

COMMUNICATIONS TRANSFORMATION

COMM TEAM SUCCESSFUL IN AFGHANISTAN DESERT

By Master Sgt. Jeff Szczechowski
455th Expeditionary Group

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan — It's appropriate that the Airmen currently deployed to the 455th Expeditionary Group's communications flight arrived here around springtime. The communications transformation that's come over Camp Cunningham since their mid-March arrival has been like the new life that sprouts up and covers the landscape after winter turns into spring.

"The entire comm team is working its tail off," said Lt. Col. Bob LaBrutta, 455th Expeditionary Services Squadron commander. "They are working daily to enhance our communications network capabilities. New lines are being dropped every day, new computer upgrades are occurring and the overall archaic infrastructure here is being replaced or modified at an astounding rate."

The flight has done a little bit of everything. 1st Lt. Keith Strandell, 455th Communications Flight commander, said his unit maintains and upgrades computers, telephones and radios. They troubleshoot camera problems, fix television sets, run coax for cable, lay down phone and network lines and set up public address systems for distinguished visitors. They even ran cable to an outdoor break area, so the Camp Cunningham community can watch television.

Everyone in the comm flight has had plenty of opportunities to "get our hands dirty," said Lieutenant Strandell, including the information manager, who readily admitted that

she wouldn't be doing the kind of work back home that she's doing here.

"I've done line and cable installs, dug trenches, run telephone lines and network cables, lots of things, which I would never have done if not deployed — it's been a good experience," said Senior Airman Daisy Almacen.

Senior Master Sgt. Paul Gorom, 455th CF superintendent, said, "from day one, everyone here has hit the road running, and hasn't looked back." He added the brisk pace is a good thing at a deployed location like Bagram.

"My philosophy is to stay busy and time will go by fast. We're pretty much constantly on the move," he said. "We've run telephone and network connectivity to the new buildings, removed old wiring and buried quite a few cables, which extends their life."

Lieutenant Strandell said he's thankful for the opportunity to be a part of Operation Enduring Freedom, working not only with the Air Force, but sister services and other coalition forces, as well. But it's his communications flight that he's most proud of.

"I've been blessed to work with a great team," he said. "They came in with a can-do attitude and pressed full speed ahead. They get the job done, and then ask what else can they do. For the most part, every one of my troops spends a good deal of their time working outside of their normal career-field boundaries. They are learning other aspects of communications and using what they learn to make Camp Cunningham a better place."



▲ Senior Master Sgt. Paul Gorom and Senior Airman Sean Russell, both assigned to the 455th Expeditionary Communications Flight, lay cable to enhance communications capability inside of Camp Cunningham.

Master Sgt. Jeff Szczechowski / 455th CF



◀ Senior Airman Daisy Almacen, 455th CF information manager, pitches in to help out in an area that is outside of her normal field of expertise.

Staff Sergeant Daniel Cord / 455th CF