

# Army Space Support Teams: The Early Years, 1986-1998

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This brief article is based on a history of the Army Space Support Teams, James A. Walker and James T. Hooper, *Space Warriors: The Army Space Support Team* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2004).

The Army Space Support Team (ARSST) celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. However, the interest in ground forces using Space assets has a longer history, one that begins with the Army's re-entry into Space in the 1980s. The Army's interest in exploiting Space has its roots in the ways it has used technology to enhance combat power, always seeking the highest ground to dominate the battlefield, using new technology to enhance functions rather than merely seeking improved equipment. These functions give Soldiers increased powers of observation of the terrain, weather and the enemy, and communication, while denying them to an adversary.

While the Army has historically sought to use Space to improve battlefield advantage, it did not play a lead role in the development of technology and use of Space between 1958 and 1984. The Army maintained its interest in Space, but stressed communications and was often a lesser partner. By 1984, Army leaders had reasserted the Army's need to use and develop Space assets.

The Army experimented with several concepts and programs to provide Space support to tactical commanders between 1986 and 1998. In these 12 years, its efforts shifted from Space systems demonstrations, to supporting deployments, to Space analytic services. The ARSST led these efforts to exploit Space capabilities for the Soldier in the field. Today, as the military Space environment changes and the Army adapts to new requirements, the ARSST continues to play an indispensable role in translating Space capabilities into warfighting tools and knowledge.

The creation of the Army Space Support Team was the result of years of experience in using Space assets to support tactical units. Establishing the Army Space Institute at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., in 1986 was the first step in the systematic effort to use Space systems and technologies to support

tactical operations. As the coordinating body for developing Army Space concepts, doctrine, training and equipment, the institute played a pivotal role in introducing the Army to the benefits offered by Space.

Activating the Army Space Demonstration Program in 1987, later called the Army Space Exploitation Demonstration Program, was invaluable because it gave Soldiers hands-on experience with the potential benefits Space capabilities offered. The demonstration program provided an early education to many tactical commanders on the ways Space technologies could be used to support planning and operations. Although this program was not designed, organized or funded to provide operational support in the field, its personnel deployed to support Army operations in Saudi Arabia (1990-1991), Haiti (1994-1995) and Bosnia (1996-1998).

The formation of the Army Space Command (ARSPACE) in 1988 marked the end of a process that began with the activation of a four-man liaison element at Air Force Space Command at Colorado Springs, Colo., in 1984. As the Army showed greater interest in Space-based technologies, this office grew until a command was established as the central organization to provide operational Space support to the Army.

The first Gulf War of 1990-1991, often referred to as the First Space War, demonstrated the benefits of Space capabilities on an actual battlefield to both Soldiers and commanders. In the deserts of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and southern Iraq, the Army was exposed to the value of multi-spectral imagery, Global Positioning System position/navigation, satellite weather, ballistic missile warning and satellite communications. The conflict also showed that few tactical commanders understood the full potential and limitations of Space support capabilities, or knew how to employ Space assets in the most effective manner. The war demonstrated



LTG DONALD LIONETTI



LTG EDWARD G. ANDERSON III



LTG JOHN COSTELLO

that the Army must create a dedicated Space support unit that could provide training and operational support to units deployed in a theater of operations. After the first Gulf War the Army's senior leadership understood it must "normalize" Space to the Soldier.

After the first Gulf War, the Army Space support program was energetically developed. In these formative stages, the leadership and foresight provided by a few general officers shaped the Army's efforts and established a foundation for the program's long-term success. Just as GEN Maxwell Thurman directed the Army's early efforts into Space in the 1980s, the Army Chief of Staff, GEN Gordon R. Sullivan, incorporated Space support systems and capabilities into the Army's 1992-1996 Louisiana Maneuvers experiments.

