

155 SECURITY FORCES SQUADRON

MISSION

LINEAGE

155 Weapon Systems Security Flight Activated, 1 Aug 1973
Redesignated 155 Security Forces Squadron

STATIONS

Lincoln, NE

ASSIGNMENTS

155 Mission Support Group

COMMANDERS

Steven Adams

Cpt Robert J. Head, #1981

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

2005 After watching the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina unfold on their television screens, members of the 155th Security Forces Squadron thought they were ready for what they would see when they were deployed to help restore security along the devastated Mississippi Gulf Coast. They were wrong. "I was not prepared mentally for what I did see," said Tech. Sgt. Michael F. O'Connell, a fire team leader with the Lincoln based 155th Security Forces Squadron who deployed with 18 fellow Nebraska Air Guardsmen, Sept. 9, for a two-week mission to Mississippi. "I've seen tornado damage in Nebraska. It's usually a few miles long by a quarter-mile wide." "This damage was...they said it was the size of the country of England. You could drive for 40 miles along the coast and it all looked the same," said O'Connell. "It was all completely devastated."

What the Airmen saw nearly defied description, said O'Connell and fellow Air Guardsman Tech. Sgt. Leroy Lewis. Huge oak trees uprooted. Five-story condominiums destroyed, leaving only a concrete pad and piles of rubble. Streets torn up and buckled. Big shrimp boats and casino barges lying in streets and neighborhoods more than a mile from the coast. Huge Conex trailer wrapped around trees like tin foil. The images simply boggled the mind. "I can't think of anyone who could've been really prepared to see such devastation and destruction," said Lewis, an assistant team leader with the Air Guard unit. According to Lewis, the Air Guardsmen were based at an Air National Guard base at Gulfport, Miss., where they lived in tents throughout the deployment. They were primarily responsible for running four-person Hum-Vee patrols through the affected area – a vast stretch of coast stretching from Christianne, Miss., to the Alabama border. "Everything within a quarter mile of Interstate 90 to the beach was gone," said Lewis, a Plattsmouth police officer in civilian life. "It didn't exist anymore. I-90 was even gone in spots. Had it not been for our Hum-Vees, we wouldn't have gotten into some of these places." Lewis said that the Airmen basically assisted local police officials in maintaining order in the affected area. At night, that meant looking for looters and enforcing the local curfews, which differed from community to community. Mostly, said Lewis, the patrols were quiet. "The civilian law enforcement presence and the military police presence were incredible," he said. "There were numerous curfew violators out...people on the beach who wanted to see what was going on, people walking around the streets, but we saw very little looting," he said. The lack of looting and serious crime, said O'Connell, was a direct result of the military response. According to O'Connell, the security policemen were responsible for assisting local residents and law enforcement officials when needed, while helping show potential looters that the military was on station and keeping an eye on things. He said the local people he met said their presence helped tremendously. "Everybody that I spoke with – 100 or more people – were very appreciative and grateful that we were there," said O'Connell, a senior at the University of Nebraska-Omaha where he is majoring in Aviation with the hopes of becoming a professional pilot someday. "A lot of them thought we were local or from the south. When they found out that we were from Nebraska, they were just astonished that we would come all this way to help them." "We were a calming force," O'Connell added. "They would see us and they knew it was going to be alright. We were going to keep the peace, keep order." That wasn't necessarily the case early on during the tragedy. O'Connell said that during the first week following the hurricane, people told him how local law enforcement officials had trouble keeping order at the cramped and crowded shelters.

While not as bad as conditions in New Orleans, he said, the situation was definitely tense. "But as soon as the military showed up, people started minding their manners...being good to each other," O'Connell said. Despite the utter destruction surrounding them, both Lewis and O'Connell said they were amazed at how positive the peoples' moods were. "People were in very good spirits," said O'Connell. "Mostly, everybody I spoke with, really their houses, their cars, all their belongings were secondary. They were grateful to God to be alive. They were grateful their families were okay. In some cases, that they still had their pets." "The mood of the people was excellent," Lewis added. "That was a huge shock to the majority of us. These people welcomed us wherever we went. Even with the losses they'd taken, they said they were going to attempt to rebuild." "That's pretty amazing considering that some of these towns, like Waveland, were completely destroyed. Gone. They didn't exist anymore." The Air Guardsmen remained in Mississippi until being redeployed back to Lincoln on Sept. 22. According to O'Connell, he returned with a new sense of priorities.

