

Airmen with the 8th Expeditionary Air Mobility Squadron and 379th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron remove an engine from a C-5 Galaxy after it was damaged from hostile ground fire during take-off from Baghdad International Airport in January. When required, the Air and Space Expeditionary Force Center uses a "teaming" concept to keep UTC — unit type code — integrity. For instance, security forces are usually sent as a team because they regularly train together.

AEF: Training, Going, Gone

Expeditionary mindset provides stability, predictability for Airmen

by Tech. Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.

opening photo by Staff Sgt. Suzanne M. Jenkins

Nothing much stands out at the Air and Space Expeditionary Force Center at Langley Air Force Base, Va.

The rooms upon rooms of cubicles are standard for a work center. A snack room provides lunch for those too busy to leave, and a larger parking lot would make people happier.

Everything appears normal, except for the inordinate amount of white boards. The boards are standard in meeting rooms, but in every other cubicle?

Ideas, as everyone knows, are fleeting. And here, where thoughts flow deep like the currents of the nearby Chesapeake Bay, ideas are jotted down quickly before they evaporate. One can actually read the writing on the wall. Nearly every white board has an expeditionary process spelled out with arrows, acronyms, sources, potential advantages and disadvantages, all just steps away from becoming future Air Force policy.

The cross flow of information, the multiple layers and complications of each AEF cycle and the 10- to 12-hour work days that seem to fly by are all part of the center's operation.

"Our mission is to take the Air Force's most valuable resource, its people, and provide lethal combat power," said Brig. Gen. Anthony Przybyslawski, the center's commander. "We're not dealing with inanimate objects here like on a factory

assembly line. We're dealing with people's lives and providing combat capable forces to the war fighter. When we [began supporting the global war on terror], we went from deploying 8,000 people to 100,000 people in a couple months. It was truly amazing."

The operations in Iraq and Afghanistan put the Air Force into full afterburner, forcing a 1,250 percent increase in deployments. The conflicts also battle-tested the air and space expeditionary force concept of operations. In the beginning, AEF goals were straightforward: Provide combatant commanders with the right force at the right time, reduce the deployment tempo and take full advantage of the Guard, Reserve and civil service capabilities.

It's a work in progress, designed to be flexible. It will continue to react to mission requirements, service needs and the national military strategy while executing the Air Force battle rhythm to de-

liver versatile and responsive air and space power to meet the war fighter's global security requirements.

For every action the center is a part of, there's

Guard and Reserve commitment

Percent of reserve components that volunteered to fill vacancies during AEF Blue.



a reaction — be it caused by wars, manpower shortages or readiness issues. The center's charter is to keep everything on an even keel — keep the yin equal to the yang. Once its concept solidified, Airmen were organized into 10 AEF "pairs" that deployed, ideally, for three months on 15-month cycles. This system became a way of life for most Airmen and allowed for unit training, adequate reconstitution, and personal as well as professional development while providing stability and predictability in

by Staff Sgt. Suzanne M. Jenkins



F-15E Strike Eagles from the 366th Fighter Wing at Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho, soar over Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. On average, the service needs fewer aircraft to support AEFs and is finding itself providing more combat support.

Senior Airman Salamina Nickel gives radio clearance for traffic crossing a taxiway at Balad Air Base, Iraq. Being an air traffic controller, Airman Nickel's skills are in high demand. As such, she and people in other career fields — security forces, civil engineers, transportation — may have to deploy more frequently to support the Air and Space Expeditionary Force.



Frequently asked questions

It seems people are deploying more often, sometimes leaving earlier and staying longer. Is the Air and Space Expeditionary Force system broke?

"It's not broke," said Brig. Gen. Anthony Przybyslawski, Air and Space Expeditionary Force Center commander. "It is working as designed. In a steady state, we paired up AEF capabilities to combatant commanders. Then our combatant commanders needed more, so we transitioned to a surge tempo. Despite the surge, the Air Force goal remains constant to keep deployments as scheduled to maintain combat capability while providing predictability and stability for our Airmen.

"We're currently on the backside of a huge mountain we successfully climbed. More than

four of our AEFs were at maximum surge. We had more than 100,000 Airmen deployed or prepared to go, which validated the AEF concept of operations. People think if they deploy for more than three months the system is broke, but it's not. It's flexing to meet mission requirements," he said.

How are units and personnel tapped to deploy?

Simply put, a combatant commander tells an air component what's needed, and the air component staff decides which capabilities or UTCs [unit type codes] will best accomplish the mission. UTC is another term for a specialized functional team. Once the code is in the system, it's assigned a unit line number for accountability purposes, and the AEF Center nominates UTCs for a deployment based on a variety of requirements. The owning major command will then verify the code

is ready for deployment and, before anyone knows it, an Airman is out the door.

Why do some people keep getting sent back to the desert, even before their 15 months are up?

A couple things come into play, one of which is overcoming a shortage of critical career fields: security forces, transportation, civil engineering and communications.

