

AIA Guard unit helps fight America's **drug war**

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With recent drawdowns in the activeduty Air Force, the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserves have taken over many critical tasks once reserved for their full-time counterparts. The 123rd Intelligence Squadron at Little Rock Air Force Base, Ark., has readily accepted the challenge.

The Air Force has increased the 123rd’s workload and squadron members have stepped up to the task, producing high-quality results their customers have come to expect.

“From the responses we’ve gotten from our customers, they’re more than pleased with our production. Agencies continue to come to us with new work. We’ve got so many requests, in fact, that we’ve got outstanding requirements we can’t meet. We must be doing something right,” said Capt. Rob Turner, executive officer at the 123rd IS.

The 123rd IS is one of two Air National Guard units in the Air Intelligence Agency. The other is the 169th IS in Salt Lake City, Utah. It is also one of 28 Joint Reserve Intelligence Centers in the military. Only three of the JRICs, including the 123rd IS, are dedicated to defending air and

space; the other centers are focused on the Army and Navy.

JRICs allow members of all the services’ intelligence communities to work together.

“We have somewhat of a joint environment. We don’t work on the same projects, but we do work side-by-side. As time goes on, it can’t help but help both of us,” said Maj. Bill Stanton, 123rd IS commander.

“Because of our status as a JRIC, we’re one of the show sites of the Air National Guard. The Air Force has put a lot of money into the 123rd IS. We’re planning \$600,000 worth of interior and exterior renovations,” said Turner.

Renovations will include brick-



photos by Staff Sgt. Regis Vega

Staff Sgt. Kirk Kriegbaum processes black and white prints with the Mark IV machine.



Staff Sgt. Marty Martin and Senior Airman Susan Langston, imagery analysts, determine the correct look angle for a target area.

ing the entire exterior of the squadron's building and the construction of a new, fully outfitted SCIF.

"The new SCIF will double our imagery production capabilities. We'll also be able to host more people from our sister services," said Stanton.

Members of the 123rd IS share stories about how the ANG has evolved to meet an increasing workload. "The Guard's primary mission is to train. We're training, but we're also producing," said Turner.

"The photo imagery section is evolving rapidly. The Air Force has decided this is a section they want to invest in. In the future, there won't be a difference between the Guard and active duty; we'll both be getting the same training and equipment," said Senior Master Sgt. Doug Bradley, non-commissioned officer in charge of the imagery analysis section.

When an A-10 crashed in Colorado in March 1997, members

of the 123rd IS were sent to Langley Air Force Base, 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.

Staff Sgt. Kirk Kriegbaum, a supervisor in the photo lab, worked on the Open Skies Treaty signed by several countries, including the United States and Russia. The treaty allows countries to fly over each other in order to view missiles and other military capabilities.

"I'm proud to be a member of this unit. We've turned a lot of heads and a lot of people have taken notice. We've changed a lot and it feels good to be a part of that," said Kriegbaum.

Most of the attention the 123rd IS receives is from their involvement with America's battle against drugs.

"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 aircraft 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 123rd 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. "More drug dealers have started using green houses, so our success has dropped off some. Once the marijuana is grown indoors, it's harder to take aerial photographs. At the same time, being indoors limits the amount

that can be grown. They have to go outdoors if they want to grow a lot," said Gentry.

"We've definitely noticed a difference in the way drug dealers grow their crops. More and more, they're growing in basements and inside houses. They use elaborate lighting systems to simulate the sun," said Chambers.

According to posse comitatus law, the activeduty military can't act as a police force against U.S. citizens. The 123rd 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.

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before they can do anything. We don't get involved in any of the drug busts, but our information leads to the busts," said Chambers.

The 123rd IS people are recognized in Arkansas for their outstanding support to state and local law enforcement agencies. "We get lots of letters from local sheriffs saying 'this is the great work you've done,'" said Bradley.

"A lot of local law enforcement agencies bring in film. We have provided materials they use to prepare for court. It appears we'll be doing drug work well into the future," said Stanton.

The 123rd IS has implemented quality initiatives to assure that

their customers get a good product.

"We've brought a lot of business principles to our work here at the Guard. We've introduced efficiency studies, production reports and performance evaluations," said Gentry.

"We've made senior leadership accountable for work done on drill weekends and we've also made individuals accountable for their work performance," said Gentry.

The 123rd IS formally identified their customers and developed new ways to meet their expectations. Surveys are sent out with every product asking if it was timely and if it met customer expectations.

"We didn't know we were efficient. It gave us a benchmark that we monitored for several months. We looked for areas we could improve, streamline and change the flow," said Gentry.

"Monitoring and holding people accountable improved efficiency," he said.

Morale is high at the 123rd IS because their members want to be there and share a common goal, accord-

ing to Gentry.

"There's a wealth of experience in the Guard. Some members remain until age 60. We have some imagery analysts who have been looking at a light table for 25 years. That's a lot of experience, people who have been a lot of places and done a lot of things," said Turner.

With the current climate of activeduty military reductions, National Guard missions are more important than ever.

The 123rd stands up to the challenge, ready to lead the Air Force into the 21st century. ■



Upper right, Staff Sgt. Stacey Spears helps fellow imagery analyst Senior Airman Greg Johnson plot coordinates on a map. Lower left, Staff Sgt. Shawna Brown, visual information photography specialist, measures the black and white contrast of film by using a densitometer.