

ESC Team Efforts Bring New CAOC To Life

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HANSCOM AIR FORCE BASE, Mass. -- When the new, state-of-the-art combined air and space operations center, or CAOC, in Southwest Asia came on line Sept. 1, it marked a milestone for joint and coalition combat forces and for the Electronic Systems Center team working to make it happen.

"We're constantly striving to bring enhanced AOC capabilities to the warfighters, and I'm particularly proud of the efforts to bring this new facility in Southwest Asia on line," said 350th Electronic Systems Group Commander Col. Bill Cooley. "Our team had to overcome some significant challenges to make this possible."

Among the largest challenges: making sure the mission could continue unabated during the switch-over from the old facility to the new CAOC, said 350 ELSG Fielding Flight Commander Capt. Dennis Smith.

"The operators there are controlling air operations in two active theaters, so the transition had to be seamless," he said. "That required a tremendous amount of planning and coordination."

Other challenges included logistics - the 350th oversaw shipment of 135 tons of equipment from the U.S. into the Central Command Area of Responsibility. The team also awarded 85 separate contracts during a two-to-three year period and obligated more than \$40 million of Global War on Terror funding, Captain Smith said.

The transition to the new facility comes after U.S. and coalition forces spent more than six years occupying 'temporary' facilities - effectively warehouse space that was hastily renovated and retrofitted in the run-up to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

While a number of issues delayed physical construction of the new facility, once things began to roll, ESC program managers were able to accelerate the equipping process.

"We were actually able to bring the new facility on line a couple of months ahead of schedule," Captain Smith said.

The new facility, which is actually three buildings designed to look and interoperate as one, better accommodates its users in many ways. However, it's the overall functionality that most concerned the 350th team.

"We added far more robust systems, all while enhancing the interoperability of each work area, and reducing space and power needs," Captain Smith said.



Airmen put finishing touches on the installation of equipment at the brand new, state-of-the-art combined air and space operations center, or CAOC, in Southwest Asia. A team from the Electronic Systems Center, headquartered at Hanscom Air Force Base, Mass., led the effort to equip, modernize and streamline operations in the new center. (Courtesy Photo)

A key ingredient in that was installation a "trusted thin client," which allows users to view multiple networks on the same screen, even networks that contain different classification levels. The TTC also reduces the number of "desktop computers" at each work station, which not only reduces the clutter, but also allows for better computer administration, because most of the computer power is centralized and easily accessible by the information technology staff.

"We also expect this to be more efficient because it will reduce the power requirement for the computers and the air conditioning," Captain Smith said.

The team also increased audio-video display capacity by 60 percent, according he said.

Communication capabilities, of course, underlie the AOC weapons system. The new AOC relies on 160 miles of fiber optic cable, displays air operations on 2,325 monitors and speaks to the outside world on 871 non-secure phones and uses an additional 692 secure Internet-based telephones to discuss mission sensitive information, according to an Air Forces-Central release.

"The team has done remarkable work on this very important initiative," Colonel Cooley said. "Not only are we deploying this new capability to the CAOC that is most in the current fight, but we delivered early, under cost, and we expect this will establish a standard for future command and control capability in other AOCs world-wide."

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