

AIRMAN INTELLIGENCE OPERATOR PROPELS UNIT TO BEST-IN-COMMAND

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GRISSOM AIR RESERVE BASE, Ind. --As a former Commandant of the Marine Corps once said, "to lack intelligence is to be in the ring blindfolded," and with the 434th Operations Support Squadron's intelligence office in their corner, Grissom's Airmen can rest assured when they step into the ring of battle, they won't have that problem.

For their efforts in keeping U.S. troops informed about threats at both home and abroad, the 434th OSS intelligence office was recently named the Air Force Reserve's Outstanding OSS Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance Unit of the Year for 2013.

"This is huge," said Lt. Col. Gregory Schultz, 434th OSS senior intelligence officer. "The fact that we were number one among all the OSS-level intelligence shops is truly awesome."

When asked what the intelligence office's biggest achievement was for 2013, Schultz said it was a combination of everyone's efforts throughout the year.

"I don't really know what our golden bb was," he explained. "There were 15 bullet statements in our package, and I think it's a compilation of all 15."



Several of those statements, which helped garner the prestigious honor, dealt with the intelligence office's support to troops downrange.

"They mobilized to a U.S. Central Command location in support of Operation Enduring Freedom where they supported more than 40 KC-135 [Stratotanker aircraft] and 140 crews that refueled approximately 3,000 receivers," said Lt. Col. Douglas Gullion, 434th OSS commander. "They also conducted 560 intelligence briefings, which supported the offload of 110 million pounds of fuel to aircraft supporting more than 120 troops in contact with enemy forces, 100 special operations forces and 200 strikes."

According to their nomination package, the deployed intelligence Airmen also authored more than mission reports, which dispersed critical threats in their area to their squadron, wing and the U.S. Air Forces Central's Combined Air Operations Center as they directly supported approximately 100 special operations refueling missions.

"Our job is to make the mission successful," added Senior Airman Jared Easton, 434th OSS intelligence. "Our goal is fulfilled when crews return home with no force protection issues."

In addition, they analyzed vital intelligence for combined joint special operations aircraft, briefing more than 200 special operations air refueling missions, which resulted in nearly 90 insurgents detained and 20 enemy forces killed in action.

"Our biggest impact is our support to the deployers as we provide threat analysis," said Schultz. "No matter what you do out there, there's always a risk, and we try to keep them informed of those risks."

To make that goal a reality, Grissom's intelligence Airmen must stay informed on what is happening around the world. "We take a lot of different data, analyze it and make assessments and say 'here's the stuff that can really hurt you, here's the stuff that's least likely,'" explained Schultz. "We look at ten to fifteen sources a day as we keep our ear to the rail."

"We don't just use one product and one product only -- we fuse things together," elaborated Senior Airman Waleed Kishta, 434th OSS intelligence apprentice. "You try to give the troops a situational awareness, keeping their guard up because the threat is worldwide; it's not just in areas that we're at war with."

"Before Airmen deploy, they come to us, and we are their eyes, their ears, their classified Google and their Wikipedia to that area they're going to," Kishta continued. "When you have this Airman who never left America and he's going into a combat zone, you want to make sure you give him accurate information so that he can come home safe to his country, family and loved ones."

In their world, Grissom's intelligence Airmen may never know how successful they have been or how many threats never metastasized into tragedy thanks to their efforts. However, they occasionally do get indicators of a job well done.

"A few years ago our civil engineer unit was slated to support a humanitarian mission in South America, and we did our analysis, and as it turned out we determined it wasn't a good idea, and so the mission did not go," recalled Senior Master Sgt. Rafael Leyva Jr., 434th OSS intelligence technician. "Events that occurred after the fact validated what we stated as two or three months later bad things did happen in the area they were headed."

Schultz also said they know they've done their job from individual experiences.

"We know that when we brief people going overseas, we're not going to be their only source of intelligence, but we are the first source, and when you see their eyes open as we show them what's really going on and happening every day you know you're making a difference," he explained. "You also know that when they come home and say, 'that one little thing you said really helped me,' and maybe some little nugget that we said did make them a little more aware and a little bit safer."

While much of their focus was abroad, Grissom's intelligence shop also earned the award for their work stateside.



"This award represents a good cross section of everything we do well," said Schultz. "We had deployments last year, so they brought a lot of meat and potatoes to the award package, but we also had the stuff we do for nuclear mission support and local force protection support.

"I think one of the things that really helped us a lot was that we are a host base, so we are the only organic intelligence here," he added. "It gives us opportunities to do a lot of things."

"They are nuclear enterprise experts," said Gullion about their work stateside. "They managed more than 1,100 pieces of message traffic for Global Thunder."

Global Thunder is a U.S. Strategic Command exercise that once focused solely on nuclear readiness and command and control, but now encompasses all its mission areas and crossing into every combatant command.

The intelligence Airmen also helped mitigate threats to the Hoosier base, said Gullion.

"They developed an inclusive list of threat sources including the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, Federal Bureau of Investigation and local law enforcement, which was recently commended by a joint services vulnerability assessment team," the commander elaborated. "They also increased intelligence partnering with the FBI by holding bi-annual military working groups to improve analysis and threat mitigation."

While their breadth of work may seem impressive, perhaps making it more so is the rate of turnover the office recently endured while still accomplishing the mission.

"They met all taskings and requirements despite the turnover of 40 percent of their officers and 43 percent of their 7-level intelligence technicians," said Gullion.

"We have the majority of our positions filled now, but I'd say 2013 was definitely a rebuilding year for us," said Schultz, who added that their office has a good reputation, not just because of their work, but because of their people.

As one of those people, Easton said he enjoys his job because of the variety. "It doesn't matter how long you've been here or how long you've been doing this job, you learn something new every day," he explained. "There are so many resources available to us, so the access to information is unparalleled."

"There's always something new popping up," echoed Kishta.

From his perspective, Schultz said what he likes most about the intelligence world is seeing his work make a relevant difference.

"When you're seeing all of the pieces and parts put together in supporting a common mission, when we're actually doing our mission, that's really neat," he concluded.

The 434th OSS is one of three operations units under the 434th Air Refueling Wing, the largest KC-135R Stratotanker unit in the Air Force Reserve Command. Airmen and aircraft routinely deploy from the 434th ARW in support of the Air Force mission and U.S. strategic objectives.



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