2007 MANAS AIR BASE, Kyrgyzstan – The weather's still nice here – relatively cool in the evenings and bearably warm in the afternoons – but the Airmen know that's going to change soon. Located on a nearly grassless plain near the towering Kyrgyz mountain range, the weather in this central Asian country has achieved almost legendary status among the Americans who have served here through stories that have been passed down between the rotations of Airmen deploying to this critically important base. Sudden snow storms. Shripping, biting winds. Bone-numbing temperatures. True or not, for the Nebraska Air Guard security forces personnel currently involved in a six-month mission here, the coming winter – while a passing thought – isn't really all that much of a concern. Heck, many say, it doesn't sound all that different than a typical Nebraska winter. "Most people back home ask you what the weather is like," said Staff Sgt. Joshua Robertson, Omaha, who normally works full-time as a security specialist at the National Guard Air Base in Lincoln but now is serving in a similar role at Manas Air Base during his six-month deployment to Kyrgyzstan. "It's comparable to being in Nebraska without the mountains." The fact that winter is still weeks or even months away is just as well for the 28 members of the Nebraska Air Guard's 155th Security Forces Squadron who have deployed here with Guardsmen from across the United States to form a unique All-Guard security forces squadron – a first-ever at a deployed location. Even though most have been working at the base for nearly two months, they're still adapting to the change of cultures, working conditions, environment and schedules. "Ever see the movie 'Ground Hog Day?'" asked Master Sgt. Craig Shrimpton, a Nebraska Air Guardsman from Plattsmouth who is now working in the base anti-terrorism office. "It's kind of like that here." "The days are beginning to melt from one into another. Same thing, different day," he added. For the Nebraska Air Guardsmen, a typical day means spending a shift conducting patrols around base, guarding aircraft on the flightline or providing security at the main gate where local Kyrgyz workers – pronounced ker-Gee – who provide many different services on the base, wait to be processed through the security checkpoints. When the Airmen are off-duty, many participate in the intramural sporting leagues that have sprung up on base or work out in the massive gym that's been built in a tent on the base. Others pass the time e-mailing or calling friends and family back home, watching movie, playing cards, taking college classes via the Internet or jogging on the base trails that –while not very long – can still provide a decent

workout. All in all, say the Airmen, the deployment hasn't been too bad. "It's better than I thought it was going to be," said Senior Airman Anthony Ray, Omaha. "Living conditions are great here. You can't complain about them. The food's great...and I'm here with guys from Lincoln, so you get to see guys you know." Staff Sgt. Ryan Blodgett, Lincoln, agreed. "It was kind of funny because it was three o'clock in the morning when we got in," he said. "We sat on the plane for about an hour then we got on a bus...you really couldn't see anything. My first impression was that this (base) was just going to be a bunch of tents." "It's actually really nice," he added. "From what I hear, compared to other peoples' deployments, (this base's facilities) are newer and the amenities are a little bit better. Personally, for a first deployment, this is a good way to start off." Yet, even though the base has more amenities and the local threat level is somewhat less than those encountered at similar bases in nearby Afghanistan, make no mistake about it, the mission the Air Guardsmen are performing in Kyrgyzstan is important. "Small base, very big mission," said Master Sgt. James Boeselager, a 155th Security Forces Squadron mid-shift supervisor in Lincoln who now is serving as flight chief, area supervisor on the flightline and quick reaction force supervisor at Manas. "Our basic mission for the Security Forces is to protect the personnel and the property that we have here," he said. "The basic mission for the air base here is for crew movement, passenger movement, air refueling support for aircraft over Afghanistan." Opened in November 2001, the Manas Air Base served as a major staging base for the initial operations in Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom. Today it continues to be extremely important as it serves as the "premiere" logistical hub for personnel and supplies moving into and out of Afghanistan as well as a base for American and Coalition air refueling aircraft providing support to aircraft flying over Afghanistan. And protecting all those assets are members of eight Air National Guard Security Forces Squadrons that have come together from Alaska, Vermont Oregon, New York, Indiana, Connecticut and Nebraska who have come together to form the 376th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron, which, according to the Guardsmen, is the first time a Air Guard-only security forces squadron has operated in the Central Command theater of operations. According to Boeselager, even though the Airmen come from so many different states, they've quickly learned to work closely together. "I really haven't seen any difference between one state and another," he said. "We're all intermixed and we all work together." Others agreed. Robertson said that even though the Air Guard units, by their very nature, have some built-in, good-natured competitiveness, for the most part the Airmen have set aside their natural rivalries and blended into one cohesive unit. He attributed part of that to the fact that the Guardsmen spent several weeks in Texas training together and getting to know each other several weeks prior to the start of the deployment. "Everyone really has meshed well together," he said. "I think some of that has to do to with our training together. It really has helped us (come together) here as well." "Even though we're not using the exact training for this exact mission, the fact that all the faces are now familiar... it helps," said Robertson. "A lot of your job from a security standpoint is working with the person you're sitting next to. A lot of times there's hesitancy because you don't know anything about that other person. (The training gave us) something... some kind of grounds to start your conversation while we're getting to know each other." "We're getting along pretty well," added Master Sgt. Daniel Emken, Lincoln, who works as a police officer in Beatrice, Neb. "Especially coming from different states, different backgrounds, we're getting along fairly

