



A TALE OF TWO ARSSTS

By DJ Montoya, 1st Space Brigade

CHAPTER 1 *ARSST Team 26 Deploys into Theater*

A small but very important ceremony was conducted back in late July for a small but very important group of people. To close out the momentous ceremony, Suzanne Buemi, Family Assistance Center Coordinator, Colorado National Guard Family Program, made a traditional presentation of a Colorado state flag to deploying Army Space Support Team 26 leader, MAJ Tod Fenner, 217th Space Company, 117th Space Battalion Colorado Army National Guard.

“We want you to fly it proudly,” said Buemi. “Just know there is home that is with you forward from back here.”

The deployment ceremony, conducted at Peterson Air Force Base’s Building Three, ended months of training and preparation for team members: Fenner; MAJ Janet Schoenberg, Space Operations Officer; SSG James Smith, intelligence analyst and team noncommissioned officer in charge; SPC David Wilde, satellite communications; SPC Andrew Pyle, geospatial analyst; and SPC Eric Geil, information systems.

Their mission is to replace their sister unit ARSST 27 which has been assisting the Marine Expeditionary Forces in theater. For the next eight months, ARSST 26 will provide Space-based capabilities to the warfighter on the ground in areas such as imagery, Space weather, position, navigation and timing and satellite communications.

“We are just getting started,” said Fenner. “And the success we achieve will be based on being the best we can be and trying to find new ways to leverage Space to save lives ... that is the bottom line.”

In addition to rigorous training, team members also had a brief moment in the limelight back on May 27 when ARSST 26 was singled out to meet briefly with Dr. Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden, during a stopover in Colorado Springs.

“I first got word from Lieutenant Colonel Don Laucirica, Office of the Assistant Adjutant General for Space, Colorado National Guard.”

“He said ‘I got a call from the vice-president.’ And I said the vice-president of what? He said ‘the vice-president.’ Of a company? ‘No. The vice-president of the United States.’ It was definitely a shock.”

The team met with Dr. Biden on the tarmac at Peterson Air Force Base with Air Force Two in the background.

“Her son is in Iraq. He is a captain in Baghdad with JAG and she has a lot of compassion for deployed Soldiers and their families — she certainly expressed that.”

And just when ARSST 26 members thought it was over, Vice President Joe Biden came over to personally greet each one.

For Smith it was an honor to meet both of them, “They are down to Earth people. Both of them showed that they care about the Soldiers.”

“Dr. Biden talked to each of us. And the Vice President actually said ‘Come here sergeant, I’ll take a picture with you.’ It was wow; I’m actually standing next to the Vice President, second in command!”

“I was surprised,” said Pyle. “When you see them on TV it is not how it is when you see them up close and in person. They spent a lot of time with us. Believe me it was an honor.”

But even with this brief moment remembered from a couple months ago team members such as Smith and Pyle are ready to do the mission.

According to Pyle, “I just can’t wait to get into country and start doing my job.”

As part of the deployment ceremony LTC Matthew Nowak, commander of the 117th Space Battalion, told team members and their families, “This team is deploying to support the Marines - a continuing mission for the 117th as we go forward.”

“These Soldiers have worked hard with the team that is over there right now as part of the transition. I really look forward to seeing what they are capable of. When they went through their certification they did a really good job as part of that and I can’t ask for a better prepared team to go forward to do this and to support this mission.”

COL Jeffrey Farnsworth, commander of the 1st Space Brigade, told the team, “We don’t expect you to be kicking down doors or doing high value target actions, but you should be enabling those that do, along with their Iraqi partners to succeed, find, capture, and whatever else is required against our adversaries. So thank you very much for your dedication and your commitment.”



CHAPTER 2 *ARSST Team 27 Returns Home from Theater*

No sooner had the 117th bid farewell to Soldiers with the ARSST 26 when they found themselves along with Family members and friends welcoming home members of ARSST 27 on the evening of July 22 at the Colorado Springs Airport.

Red, white, and blue American flags, and signs of “welcome home” greeted returning Space Cowboys MAJ Joseph Paladino, CPT Benjamin Howe, SSG Joseph Brusky, SSG Jeffrey Flora, SGT Patrick Sawyckyj and SPC Bennie Dennis.

It would be seven more days until these Space Soldiers got an official greeting with all the trimmings during an early morning ceremony held in front of 117th Headquarters at 1670 North Newport Road, July 28.

ARSST 27 supported combat operations for the I Marine Expeditionary Force Forward and II MEF, from Dec. 20, 2008 to July 22. During this period, detailed operational planning and execution was instrumental to the introduction and rapid dissemination of over 1,800 Space enabling products to all levels of the Multi-National Force-West Command Elements enabling successful execution of combat operations in Al Anbar Province, Iraq.

The team had tremendous impact on the overarching success of counter-IED programs and is directly attributable to an increase in force protection, defeat of IEDs, and the marginalization of Al Qaida in Iraq throughout the area of responsibility.

BG Thomas Mills, commander of Ground Forces for Colorado National Guard said, “What they have done basically has provided the forces on the ground – coalition forces – the ability to be more effective while the enemy is less effective.”

“To make sure we have less casualties and it is all based on the Space products that they provide. But more importantly, I would just like to recognize each and every one of these Soldiers for their patriotism, for their focus, and for their professionalism. This is not a task that every Soldier can do. They are a special breed able to do this job day-in and day-out providing the finest in capabilities for our forces.”

ARSST 27 also exercised commendable initiative by providing non-doctrinal Space support to civilian agencies which directly contributed to improving and sustaining agricultural reconstruction efforts in the area of responsibility. These accomplishments were made possible through the team’s expert use of various military and civilian imagery capabilities.

COL Dana Capozzella, brigade commander, 89th Troop Command, COARNG, said, “I think Space is the cutting edge and we need to continue to develop and exploit the skills that your teams can give to the rest of the military.”

ARSST 27’s dedication, teamwork, decisiveness, technical and tactical knowledge ensured that no element within the MNF-W staff or major subordinate command was ever without the critical Space enhancement to support ongoing combat operations. The team’s efforts in integrating Space-based capabilities into various operations greatly enhanced efforts to defeat anti-coalition forces, enable Iraqi Security Self Reliance, and support a free and democratic government in Iraq.

“As the federal mission commander for this team, I have to say we are truly in the 1st Space Brigade a multi-component organization,” said COL Jeffrey Farnsworth, commander of 1st Space Brigade.

“It is hard to find another organization that folds in the National Guard, the Army Reserve, and the active forces into one unit which organizes, trains, and equips one team and delivers that force to our warfighting mission seamlessly whether that team comes from the National Guard, Army Reserve or active force. And I’ll tell you this team has met the standard -- exceeded it in many cases. It is a seamless organization. And I’m proud to have the Space Cowboys as part of the brigade, and this team in particular, enabling our success.”

Afterward, LTC Matthew Nowak, commander of the 117th Space Battalion presented the team members with numerous awards and recognitions for their service during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Among the chief honors given was the Bronze Star Medal presented to Brusky. Paladino and Howe were awarded the Meritorious Service Medal. Flora and Sawyckyj received the Army Commendation Medal. And Dennis was awarded the Army Achievement Medal. Paladino and Flora also received the U.S. Air Force Space Badge.

Paladino closed out the ceremony by thanking fellow team members for their valuable contributions and telling the audience, “I’m proud to say the Soldiers standing before this morning set the standard for Space operations and made a lasting impression to the Marines and significant contributions to the war on terror.”