"Unfortunately, even though we have shortages in other career fields, we can't change the pipeline overnight to train more people," General Przybyslawski said. "We have to be guarded in these shortages. Our Air Force leadership is keenly aware of the skill imbalances in our force structure and is addressing ways to correct this imbalance." This may result in 179-day tours for selected career fields.

Airmen's lives. On Sept. 11, 2001, that changed.

"It was like turning on a fire hose," said Master Sgt. Roger Heath, of the center's operations division, who arrived there a mere two weeks before the attack on the United States. And it wasn't just September 11th. Whenever he watched CNN, he witnessed the fruits of his labor. "Haiti, Africa, the winter Olympics, homeland security, even the fires in California — whenever I'd see our people landing there, we did that," he said proudly.

Using a sledgehammer as a fly swatter

In the past, General Przybyslawski said the cost of engagement was too high. Instead of sending a six-person team to repair a runway, a whole squadron was sent. It was like using a sledgehammer to kill a fly.

"The war fighter now asks for a specific capability, and we provide the weapon system," the general said. "An Army commander once said he was tired of using \$100 bills to pay bills without receiving change. He wanted a lot of \$5 bills. The Air Force, because we have more than 90,000 specific capabilities and skills, carries around 90,000

by Staff Sgt. Russell Wicke



Senior Airman Jodi Brown, an M-60 machine gun operator with the 455th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, scans the horizon while on a random perimeter check. Hostile encounters are likely on the edge of the base, and Airmen work with the Army to secure the base. Security forces Airmen deploy for 179 days, then redeploy home for 179 days before deploying again. This is the only career field that currently deploys in this fashion.

nickels to pay bills efficiently."

There are 220 people from 48 different Air Force specialties in the center who provide combat commanders the aircraft and manpower needed to complete a mission. Capt. Jennifer Allen — who recently returned from a stint at a deployed location — is typical of an AEF Center staff member. A majority of them are battle-tested.

"It's hard for a personnel officer to get selected to go to a war zone," the captain said. "I wanted to get a wartime tasking. Since I was never [against a tasking], I signed up for a remote short tour. Some people think that we in the AEF Center don't know what's going on, but we do."

General Przybyslawski instills the human aspect in the center. "These are real people we're talking about,

AEF short history

In a way, the Air Force has always been an expeditionary force. Brig. Gen. John Pershing was the first to use American military aircraft during combat operations with Mexico in 1916. The Army's aviation section learned hard lessons concerning the fragility of aircraft operating from airfields far from home, according to Dr. Richard Davis, senior historian at the Air Force Historical Support Office, Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, D.C.

The Tactical Air Command led the Air Force's first attempt at institutionalizing a rapid response force during the Korean War, and in 1953 created a composite Air Strike Force to deter communist aggressions.



Brig. Gen. John Pershing

Later, 19th Air Force stepped out of the mold and created what was known as a "Suite Case Air Force." Despite not having aircraft

or combat units, it was on call for short-notice deployments worldwide. They maintained 30-day, fly-away kits. A third of the staff was jump-qualified and able to parachute with the Army. When deployed, the staff served as the lead command element for contingencies. It quit deploying in 1973.

Then along came the Gulf War in 1991, which taxed man and machine. The high-stress and combat nature of the war limited the amount of time a unit could train and put a strain on more than 600 aircraft and 55,000 deployed Airmen involved in the conflict. This resulted in people leaving the Air Force in droves, affecting recruitment and retention.

"The notion of a quick-reaction air power package consisting of several types of planes has been a thread in [Air Force] thinking for at least 40 years and had earlier

found concrete expression in TAC's creation of the 19th Air Force in the 1950s," Dr. Davis wrote in his history report "Anatomy of a Reform."

In fall 1994, shortly after assuming command of the Air Combat Command's 9th Air Force, then-Lt. Gen. John Jumper was faced with a problem. Normally, one of a Navy carrier's missions is to provide air support for a certain area of the world. Because of world affairs, a Navy aircraft carrier deployment elsewhere forced the general to think of a way to temporarily fill a "hole" left by the force with Air Force aircraft. A Navy carrier wing is composed of several different air frames, enabling it to handle a variety of threats. General Jumper broke the Air Force norm when he proposed using a mix of F-15s, F-16s and B-52s to replace the Navy mix.

His commander in chief accepted it, and it worked so well the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff directed the command to deploy an air expeditionary force to Bahrain in 1995.

The practice of sending an air expeditionary force became standard when carrier gaps were created due to contingencies around the world. Later, Gen. Michael Ryan, then United States Air Forces in Europe commander, sent air expeditionary forces to Bosnia and then, as the Air Force chief of staff, championed the AEF concept.

Then, in 1998, General Ryan laid it out on the table. He wanted to "enhance the current cohesion and coherence of this movement [toward an expeditionary service] and accelerate our progress in this direction."

It meant having a force that

was light, lean and lethal, according to Dr. Davis. By mid-March 1998, the air staff was grappling with making the concept a reality. On Aug. 4, 1998, General Ryan and Acting Secretary of the Air Force F. Whitten Peters announced their plans for 10 aerospace expeditionary forces under the concept of a 21st Century Expeditionary Aerospace Force, or EAF, which would later be dropped.

