

117TH



Playing a Vital Role in Space Support to the Warfighter

By Ed White

Five years ago the Colorado Army National Guard had no idea that they would be the proud owners of the National Guard's only Space Battalion. Today, the 117th COARNG (Colorado Army National Guard) Space Support Battalion is providing a variety of support for military and civil missions.

"We are continually funneling people into theater," said LTC Don Laucirica, battalion commander. "We have a Commercial Exploitation Team (CET) in-theater now and have provided Army Space Support Teams (ARSST) as well. This is a 24/7/365 mission and we are well prepared to accomplish it."

Not only do they support the active Army side of things, the battalion sent an Army Space Support Team to support the Hurricane Katrina recovery efforts and there is the potential for Army Space Support Team to provide support to any number of in or out-of-state natural disasters such as earthquakes, forest fires or floods.

Laucirica holds that National Guard Soldiers bring a special mix of skills to the fight. "Our guys work in two worlds," he said. "They have their military specialty and they have their civilian occupation. Sometimes these two things dovetail, sometimes they don't, but the National Guard Soldiers are most often recognized for both the jobs they are assigned, as well as for contributions that they have

made outside their normal military lane. It is this added dimension that makes their contributions both unique and valuable."

The 117th (COARNG) Space Support Battalion is composed of a Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment and two companies, the 217th and 1158th Space companies. The Space companies control six Army Space Support Teams and one Commercial Exploitation Team each.

The "War Trace" element for the 117th is the 1st Space Brigade. A War Trace element is the unit the battalion is aligned with in a go-to-war situation. For administrative, logistical and pay support they fall under the 89th Troop Command headquartered in Denver.

Commanding a unique unit poses its own set of challenges, Laucirica said. These include the need to lobby a number of publics for money to buy equipment, and the constant need to recruit good people.

"Space Soldiers are extremely difficult to come by in the National Guard," Laucirica said. "It is such a small field and the way the Guard's system works, we can have a Soldier in the unit but until he or she is qualified in their MOS (military occupational specialty), they do not appear on the books. This means that when we drill, I might only have 40 or 50 people there with the others off in schools or other training to get MOS qualified."

"I talk to interested individuals and their families all the time," he said. "This is not something my



CPT Matthew Pollock (right) is charged with command of the 1158 Space Support Company by former 117th Space Battalion Commander, LTC Scot

Regular Army counterparts ever have to worry about, but it is part of the lifeblood of any National Guard unit.”

A new recruit might not make a real contribution to the unit’s mission for several years, until they are MOS qualified and fully counted on the rolls.

“I could have only 60 percent of my officers and enlisted MOS qualified at any one time. In the regular army this would be a very hard thing for a unit to deal with, but in the Guard it is the norm,” Laucirica added.

Once a Soldier is MOS qualified, they are put on a team, either an Army Space Support Team or a Commercial Exploitation Team. Then they begin working together. “These Soldiers have the advantage of working together for years because one aspect of the nature of a National Guard unit is that while we have them, we enjoy longer term personnel stability. This gives our teams an advantage when they deploy, based on the fact that they know each other and can readily take up each other’s slack because they will have done just that during exercises and training events.

Laucirica faces two problems on the enlisted side. First is that once a Soldier reaches E-6 there is really no more opportunity for promotion in the unit. It takes them a long time to get MOS trained and by the time they reach that point they can easily move on in a

related field to a position where promotion opportunities are more plentiful. As an example, he cites that one of his first sergeants is an E-6.

“I believe we can get our manning document changed so we can begin promoting our Soldiers into the upper level enlisted ranks,” Laucirica said.

The second problem is that continuing opportunities in the civilian job market make many of his Soldiers very mobile. “Many of them can go anywhere in the U.S. and find a great job.

They are not tied to this area.”

All in all though, Laucirica sees Space as a “growth industry” within the National Guard. The capabilities are easily accepted by the leadership of the units they support and, thanks to an ever-present educational thrust to capabilities briefings, and a truly customer oriented approach to providing support, supported units are learning how best to use the capabilities the battalion provides.

“It is always great to see the light go on when one of the senior leaders realizes what we can do to help them. And our Citizen/Soldiers are very user friendly. They have to be. They work in a highly competitive capitalistic marketplace in their day-to-day jobs. Customer service is what much of their experience is built on and they just naturally carry it over. Commanders love this attitude and tend to maximize their use of the capabilities.”

Laucirica, whose goal during his tenure as commander is to double the size of the unit, believes that the battalion is only getting better. “We have a strong group of dedicated, committed men and women at all levels. They bring their Soldier skills added to their civilian skill sets with them to the fight. There are unique talents and abilities found on every team. That, coupled with the willingness to think and act outside the box where needed, continues to help us succeed throughout the entire spectrum of missions we have been assigned from the Army or the State of Colorado.”