



Army Specialist Joshua Joyce / Multinational Corps

Keeping satellite receivers free of debris is just part of a daily checklist for Tech. Sgt. Davi Novak, NCO in charge of satellite communications throughout Iraq. He's deployed as part of a Tactical Air Control Party team who calls in air support for Army missions.

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**BAGHDAD, Iraq** — More than 200 NCOs have become a vital Army asset by providing air cover for patrols who protect convoys, perform raids, respond to mortar and road bomb attacks, and who train Iraqis to provide for their own security.

They're part of a Tactical Air Control Party, which is a self-support-

ing team made up of communications, weather, radio, intel, logistics and special forces members. With their combined efforts, they can call in an F-15 to perform a show of force, an AC-130 gunship to eliminate nests of insurgent forces, or a UAV to bring in surveillance intel, among other missions.

"Our role is to support the Coalition ground forces in order to set the stage for a new Iraqi government to eventually become independent," said Lt. Col. Neil Roghair, Air Support Operations Center director. "We are

using airpower in very unconventional ways to support an unconventional mission. At the heart of our mission are highly skilled NCOs who bring the right assets to the right people at the right time. This used to be an all-officer job, but Air Force took a chance years ago by allowing NCOs to control air. It has paid big dividends and they have emerged as the stars of the show in Iraq. The missions here involve bombs and bullets, but they also include surveillance, car-chases and flying airplanes over tense situations to 'send a message'. Our TACP NCOs make incredible things happen over here and very few people are aware of them."

It's NCOs such as Tech. Sgt. David Novak, a satellite communications expert, who ensures the teams on the ground and in the air can talk to each other through multiple venues. It's also NCOs such as Tech. Sgt. Christopher Bates, who has become the "go-to guy" throughout Iraq for radio maintenance issues.

Then there are NCOs such as Tech. Sgt. Kevin Davis, a special operations team member who provides "eyes on target" to call in close air support and who coordinates air assets for training the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Force.

Training the Iraqis to provide for their own security needs is a focus of the Coalition mission since the transition of sovereignty June 28.

Lt. Col. Joseph Snow said a majority of their missions within the 9th Expeditionary Air Support Operations Squadron have been to provide surveillance capabilities for the Coalition and for Iraqi security forces.

"We're able to respond to threats in a quick, timely manner thanks to our TACPs. For instance, one of our camps came under mortar attack in May injuring several people. Our TACPs coordinated a quick response from two F-15 fighters which then passed off intel to helicopter units and to Iraqi and U.S. military police units that detained the perpetrators. We haven't



Army Private 1st Class Bryce Dube / Multinational Corps

Being able to call in air support for the Army requires reliable communications in the field and Tech. Sgt. Christopher Bates, a radio maintainer within the Tactical Air Control Party, ensures that happens.

had any mortar rounds going off there since then. We may not be actually dropping bombs on target, but we're definitely making a difference in keeping our people safe."

TACPs such as Sergeant Davis who serve within the special operations arena do call in the firepower and have done so with the Army since Sept. 11. This is his second tour to Iraq after having also served in Afghanistan.

This time though Sergeant Davis is working with the Army to train Iraqis to perform similar missions. The Iraqis acquired \$65 million of Saddam's money that is being used to buy weapons, gear and vehicles, and to build facilities and bring in support capabilities for the ICTF. Team members from the ICTF were selected from throughout Iraq and have gone through a selection process before being assigned to the ICTF.

"They've (the Iraqis) come a long way in their training. When we were first teamed up several months ago, we had the lead on all logistical, operational and planning issues. Now they're the ones planning and starting to take the lead in these areas. We still have a way to go, but this group of soldiers will be the future trainers and

leaders of the ICTF" said Sergeant Davis, who coordinated helicopter support for fast rope training with the Iraqis recently.

One Iraqi soldier said his goal was to be the best trained unit in the Middle East. Another Iraqi soldier who had never been in the army before, said, "Our motto is to lead with an Iron fist. We want to be the best. This training is very good and we thank you America for bringing this training to us."

During March and April, Coalition Forces saw some of its heaviest fighting this year and TACP teams saved lives on several occasions. As the Army braced for a rise in violence, TACP teams are needed more than ever. Since the transition, the Interim Iraqi Government has the lead on how they want the Army and the TACP units to assist them in providing security for their country.

Colonel Roghair added, "We could stay busy or we could completely change directions. I don't know what ops tempo the future brings, but, what I do know is that our men and women for the past two years have done a phenomenal job out here and are to be commended."

# JOINT MISSION

## Tactical Air Control Party calls in air cover for Army patrols, helps train Iraqis for security mission