By January 1999, the AEF management staff had grown to 100 people. They found a home in a basement at Air Combat Command headquarters at Langley Air Force Base, Va. When the staff doubled, members moved into an old hangar in 2000, where they reside today.

— Tech. Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.

Longer deployments

not line numbers. We need to take care of people," he said.

Finding religion

That personal care can be extended to the 20,000 people deployed on any given AEF rotation, or even focused on a single person — that is, if that person is being extended. By his own rule, the general must review every extension.

"I found religion when General [John] Jumper [Air Force chief of staff] asked me who authorized extensions — who ultimately made the decision. I said [functional area managers] do. Ever since, I review every extension out there and investigate every action possible so we minimize extensions."

But he doesn't like to extend people, especially if they're in a remote environment. "Extensions are like rocks in our shoes; it's not a perfect world. If we have to extend people, we try to tell them before they deploy. Extensions are our last option," he said. "We take extensions seriously, so much so that the chief of staff will approve all extensions when the new Air Force Instruction on AEF presence policy is soon released."

To prevent extensions and allow greater continuity for expeditionary commanders in the field, while still providing stability and predictability, General Jumper announced a change in deployment lengths.

Beginning with AEF Cycle 5 in September, AEF deployment lengths will be four months on 20-month rotational cycles.

"This evolution of the AEF is not a temporary adjustment," General Jumper said in his "Sight Picture" on June 4. "More appropriately, it is recognition of new demands around the world for air and space power."

"Simply put, the demands on our deployable forces have not diminished and are not expected to decline for some time," the general wrote.

The 20-month cycle will continue to provide commanders and Airmen the ability to plan ahead, allowing predictability while providing greater continuity for the in-theater commander.

As part of that predictability, and before Airmen are notified of a deployment, General Przybyslawski says people should put themselves in an AEF

by Staff Sgt. Matthew Hannen



An E-3 Sentry Airborne Warning and Control System deployed to the 363rd Air Expeditionary Wing takes off for an Operation Iraqi Freedom mission. Low-density, high-demand systems, like AWACS and the E-8C Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System, are enabling forces ready to deploy 24-7. For instance, AWACS crews rotate every 45 days because their numbers are limited, the systems are badly needed, they deploy frequently and to maintain training proficiency.

For more info

Airmen can learn more about the Air and Space Expeditionary Force and deployment information by visiting the Air and Space Expeditionary Force Center Web page at <https://aefcenter.acc.af.mil>. This site is only accessible from .mil and .gov computers.

mindset and be ready to deploy anywhere in the world when requested.

General Jumper agrees. "The culture of the ... Air and Space Expeditionary Force is ... everyone in the Air Force must understand that the day-to-day operation of the Air Force is absolutely set to the rhythm

of the deploying AEF force packages," he said during past symposiums.

"We need people to get upset when they don't go," General Przybyslawski said. "The proper mindset is you're either training to go, going or already gone. You're 'sitting alert' until called." ❄

The AEF 12 step

Following are the basic steps taken to get Airmen from their doorsteps to a deployed location, and back. In this instance, there is a requirement for Airman John Jones in the desert, but any war fighter can make the request.

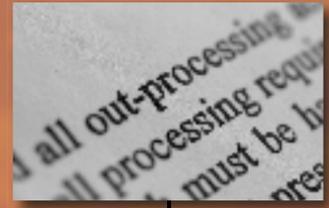
by Capt. Roger Burdette



1. The war fighter tells the air component what capability is needed.

2. The air component, in this case U.S. Central Command Air Forces, staff determines which UTC — unit type code — will best accomplish the mission.

by Master Sgt. Lance Cheung



4. The Air and Space Expeditionary Force Center reviews and nominates the UTC based on home station alignment and the Air and Space Expeditionary Force UTC reporting tool. In this case, Airman Jones is determined to be ready and fully trained to meet the requirement, and his major command headquarters verifies he's ready to go.

3. The air component puts the requirement into the time phased force and deployment data.

5. The air component and combatant commanders validate the action. The AEF Center sends a levy to the unit notifying it the UTC has been tasked.

6. The Personnel Readiness Unit notifies Airman Jones' unit. The transportation management office books his reservation with U.S. Transportation Command airlift based on his date required in place and space availability.

by Master Sgt. Lance Cheung



by Scott H. Spitzer



7. Airman Jones deploys to perform his wartime tasking. Some missions require additional training that must be done before arriving at the deployed location. This is not a part of the deployment. The deployment begins when Airman Jones signs into his deployed location.

8. The air component works with the war fighter to determine if Airman Jones' skill will still be needed for the next rotation.

by Master Sgt. Lance Cheung



9. If it is, the AEF Center will begin the same process again to replace Airman Jones. If not, the requirement is deleted, and Airmen Jones completes the tour and returns home without a replacement.

10. Once a replacement is identified, a date required in place is established. Airman Jones has a good idea when he is leaving and who is replacing him.

by Staff Sgt. Quinton T. Burris



11. At his deployed location, Airman Jones receives his transportation ticket information home.

12. Airman Jones redeploys home.