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JTAGS Japan, 1<sup>st</sup> Space Company

# JTAGS AWA2TIV

**MISAWA AIR BASE, Japan — It was like a scene right out of the latest action-adventure movie. Teaser: Your mission, should you choose to accept it is to setup a Joint Tactical Ground Station (JTAGS) site. Your equipment: A C-17 Globemaster aircraft, a JTAGS shelter with all its equipment, and nine determined Soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Space Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Space Battalion (two officers, six JTAGS operators, and one acting supply noncommissioned officer.) Your final destination is Misawa Air Base, Japan. As author Clive Cussler would say, “Now make like an egg**

Dissolve to: It all began on a quiet September evening in Colorado Springs. The setup crew of nine hand-selected JTAGS personnel anxiously waited on the flight line, at Peterson Air Force Base, with almost 90,000 pounds of equipment standing by. Shortly after 7 p.m., the high-pitched howl of a C-17 on approach broke the silence.

Soldiers lined up at the fence to watch their chariot taxi in off the runway. She was a big, ugly beast, but an impressive one at that. The flight crew was certainly not the least bit reserved about bragging on her behalf. She had just rolled off the assembly line less than two years ago, and was referred to as the “latest model.” Very fitting for what was about to take place.

As the JTAGS crew began the equipment upload, they realized right away that the task at hand looked a lot easier on paper. However, with a few minor deviations, the help of a 60K loader (aka, the Optimus Prime of forklifts), and some guidance from the loadmasters, everything fell right into place, and their precious cargo was securely stowed for the next day’s flight. The upload had been a success. Cut to: Next day in the afternoon.

The JTAGS crews bid their goodbye’s to families, coworkers, and other members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Space Battalion and 1<sup>st</sup> Space Brigade before loading onto the aircraft

for what would hopefully be an adventure worthy of another “Iron Eagle” movie sequel.

The engines fired up, the ground crew gave a “thumbs up,” and the tower cleared the aircraft for takeoff. But much to the surprise of the Soldiers on board, however, the plane didn’t takeoff with the nice and easy acceleration of most commercial flights, carefully calculated and executed to keep passengers from spilling their latte’s. Instead, the pilots performed the good ole “Top Gun” takeoff that snatched the JTAGS crews’ collective heads sideways and sent books and iPods sailing into the back of the plane.

If they weren’t awake before, they definitely were now. Luckily for the crew, the chains holding down the MTV (Medium Tactical Vehicle) held tight. Other than the rocky takeoff, the flight went pretty smooth. A refuel in Washington state, an overnighter at Elmendorf Air Force Base (home of the F-22’s), and an 8-hour flight over the Pacific pretty much summed it all up.

Scene and country change: Upon landing at Misawa, the JTAGS crews stepped off the huge cargo aircraft to see a very familiar face. It was CPT Stephen K. Jennison, the JTAGS Detachment Commander, Japan who had been waiting with as much eager anticipation as the Soldiers had.

So, what does all this mean? It means that a JTAGS unit from the U.S. to Japan is the culmination of a four-year cooperative effort between U.S. Pacific Command, U.S. Space Command, U.S. Forces Japan, U.S. Strategic Command and U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command.



CW3 Santiago Gonzales carefully eyeballs the loading of the JTAGS shelter onto a C-17 Globemaster aircraft at Peterson Air Force Base for a trip to its new home at Misawa Air Base, Japan in early September. Photo by DJ Montoya

Misawa was selected for its ability to support operations, Soldiers and their families.

The presence of JTAGS in Japan provides a more robust Theater Ballistic Missile Defense and Ballistic Missile Warning Capability. Its mission is to receive and process in-theater direct down-linked data from Defense Support Program (DSP) sensors in order to disseminate warning, alerting and cueing information on ballistic missiles throughout the theater using existing communication networks. What the Soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Space Company were about to accomplish



was historical. Not just because it was a new site, or due to the fact that they would be the first newly deployed JTAGS in over five years, but because what was off-loaded at Misawa Air Base on this incredible afternoon was the legendary (and what was once thought to be lost) “Shelter #1.”

It was the original JTAGS Tactical System. The fabled “Shelter #1” was built for U.S. European Command, pulled mission in U.S. Central Command, and eventually became the test system and fielding shelter for Northrop Grumman, at Fort Carson, Colo. Now, after months of reconstruction, she had ventured halfway around the world, to what should become her final site, to once again assume her vital mission.

“I must say, she certainly turned heads as we drove across Misawa Air Base (due mostly in part to the fact that an enormous MTV towing a 10-ton shelter, driven by Army Soldiers, is not a common sight around these parts,)” said Jennison.

Cut to the happy ending or is it the beginning: Once the JTAGS Soldiers arrived, they could see that the new compound was quite impressive. The shelter fit perfectly in its new bay, the antennas had an eight-foot mound carved perfectly out of earth and grass to sit atop, and the offices came to look pretty sharp after a few weeks of nearly round-the-clock construction.

Setting up the site was no easy task, but then again every new initiative has some growing pains to endure. They now had their home, shelter and only two weeks to make her gleam like a rock star.



The next two months were just a matter of training the JTAGS Soldiers who had come to take the place of the original set-up crews who had invested in massive amounts of caffeine for their 12-hour shifts.

There were laughs and heartaches, and more than enough long hours. Some of the original JTAGS personnel returned home early after the initial job was done, but a few stayed behind to ensure that the mission could continue, and that the new crews were fully capable of doing the job. But for all of them it had been an experience.

End titles: The original nine included 1LT Corey Ruckdeschel, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Santiago Gonzales, SSG Jonas Moody, SSG Jared English, SGT Christopher Crook, SGT Patrick Contreras, SGT Michael Scott, SGT Ivan Virruet and SPC Robert Parshall.

It was 5,600 miles, a month of construction, 24-hour operations between two crews, and enough issues to start a new magazine line.

**LEFT:** JTAGS Japan 1<sup>st</sup> Crew along with their Commander, CPT Stephen Jennison (far left back row) celebrate after a successful set up of the facility on Misawa Air Base, Japan. Photo courtesy JTAGS Japan

**RIGHT:** Three TACSTAR antennas herald the arrival of the Joint Tactical Ground Station in Japan. The mission of JTAGS is to receive and process in-theater direct down-linked data from Defense Support Program (DSP) sensors in order to disseminate warning, alerting, and cueing information on ballistic missiles throughout the theater using existing communication networks. Photo courtesy JTAGS Japan