

YOU'VE GOT MAIL

THANKS TO THE TEAM AT DETACHMENT 2



Senior Airman Stacey Bailey uses a scanner to track registered mail at the mail processing facility in Yokota.

Master Sgt. Val Gempis / AFPN

By Master Sgt. Val Gempis

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YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Detachment 2 of the Air Postal Squadron operates the Air Force's largest and busiest central mail processing activity. Its 48-person team of Airmen and local Japanese workers oversee the movement, sorting and distribution of more than 50 million pounds of mail annually.

The squadron is part of the Military Postal System that operates in areas where the U.S. Postal Service does not operate or in other places where U.S. military is present. Its mission is to provide prompt, reliable and efficient postal service for all Department of Defense people.

Processing mail here is a complex operation, said Isiah Ravenel, detachment chief. The detachment receives and dispatches mail to about 2,000 commercial and military aircraft a year bound for Pacific Command locations including Australia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Korea, Thailand, Singapore and Bahrain.

In 2003, the group operated two shifts, 19 hours daily, year-round, while serving more than 300,000 customers in the Pacific Command.

Daily, Airmen load and unload postal trucks and move mail around using forklifts, electric tractors and hand-pushed carts. They also operate mail processing, sorting and canceling machines.

Despite using automated equipment, the work of mail sorters can be physically demanding.

"It's a lot of work. Your back

aches, your hands hurt and your body is exhausted at the end of the day," said Master Sgt. Neil Mercader, operations chief at Narita Airport in Tokyo.

Workers trek back and forth between Yokota and Narita Airport daily using 32-foot trailer trucks driven by 374th Logistics Readiness Squadron heavy-equipment operators, also from Yokota. Though the airport is only 70 miles away, sometimes the Airmen sit in traffic for up to four hours. But knowing how important mail is to the morale of people stationed or deployed overseas makes the job gratifying, team members said.

Although the detachment primarily works in the Pacific theater, it's also tasked with supporting the troops on the front.

Detachment workers were instrumental in initiating mail operations at Baghdad International Airport. They delivered, often through hostile fire, more than 16 million pounds of mail to about 130,000 troops in the country. The detachment still has a deployed post office, at an undisclosed location in Southwest Asia.

"It's been a Herculean effort for us to meet and surpass our goals with so many troops gone. But we have a good cohesive crew," said Senior Master Sgt. Michael Breazell, unit superintendent.

Even though they have to double up on duties and stay longer at work at times, Sergeant Breazell said people stayed focused and very professional.

"They just do their work with flair and a smile," he said.