to do the nation's work. Members have been on orders since July to support the Air Force's Air and Space Expeditionary Force. As one set of 179-day orders end, members will be picked up for another set of 179-day orders. Lt. Needham concluded that the current activity could continue for two to three years, "probably pushing the waiver limits." Another news item in January 2007 identified the squadron's "reachback" remoting capability—DCGS—that facilitated 123rd operations back home in Arkansas in support of the wars in Southwest Asia. In Fiscal Year 2004, Arkansas Sen. Mark Pryor and Rep. Vic Snyder inserted legislation into the budget to provide \$6 million to purchase and maintain a Distributed Common Ground System and required infrastructure.

This allows Arkansas Guardsmen to provide vital intelligence to the warfighter from in garrison, and adds a low density high demand capability to the nation's Global War on Terrorism. In addition to a wartime role, the same equipment could be used to support a natural disaster, such as Hurricane Katrina to observe damage to key infrastructures.

2008 For 50 years, the 123rd Intelligence Squadron has been analyzing and exploiting imagery

products for the Defense Department and other governmental agencies. And while the technology has changed, the unit's Airmen still keep their trained eyes focused on the target. The unit, initially established in 1952 as the 118th Reconnaissance Technical Squadron at Adams Field in Little Rock, was renamed the 123rd Reconnaissance Technical Squadron 50 years ago. The unit could have celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2002 but most members were mobilized after the 11 Sep 2001, terrorist attacks and couldn't make it back to Arkansas for a celebration.

Officials chose to wait until this year to hold the celebration, marking 50 years with the 123rd designation. Initially, the unit supported RF-101 from Louisville, KY. Unit members operated a photo lab, according to retired Senior Master Sgt. Randall Cragg. He didn't join the unit until May 1969, but he's familiar with the history of the unit as it dated back to its origins. He retired from the military Dec. 31. When he joined, some unit members were overseas in response to the Pueblo Crisis.

The crisis began Jan. 23, 1968, when North Korea took over the USS Pueblo in international waters off the North Korean coast. 123rd members were deployed to support the 154th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, and its fleet of RF-101s at Itazuke, Japan. The unit moved from Adams Field at Little Rock National Airport to its current post on Little Rock Air Force Base in 1987. Since then, technology has changed from 1990-era computers that used 5 ¼ inch floppy disks to the latest high-speed computers, Secure Internet Protocol Router Network connectivity and servers that store terabytes of information. One terabyte equals roughly one million megabytes.

Unit members have also seen action in Operation Southern Watch, the enforcement of the no-fly zone over Southern Iraq, throughout the 1990s, Operation Noble Anvil, the air campaign over Kosovo in the late 1990s, and more recently Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and Jump Start, the president's mission to secure America's southern border with Mexico. Additionally, some unit members work counterdrug missions for law enforcement agencies. Operation Jump Start and counter-drug missions are conducted in Title 32 status as a member of the state's militia. Title 10 federal active duty members are prohibited from participating in those types of missions because of the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878.

Not too long ago, a plane would fly a mission of one or two hours and return to a deployed location. Technicians at the location would remove the film from the plane and process it. Analysts would then review it and write an initial report. Three hours could easily elapse before an assessment was written and forwarded for review. Today, unit members analyze data in near real time and provide feedback in a matter of minutes to war fighters on the ground halfway around the world. All the way from the friendly confines of Little Rock Air Force Base. Roughly two-thirds of the 85-member unit are in the middle of one-year active-duty orders, said Lt. Col. Ken Temple, 123rd Intelligence Squadron commander.

After a 7.0 magnitude earthquake devastated Haiti, seven members of the Air National Guard's 123rd Intelligence Squadron departed the state in response to Arkansas' first call for Guard support there. On Thursday, 21 Jan the unit received a confirmed mission to deploy personnel in support of Operation Unified Response for a currently undetermined period of time. The team departed the Little Rock Air Force Base at approximately 8:30 the following morning for the first leg of their journey to Haiti courtesy of an Arkansas Air National Guard C-130 piloted by members of the Guard's 189th Airlift Wing from the base.

The team deployed with the mission to analyze imagery from full motion video taken from fixed wing aircraft conducting aerial reconnaissance over the affected areas of Haiti. The unit's mission assists with force protection of troops on the ground through the identification of areas with rioting or mass crowding of displaced persons. The unit is also responsible for analyzing infrastructure such as roadways, sea and aerial ports to help identify their capabilities to accept incoming support. "I've been ready since the day we heard that the quake happened," said Tech. Sgt. Courtney Leslie, intelligence analyst with the 123rd.

"Although we're not collecting traditional intelligence that we would on other countries, it's viable intelligence products that we will be producing for the generals and the ground commanders down there that will give them so much more ease to be able to bring aid into the people and to control the millions of people that do need that aid." Fighter Wing responds The 188th Fighter Wing answered the Arkansas Guard's second call for support to Haiti with the deployment of the unit's Disaster Relief Beddown Set (DRBS) on Monday, 25 Jan.

The DRBS supports up to 150 personnel with billets, shower and latrine facilities, kitchen and self-help laundry machines, as well as providing water purification capabilities. The system was last used in Jan 2009, when it was deployed to Marshall, AR., following the devastating ice storm that affected the northern third of the state. With this most recent deployment, the DRBS will house relief personnel from Expeditionary Medical Support, a National Guard asset that is tasked to provide medical care to earthquake victims in Haiti. Although no Arkansas Guardsmen were tasked to deploy with the equipment, unit personnel came together to load out the system for movement via one C-130 and two C-17s.

Army Guard awaits mission The 77th Aviation Brigade's Company F, 2nd Battalion, 211th Air Traffic Services, received word of a possible deployment to Haiti as well and began preparation for possible movement in late January. The deployment remains pending at the time of this writing, but is anticipated to occur in early February. The unit's expertise would provide the Joint Task Force Command with a much more controlled reception of airflow bringing humanitarian aid into the nation.

The latest chapter The Guard's role in support of Operation Unified Response is a continuance of the massive call for Guard support in response to natural disasters over the past few years. The Arkansas Guard's largest single call for support in response to a natural disaster came in late 2005 after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast. While Arkansas activated over 3,000 troops, the Guard as a whole mobilized approximately 50,000 to the affected states. The Guard's role here at home peaked in 2008, with 81 state active duty missions primarily in response to the multiple natural disasters such as tornadoes and flooding that hit throughout the year.

Last year topped that number however with 107 state active duty missions. The majority of those missions came in response to the massive ice storms that devastated north Arkansas, resulting in the activation of approximately 1,000 Guardsmen to support the affected communities. "It makes you proud," said Tech. Sgt. Leslie reference her role in the current mission to support the relief effort in Haiti. "And to have the support of the coworkers that are staying behind, to have the support of the Family, and your friends that are picking up the pieces, it makes you really proud.

2005 2 Sep The 123rd Intelligence Squadron, Arkansas ANG, deployed two Intelligence Analysts

to Shreveport, Louisiana. An additional six Imagery Analysts were mobilized at home station to support RC-26 operations.

USAF Unit Histories
Created: 22 Dec 2020
Updated:

Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.
Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.