



# NEWS RELEASE

**UNITED STATES AIR FORCE**

## **HEADQUARTERS STANDARD SYSTEMS GROUP**

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## **SSG Division Keeps Air Force Bases Connected**

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SSG Public Affairs

**MAXWELL AFB, GUNTER ANNEX, Ala**--Although in existence for nearly 15 years, most of their users don't even know they exist.

"If we do our job right and information flows properly, the typical user in the field won't even know we are here," said Lt. Col. Ronnie Edge, Chief Air Force Network Operations Center (AFNOC), here.

The AFNOC, located in the Standard Systems Group, is responsible for keeping Air Force bases connected to each other and other Department of Defense units throughout the world.

"We keep traffic flowing so users at each base can get their jobs done," said Edge.

Keeping bases connected includes operating the Nonclassified Internet Protocol Router Network and the SECRET Internet Protocol Router Network service delivery point at Air Force locations. "Our crews work 24 hours-a-day seven days-a-week to ensure the network is working correctly for over 500,000 Air Force network users at approximately 257 locations worldwide," said Colonel Edge. This includes Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard locations.

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If the AFNOC observes a network outage or if network problems are reported via the help desk, the AFNOC will first work to determine where the problem lies. If the problem is with one of the devices managed by the AFNOC, they will take steps to fix it. If the problem lies at the base network, they work with the appropriate Major Command's (MAJCOM's) Network Operations and Security Center (NOSC) to resolve the problem. If the problem lies outside the Air Force network, they work with the Defense Information Systems Agency's Global Network Operations and Security Center in Arlington, VA. They keep MAJCOMs informed of significant outages when they occur and follow up once the problem has been resolved. The AFNOC also maintains strict configuration management of the critical devices they operate.

In addition to operating the network service delivery point at each base, the AFNOC provides a Base Assistance Team (BAT) to help MAJCOM NOSCs and base network control centers with network performance problems at their bases.

"When requested, we'll deploy the BAT team to a base to help them fix a local network problem or fine-tune the network so that it performs better," said Colonel Edge. The BAT team shares their findings with the Air Force Communications Agency's SCOPE Network team to help optimize Air Force networks and prevent future problems. The AFNOC has a close working relationship with the Air Force Communications Agency due to the agency's role as the Air Force lead command for network capabilities.

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According to Colonel Edge, there is a lot of synergy in locating the AFNOC with other offices in the Standard Systems Group. These offices include the Air Force Systems Networking program office, the Field Assistance Branch, the Combat Information Transport System Enterprise Network Support Center, and the Air Force Defense Messaging System program office and technical support center. "We have on-site testers, engineers, and functional offices that we leverage to ensure the network can host combat support applications and those applications interoperate well with the network," he said.

The AFNOC doesn't just monitor the movement of electrons via the network. They also monitor the actual service levels experienced by over 50,000 users Air Force wide on combat support systems and applications such as the Computer Automated Maintenance System, the On-Line Vehicle Information Management System, the Air Force Portal and more.

"We are working with our engineering directorate on a concept called Web Tone, which will define standard measures of performance for applications to perform well on the network," said Colonel Edge. Included in the Web Tone concept is the capability to instrument the application with gauges to assess operational system performance and service levels.

What began as a staff of two people working five days a week has increased to more than 50 government employees and contractors. The office has also seen many name changes and an increase in responsibilities.

According to Colonel Edge, much has changed over the years. "We have moved from having servers located at virtually every installation to a centralized system. This has caused a significant increase in the volume of data being shared and transmitted over the network."

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Over the years, the Air Force and the military in general have come to rely heavily on the network to get the job done, making security of the network much more critical. "Before, security issues were mainly just a nuisance. Today, a lack of network security could severely impact our ability to carry out the mission," he said.

In light of this, the Air Force Network Operations and Security Center (AFNOSC) was created at Barksdale AFB, La. The AFNOSC, which will achieve initial operational capability in 2004, will be comprised of the AFNOC duty crew, the Air Force Computer Emergency Response Team (AFCERT) duty crew, and a Command & Control (C2) operations center and staff at Barksdale. "We now provide the AFNOSC with the operational status of the Air Force data network and the status of standard base combat support information systems," Colonel Edge said.

When security issues, vulnerabilities, attempted intrusions or attacks are identified, the AFNOSC leverages the expertise of the AFNOC and AFCERT to develop an appropriate response considering all available Net Combat Operations response options. Because security, intelligence gain/loss analysis, and operational impacts must be balanced when conducting network operations, the AFNOSC is charged with providing an integrated C2 process for defending AF networks.

Colonel Edge indicated some of the most exciting initiatives have come as a result of the group's transformation. "Combining network operations and the help desk has given us enterprise-wide situational awareness and helped us link what's happening on the network to the application. In other words, now we can see the total picture which enables us to better meet our customer's needs."

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The Standard Systems Group provides and sustains combat support information systems for the Air Force and Department of Defense. The group procures leading edge information technology products used by virtually every organization on Air Force military bases worldwide.

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