

Network specialists at the Air Force Communications Agency remain vigilant during the exercise.

Master Sgt. Karen Pettitt / AFCA Public Affairs



BLACK DEMON

NETWORK SENTINELS

PARTICIPATE IN LARGEST EXERCISE OF ITS KIND

By Mr. Masao Doi
HQ Air Intelligence Agency
Public Affairs

LACKLAND AIR FORCE BASE, Texas — Air Force officials completed a two-week network defense exercise recently, which validated and strengthened the Air Force's ability to defend its network against attacks.

Black Demon, the largest exercise of its kind in the Department of Defense, consisted of approximately 200 people at network operations security centers and associated network control centers

Air Force-wide. Exercise situations included testing the continuity of communication operations against network attacks, reconnaissance, denial of service, loss of network defense tools,

threats by authorized and unauthorized users, malicious logic and loss of fire-wall protection.

Training is the primary objective of Black Demon.

"The overarching goal is to train our crews in these network operations and security centers to understand the threats to the Air Force network and the network in general," said Brig. Gen. Gregory Power, 8th Air Force vice commander and lead for the exercise.

Scenarios simulated attacks on the Air Force network to improve specialists' ability to discern and respond to real attacks in the future. Attacks were also designed to enhance command and control throughout the network, refine policies and develop and validate tactics, techniques and procedures for a more effective defense.

Entrusted to plan and execute the exercise were members of the Air Force Information Warfare Center at Lackland. They teamed up with

approximately 450 specialists from around the Air Force, including the Air Intelligence Agency, Air Force Communications Agency, the Air Staff, all nine Air Force major commands and the Air National Guard.

The 23rd Information Operations Squadron housed the Exercise Control Center, which served as the hub of the two-week event.

Staffed by personnel from AFIWC, AFCA and the 67th Information Warfare Flight to oversee and manage exercise execution, the ECC provided centralized command and control, evaluation, dedicated data collection and oversight of aggressor force activities.

The exercise played out primarily on the range network—a realistic computer network designed to simulate the operational network.

This training network was developed by AFCA to provide a realistic environment to train network defenders and allowed the ability to interact with other

ranges and the ECC.

"The ranges are interconnected, so that adds to the realism," said Lt. Col. John Bansemmer, 23rd Information Operations Squadron commander.

The range network allows training without disrupting the operational network.

"By using the range, we segregate play from the operational environment reducing the risk of spillage," said Chief Master Sgt. Stephanie Harwell, AFCA network strategies and tactics superintendent.

Exercise planners believe this year's Black Demon represented an improvement over the previous one conducted two years ago because all MAJCOMs were able to participate.

"We've been able to establish a lot more rigor in our ranges and create a much more realistic environment," Colonel Bansemmer said. "We've improved by at least an order of magnitude from the first exercise."

Other key players helped to make the exercise a success.

The Air Force Network Operations Security Center is a new entity that helps establish a coherent command and control structure with the component elements of the Air Force computer emergency response team and the Air Force Network Operations Center.

"As the exercise progressed, the operators' responsiveness and their actions improved dramatically," said Colonel Bansemmer. "They just kept getting better and better."

Members of the 23rd IOS will work with other exercise participants to compile their observations from the exercise in a tactics, techniques and procedures document.

The tactics document will serve as a core training aid for the seven-level, communications-computer systems operator course at Keesler AFB, Miss.

The course will emphasize the importance of information assurance in all communications activities ultimately leading to more effective computer network defense.



Participants had an array of tools at their disposal to combat a variety of attacks. The exercise was conducted on a range network so that scenarios wouldn't spill into the operational network.

Master Sgt. Karen Pettitt / AFCA Public Affairs