well...I think the Guard brings a lot of maturity and a lot of experience to the table that other people might not be able to bring." Working with Guardsmen from other states has also had an effect on Nebraska's newer Guardsmen as well. "You get a lot of knowledge from a lot of different backgrounds on how they do (security,)" said Senior Airman Brian Baack, a nuclear security officer from Auburn, Neb. "I try to soak up as much as I can from whoever I work with." The Guardsmen say they have also quickly realized that even though the days can often be long and busy or long and mundane, they have an important job to do for the people who are relying daily on their support. "The only thing that really sticks out for me (is) you see your deployment here and you're trying to work through your six-month tour and then you see the guys transiting through," said Blodgett. "You know that you're stopping here, but they're going to a place that's far worse...a more dangerous place to put themselves deeper into harm's way. They're likely to be in a place where they don't have a really nice gym to work out in. They're going to be eating MREs (meals, ready to eat) far more frequently than they'll get to eat in a dining facility...that kind of brings what you're doing home." "It makes you appreciate them more for what they're going to be going into."

Take the population of Maryland and cram it into South Dakota, fill it with mountains and place it on the western end of China and you start to have something that resembles the nation of Kyrgyzstan. For six months, this tiny central Asian country was home for 28 members of the 155th Security Forces Squadron while they were deployed to Manas Air Base, just outside the capital of Bishkek. While being away from home can be difficult, what many found to be the biggest asset they brought with them on the trip was the right attitude. "A deployment is what you make out of it," said Master Sgt. Craig Shrimpton, 155th SFS noncommissioned officer-in-charge of installation security and the superintendent of force protection while at Manas Air Base, Kyrgyzstan. "I think mentally, it's just a positive mental attitude." Staff Sgt. Lindsey Yardley, 155th SFS member and visitor control member while stationed at Manas, echoed Shrimpton's sentiment. "For me it was maintaining a positive mental attitude and a willingness to learn. Those are the two key things. If you have those two, you will be fine." For Shrimpton, a veteran of past deployments, this was the longest time he has spent away from home in his 20 years in service. He said it helped to have family back home that supported him on the trip while he was gone. "My wife has what she calls her 'gameon' face. She knows this is something I prepared for my entire career and she knows I'm going to go do it and do it the best that I can." Shrimpton said he felt that positive attitude was a key ingredient for all the Nebraska Guard members. "I think one of the things that made this deployment special for a lot of people was that at least 90 percent or greater volunteered, instead of being 'voluntold.' I think that makes a difference." The Nebraska Guard performed many important missions during the almost six months they were stationed in the land-locked country guarding the Manas International Airport and advising the wing commander on force protection concerns for the base. The members were broken down into two 13 member security teams and a two person Force Protection team, according to Chief Master Sgt. Matthew Swetland 155th SFS Superintendent. The FP team was made up of Capt. Matthew Clough, 155th SFS commander and Shrimpton. "They basically are the wing commander's personal staff for force protection," said Master Sgt. Jason Schroeder, 155th Wing Anti-Terror Force Protection security officer. As the Manas FP staff, Clough and