The experiments gave ARSPACE greater impetus and high level executive support to implement the changes indicated by the lessons of the first Gulf War. The direction and management provided by then BG Edward G. Anderson III (deputy commanding general, Combat Developments, Combined Arms Center, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command) and MG Jay Garner (assistant deputy chief of staff for Operations and Plans, Force Development) was also crucial in this effort. Their leadership helped shape the Army's decision to field a Commercial Space Package and activate a contingency Space support capability at ARSPACE.

In 1994, thanks to the efforts of these leaders, the Army activated a deployable Space support team in Colorado Springs called the Contingency Operations — Space (COPS). The COPS team was the Army's first organization explicitly designed to provide sustained operational support for units in the field and the ARSST's direct predecessor.

The ARSST was an extension of the COPS concept, a deployable Space support organization. ARSSTs began to deploy on Jan. 1, 1995. Over the course of that year, the teams supported 28 exercises of various types. The frequency and length of deployments caused a high unit operations tempo, with ARSST Soldiers deploying for more than 140 days out of the year. This intense level of support continued. The first time an ARSST deployed to support an actual contingency mission rather than an exercise was in 1996. This deployment was to Tuzla, Bosnia, in support of the 1st Infantry Division (Mechanized). During this period, demand for ARSST support was greatest from the XVIII Airborne Corps and Army Special Operations forces. Each deployment generated new lessons in terms of ARSST capabilities and configuration and between 1995 and 1998, the concept of operations for ARSST employment evolved.

This evolution was guided by several leaders, including LTGs Donald Lionetti, Jay Garner, and Edward G. Anderson III as commanding generals, U.S. Army Space and Strategic Defense Command



ARSST Team members review fresh satellite imagery during a 1999 exercise in Grafenwoehr, Germany. *Photo by Ed White*

(USASSDC). After the USASSDC became the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command (USASMD) in 1997, LTGs John Costello and Joseph M. Cosumano Jr., sustained this progress by providing the necessary leadership and direction to refine the Army's Space support capabilities and integrate them into the Army Transformation process.

Between January 1995 and 1998, teams deployed worldwide to support units from battalion to theater level and all echelons in between. Of equal importance, the ARSST was a conduit between ARSPACE capabilities and the needs of operational units. Team personnel worked diligently to earn the trust of supported commanders and staffs, demonstrate the value of Space systems and capabilities, and remained prepared to deploy within 48 hours to support the full spectrum of Army missions.

In 1997, ARSPACE continued to explore ways to improve the level of Space support and began experimenting with the Army Space Support Cell (ASSC) concept which it exercised and tested in 1998. An ASSC would provide connectivity for ARSSTs to ARSPACE assets and would serve a coordinating function with joint and component organizations. The cell would integrate Space analysis into the supported decision-making process providing value-added products and services. The ASSC concept would do more than bring computers to produce a number of products; it would allow the supported unit to make the best use of both Space products and expertise in both the planning and execution of its operations. The ASSC's activities and methods of support would vary, depending on the commander's requirements, the theater's physical size and infrastructure

capabilities, as well as the command's level of dispersion in theater. The cell would be tailored to fit the needs of the supported unit.

As part of this process, ARSPACE began to develop a formal training program for ARSST personnel. In 1998, the Army took steps to activate the new FA40 functional area (Space operations officer) to deal with the warfighting implications of Space operations from a leadership development and training perspective. The Space operations officer serves as the primary focal point integrating Space capabilities in the military decision-making process of corps and division headquarters. Their presence on these staffs provides commanders with officers who have the expertise to exploit Space-based assets and Space products fully, significantly enhancing warfighting capabilities. Additionally, FA40 officers assigned to other key posts provide expertise for decision-making while ensuring that Army requirements and operating capabilities are integrated throughout the national security Space community.

The pace of change and innovation in Army Space support has been particularly dramatic recently. The establishment of the FA40 Space operations officer functional area, the continued development and implementation of Army Space doctrine and numerous experiences with Army Space tactical and operational integration, seem to suggest that the desired goal of Space normalization has been largely achieved with ARSST teams now consistently participating in operational missions. The year 1998 saw the end of one chapter in Army Space and ARSST history, but another has begun.