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153rd Command & Control Squadron: serving as cyber & driver

By Capt. Megan Hoffmann

State Public Affairs Office

CHEYENNE, Wyo. – Throughout history, defeating a military adversary was primarily accomplished on a battlefield. We sketch a picture in our mind of military members adorned with muskets and rifles, sweat pouring down their forehead, uniform garnished in blood spatters and mud streaks as they hide in a foxhole or forge toward enemy lines, evading fire.

Cyber capabilities have presumably replaced a majority of the mud and blood seen in decades past. Seemingly, the new way of warfare gives the advantage to those who can predict, control and outsmart the opponent with information technology. Virtual reality has replaced battlefield reality to some degree.

The Wyoming Air National Guard's 153rd Command and Control Squadron eats, drinks, and sleeps the cyber challenge. Their mission is to provide mobile, survivable and enduring command, control, communication and computer capabilities and intelligence in any environment, on any given day. Technology is their trade.

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"I get to come into work every day and make sure all of our networks are functioning properly. If it isn't, then I get to work on troubleshooting and mitigating further issues," said Staff Sgt. Jake Duda, a cyber transport systems admin who has been in the cyber world since enlisting in the Air Force in 2010, and has been with the 153rd CACS since 2012.

Duda works in the cyber domain in CACS, which involves five areas: cyber transport, cyber surety, radio frequency transmissions, cyber systems and client systems, all of which are synergistic in providing communication and cyber capabilities. The personnel who work this mission do everything from setting up and troubleshooting email, to communicating with satellites in order to provide support to local, state and national customers.

The squadron, which stood up in 2000 as the 4th Command and Control Squadron, was initially an active duty unit. Two years later, it transitioned the mission to the guard and the unit became part of the Wyoming Air National Guard as the 153rd CACS. During the transition, the unit was comprised of active duty airmen working alongside guardsmen. The personnel of the 153rd CACS now fully belong to the Wyoming Air National Guard, but the unit resides on F.E. Warren Air Force base, both located in Cheyenne, only a few miles apart.

"We have a great relationship with F.E. Warren. They help us out in the area of comm assets and security forces, and we do our part to be good neighbors and end-users," said Chief Master Sgt. Joshua Moore, chief of cyber systems, who has been a member with the 153rd CACS since its inception in 2000.

CACS also owns and operates an entire fleet of military vehicles that their personnel are required to be trained and certified to operate. They are expected to know cyber and driver duties.

"What makes this job tough is not only that we expect our comm personnel to come in and be able to keep our computers, phones and satellites up and running and troubleshoot and fix any issues, but then we also tell them they have to hold military certifications for a number of different vehicles, as well. They have to be able to do it all, which can become difficult to juggle," said Moore.

The squadron has the capability to provide everything from resources to local and state first responders such as fuel, MREs and potable water, to supporting national-level events that would require providing highly sensitive, secure communication capabilities.

They host more than \$500 million in assets and 200 personnel that comprise 29 Air Force Specialty Codes. Those assets and personnel answer to a multitude of commanders and organizations to include the 153 Airlift Wing, their host unit, who provide strategic combat airlift; the 90th Missile Wing, their housing command, who provide combat-ready intercontinental ballistic missile forces; U.S. Northern Command, who conduct homeland defense efforts to include security support and security cooperation; and Air Force Global Strike Command, who have oversight of the 90 Missile Wing with an overall mission to provide combat-ready forces to conduct strategic nuclear deterrence and global strike operations.

As complex as their chain of command is, so too is the cyber environment and the skills and time it takes to train personnel in the career field.

"From the time we get a new airman in, it takes at least 24 months to get them fully trained and for them to understand what we do here. Not only is the initial training intense, but then you add in trying to keep pace with the technology sector because it's always changing. It makes the day-to-day job very challenging," said Moore.

"My initial training was 11 months, two of which were spent just learning basic IT functions," said Duda.

The training, as time consuming as it is, has benefits in the civilian sector.

"All the training and certification that you get while working in CACS are very beneficial and transferrable to civilian jobs. We purposely help our personnel by giving them days and shifts that can benefit them with extra certifications that they desire and can use in the civilian sector. Then, the civilian sector also has the means and training in the information technology sector that many of our people bring back to CACS that help us out here. It's a mutually beneficial relationship," said Moore.

Duda, said that the many facets of being in the command and control realm are what make the job so enjoyable, yet so challenging.

"Oddly enough, I look forward to coming into work knowing there will be problems that I will assist in troubleshooting. I enjoy the challenge," he said.

Moore echoes Duda's excitement for the CACS mission.

"I've been in the Air Force for 22 years and this is by far the best job I've ever had. The people here are like family. We are on an active duty base with an active duty mentality and functionality, but the guard sense of family is apparent. The people here aren't looking to [transfer to another base], and they take pride in what they do."

Although cyber has proven to be a constantly moving target, difficult but not impossible to hit, it's one that's always within the scope of those in CACS.

"The same thing that makes cyber work challenging, is also what makes it fun. For example, issues within the network will arise where no foreseeable solution exists.

Suddenly, the issue has been resolved without knowing what caused the fix. It's exciting and demanding all at the same time," said Duda.

Although military history and warfare started on a physical battlefield, the battlefield has expanded.

"We aren't just fighting in the physical battlefield anymore. The advancement of technology has advanced our adversary. We now require optimal cyber and communication capabilities to hold the advantage, and being able to play a part in advancing those systems is a distinct privilege," said Duda.

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Photo available at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/wyoguard/34827002573/in/dateposted-public/>

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Staff Sgt. Jake Duda, cyber transport systems admin and Chief Master Sgt. Joshua Moore, chief of cyber systems with the Wyoming Air National Guard's 153rd Command and Control Squadron, pose on one of the unit's semi tractor-trailers June 30, 2017. The mission of the 153rd CACS is to provide mobile, survivable and endurable command, control, communication and computer capabilities and intelligence with over \$500 million in assets, 200 personnel and an entire vehicle fleet. (Wyoming Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jimmy McGuire)