

SMDC Operations Center

By LTC Joseph S. Dreiling

Colorado Springs, Colo., has long been known as the home of the North American Aerospace Defense Command, the mission control center for warfare of a global and highly technical nature. Not commonly known is that this city at the foot of Pikes Peak is also home to U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/U.S. Army Forces Strategic Command and its high-tech Operations Center that offers command and control of all Army Space assets around the world. The SMDC Operations Center is the information integration center for Army Space, the 1st Global Missile Defense Brigade, the 32nd Army Air and Missile Defense Command, and affiliated active duty and National Guard elements.

When U.S. Strategic Command made changes and assigned new missions in the fall of 2002, the title and requisite responsibilities of the Operations Center also changed. It changed from being the Army Space Operations Center to the Operations Center for all of the command and its new mission areas. It now provides worldwide support to all elements of the command, not just for the Colorado Springs element of that command. It is now the control hub for the commanding general of SMDC/ARSTRAT. As such, it is now responsible for tracking the operational status of assigned elements, and for accountability of all personnel (including civilian government employees and contractors). While the overall mission of the Operations Center is unchanged, there has been a notable increase in operations tempo as well as a need for integrating new technology. The center is involved in a continuous process of upgrades. The goal of these upgrades is to ensure that it has the functional capability to provide world-class connectivity to the command. The mission is to fully integrate and provide the network-centric support necessary to remain relevant and ready in the Army's future force.

This centralized command and control hub continually communicates with command centers at U.S. Strategic

Command, Department of the Army, 14th Air Force, Cheyenne Mountain Operations Center, Naval Network Warfare Command and Air Force Space Command on a variety of mission-related subjects. The command staff in Colorado Springs can contact any fielded element or other major command through the Operations Center.

Along with the new upgrades came a systemized operator-training program. A training and evaluation curriculum was instituted to make sure the new technological capabilities were fully utilized. The program tracks each crewmember from basic introductory level performance through crew-level certification. The 90-day certification program assures that each new member is capable of operating all technologies present. These certified officers continue to recommend upgrades to the certification program in response to the changing mission of the Operations Center. Because of the changing nature of the operations and the fact that the mission is "real world" every day, the certification file is a living document.

A component of the upgrade that must not be overlooked is the ongoing and developing training program. In order to insure that the command receives the most from all of the new systems installed in the Operations Center, a training and evaluation curriculum was instituted. The program tracks each crewmember from basic introductory level performance through crew level certification. The NCOs from each shift continue to recommend changes to the certification program in response to the changing mission needs of the Operations Center. As part of the recognized need for MOS-targeted and trained personnel in the Operations Center, each shift has at least one expert who understands the major systems of the command. In the past, the Operations Center had been manned only by 31S1C Satellite Controllers but now includes a trained 14J to answer JTAGS-related technical questions. This ensures that, should a question arise concerning a system problem with either of these systems, there is a soldier on duty who can answer the majority of



those questions. The goal is to have an experienced soldier available to help work technical issues as they arise.

Collaboration across and among various command areas required quite a bit of new technology. It is important that the Operations Center maintain situational awareness for command and control of SMDC/ARSTRAT forces. This means that all new communications tools are all secure, secret-level systems that operate with messaging and/or chat capabilities across a secure net platform. All of these platforms have been tested in real world operations or recent exercises. As an example, one of the chat capabilities provided information verification during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

None of the above-mentioned new technologies could have been installed without the help of the SMD Battle Lab also located in Colorado Springs. Its mission is to match new technologies to mission requirements when support to the warfighter is the prime concern. Frequently, its cooperative effort and ability to think outside the box ensured that the Operations Center maintained world-class operations with a relatively low cost to taxpayers.

The crew is now efficient and more available because of such new internal systems as a video feed for the Operations Center floor and the Crisis Action Center from any or all of the communication systems. These video systems are used for briefings and situational awareness. World events are monitored to provide world situational awareness with a set up of six national and international news feeds. A pair of computerized white boards gives the command the ability to collaborate and plan without ever leaving the office or field. This system of boards acts much like a dry-erase white board, but has its own hard drive. Associated software that resides on laptops allows downloading from the "smart" board to the laptops for editing by any member of the team. Completed work is already in a digital format, making distribution to command elements much faster.

In order to provide our commanding general with total accountability of his Soldiers and civilian employees, a com-

puterized phone alert system has been installed. This system uses 24 phone lines that can call every person in the command continuously until all have been reached to dispense necessary command-wide or targeted information. In addition, the system can produce a report at any time during the process to give the commander an update on the progress of the information call.

With the next round of upgrades, the Operations Center will function even more closely with U.S. Strategic Command's Global Operations Center. This will enable us to work in real time as the Army Space operations expert in support of operations for the entire command. It is expected that the center will soon upgrade a number of physical and electronic measures to facilitate handling documents and information at the Top Secret compartmented level. This will allow for a higher-level coordination with Strategic Command.

These new systems are coming onboard to keep pace with new missions. Growth in these mission areas dictates development of additional subordinate commands, which are being aligned with SMDC/ARSTRAT or being created from within the present organization. The capacity of the Operations Center has increased tremendously as it is expected to support the new SMDC/ARSTRAT elements such as the 1st Global Missile Defense Brigade and the 32nd Army Air and Missile Defense Command, along with its affiliated active and National Guard elements. The enhanced configuration, increased systems capacity, realigned manning structure and ergonomic redesign will provide the full toolset necessary for the center to support the growing needs of this global command.

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