FROM WINE TO PINEAPPLES

Delta Company Takes on New Satellite Role

LTG Richard Formica, Commanding General, U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/ Army Forces Strategic Command, addresses a crowd of over 100 during the WSOC / Delta Company dedication ceremony on the morning of Feb. 23, at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Wahiawa Annex.

Story and Photos by DJ Montoya, 1st Space Brigade Public Affairs

WAHIAWA, Hawaii – 2011 has yet to be determined as a vintage year for California wine, but for the Soldiers of Delta Company, 53rd Signal Battalion, it will go down as a banner year. Members of Delta have departed their humble, but outdated, satellite control facility after more than 20 years of being located in one of California's most acclaimed wine regions just north of the town of Paso Robles. In its place they have settled for a more tropical setting next to pineapple fields on the island of Oahu, Hawaii.

Delta Company has provided network and payload control for the Defense Satellite Communication System at Camp Roberts, Calif., since the late 1980s. The company, which consists of nearly 55 Soldiers and 10 Civilians, to include government and contractor employees, in recent years has taken on a new mission: managing the new Wideband Global Satellites.

The reason behind the relocation to Hawaii lies with the particular wideband global satellite that services the Pacific Rim and puts Delta Company directly underneath its orbital footprint. Wahiawa's geographical location makes it the only Wideband Satellite Communications Operations Center capable of accessing the test slot for new WGS units. This means Delta Company will do the payload control validation on all future WGS launches and testing of satellite control hardware and software.

From his office at the Army's first official WSOC and Delta's new home on the U.S. Navy

U.S. Army personnel from the USASMDC/ARSTRAT 1st Space Brigade,and the 53rd Signal Battalion along with Flight Sergeant Matthew Clarke (center) representing the Australian Defense Forces, untie a traditional Maile Lei formally dedicating the WSOC and new home of Delta Company

Sgt. Joshua Quenga, a native of Hawaii, performs his duty as the mobile transmission and enterprise transmission controller at his six-screen station within the operations center of Delta Company's new home at the Wahiawa Annex.

SPC Felipe A. Ordonez checks the operations manual as SPC Justin C. Waldron prepares to sign on to his control station. Both Ordonez and Waldron have important missions at Delta Company's new operations home on the Island of Oahu, Hawaii.

"It is my job to be the focal point for all matters related to communications payload control and the DSCS III satellite constellation," said Ordonez.

Naval Computer and Telecommunications Area Master Station, Wahiawa Annex, company commander CPT Daniel Zisa can almost see the ocean from the North Shore of the island.

Zisa, who only has until the end of summer before moving on to his next assignment, looked back on all the work put into standing up the $25.4 million, 28,244-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility.

"No unit in SMDC/ARSTRAT has ever relocated and maintained critical satellite communication operations at the same time utilizing one company's worth of manning," he said.

Construction for Delta's new home began in March 2009 and was completed May 31, 2010. Keys to the building were turned over June 25, 2010. Operations at Camp Robert ceased in late January of this year, and a ribbon-cutting ceremony at NCTAMS, Wahiawa Annex, brought it altogether Feb. 23.

Operations noncommissioned officer in charge SSG John Wischmeier recalled the beginning of the move to Wahiawa.

"I was the third Soldier to arrive in Hawaii, and I saw the installation of the equipment from the start. It was truly an amazing event watching the WSOC take shape. I was responsible for making sure the Soldiers were properly trained and proficient on the newly installed equipment. It is great to see the tremendous amount of effort and enthusiasm from our Soldiers and Civilians as they make this herculean effort happen."

At the heart of Delta's operation are the Soldiers, especially those on the high-tech Operations Floor who control the satellites so greatly needed for day-to-day missions.

Take SPC Justin C. Waldron, WGS payload controller, who monitors the Spacecraft's link to the ground station.

"This link allows us to configure the onboard communications resources in order to ensure continuity of communications services to fellow Warfighters located throughout the world," Waldron said.

He went on to state that the WGS payload controller liaises directly with the Air Force to monitor and maintain the health of the Spacecraft. "I absolutely love my job because of the unique technical aspect and sense of knowing that our work makes a huge impact to global operations."

SPC Felipe A. Ordonez serves as the DSCS payload controller.

"It is my job to be the focal point for all matters related to communications payload control and the DSCS III satellite constellation," said Ordonez. "As a DSCS payload controller, I am responsible for monitoring and reporting the health and status of the Space asset. Furthermore, I have the ability to command and configure the communications subsystem on the spacecraft to provide communication services to our fellow Warfighters geographically dispersed."

From behind his six-screen station SGT Joshua Quenga works both the mobile transmission controller and enterprise transmission controller positions.

"The primary responsibility of the MTC in the Pacific theater of operations is to maintain, command, and control satellite communications transmission over both the DSCS and WGS satellites as well as provide steadfast communications for all mobile ground terminals, naval ships, submarines, aircraft, and other diplomatic assets in the Pacific," Quenga said. "At the ETC position, I watch and maintain strategic links for fellow Warfighters on both DSCS and WGS systems in theater. The links maintain the crucial communications required of many global operations."

If this is a little confusing Zisa had the perfect explanation for someone who didn't know a lot about WGS or satellite control.

An outside view of Delta's new $25.4 million home complete with company guidon.

"The best way to explain satellite payload control is to use the example of a public bus," he said. "Much like a bus driver physically drives the bus, the Air Force flies the satellite. Our role is controlling the information that travels through the satellite, or in the 'bus analogy,' who gets on and off. Additionally, we monitor the health and welfare of the satellite to ensure its systems are in prime operational condition and that other organizations are not overpowering the satellite, which not only disrupts communications but could destroy its operational capability."

In addition to a new mission with WGS comes a bi-national partnership with Australian Defense Forces personnel who will be integrating with Delta Company personnel.

According to Zisa, five Australians currently are imbedded into Delta operations.

"We are looking to have a full contingent of 12 Australians working within the WSOC in the future years to come. Currently we have two Soldiers from the Royal Australian Army, two Airmen from the Royal Australian Air Force, and one petty officer from the Royal Australian Navy. We work as one integrated unit and within the same building."

Zisa reflected on Delta being the first fully operational WSOC.

"This is by far the most unique assignment in the United States Army. It is truly a rewarding experience to move a unit and operations overseas, bring new systems online, and incorporate the Australian Defense Forces into our operations. Not an easy task, but truly a rewarding experience."

LTG Richard P. Formica stops to congratulate SPC Matthew R. McLeod, a satellite payload controller with Delta Company. McLeod holds the title of 2010 USASMDC/ARSTRAT Soldier of the Year.

Delta Company Soldiers do routine systems check in the equipment room of the new 28,244-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility at the Wahiawa Annex.