Shrimpton were responsible for ensuring that force protection measures were kept up to date at the base, which in turn kept the personnel and resources there safe. This included monitoring everything that was coming or going on at the base, from new buildings being built, running the Right-From-The-Start briefing for all newcomers, wing exercise program, the off-base program and conducting random anti-terror measures. Shrimpton said he wore many hats while stationed at Manas, but by far the bulk of his time was spent processing requests to go off base. While the wing commander at Manas made the approvals, Shrimpton's recommendations were always the main consideration in getting a request approved. "(The commander's) the ultimate decision maker," he said. "Past experience says that if we concur, he doesn't second guess us." The regular security members were equally challenged in keeping everything together during their work and off time. "It was a small base, but the (Morale, Welfare and Recreation) folks had a lot of stuff for us to do, including a really outstanding gym" said Master Sgt. James Boeselager, a Nebraska Air Guard Security Forces supervisor who was a shift supervisor while at Manas. According to Yardley, the greatest challenge to her job was trying to figure out how to communicate with the local nationals who didn't speak English. "95 percent of the people I dealt with on a regular basis didn't speak English. So, the communication barrier was huge," she said. This created a situation where she had to find other ways to communicate without being able to talk to them." "I really learned how to talk to somebody with body language," she added. This usually required hand gestures for simple things and bringing in an interpreter for the harder situations. This was compounded even more in Manas because they had more stringent security than she usually has to enforce when she works at Nebraska. "You had a heightened sense of security. There, we were searching every vehicle, each person and their bags... everything." The trip was a great learning experience for most of the Nebraska Air Guardsmen, including helping them get better prepared for the next time they have to live in a foreign land. "Before I went to Kyrgyzstan I did some research, but from now on I'm going to do a lot more research on the country and I'm going to figure out what language it is because you can learn so much from a different culture," said Yardley. 2008

MANAS AIR BASE, Kyrgyzstan – For the nearly 30 members of a Lincoln-based Nebraska Air National Guard Security Forces Squadron who have deployed nearly half-way around the globe to provide security protection at a key base in Central Asia, the six-month mission has been anything but routine. Providing security at the base flightline, conducting patrols and manning the security posts at the base's front gates have not only given the Air Guardsmen a chance to do their part for the continuing Global War on Terror, it's also given them a chance to learn more about themselves, their military occupations and the world in general. In short, say the Nebraskans, the deployment to Kyrgyzstan has offered the Guardsmen the opportunity to become both better leaders and people. "It's definitely a learning experience," said Staff Sgt. Ryan Blodgett, a Lincoln native who is experiencing his first deployment to a foreign country. "From a personal level, being away from family for six months is definitely going to build some character and personal strength and resolve." Blodgett said that one of the first lessons he learned upon arriving at Manas was that he definitely wasn't in Nebraska anymore. "Instead of being in your own home state where English is the primary language, we're actually the outsiders here," he said. "It's just a totally different mindset that you have

to get around. You have to deal with their rules instead of them learning to deal with your rules.” Ditto, says Senior Airman Dustin Johnson from Bloomfield, Neb. Johnson, who works fulltime in security forces at the National Guard air base in Lincoln, said deploying half-way around the world to help protect a critical air base is an experience he won’t soon forget. “There’s so much that we’re getting out of this,” said Johnson. “We’re all in the same position here. We all signed up for this or got chosen to come over here and serve. So, for the next six-plus months, it could be a life-changing experience for some and it could be just another day for others,” he said. For example, Johnson said, in the few short weeks he’s been stationed at Manas he’s already experienced things he never imagined. “You’re dealing with host nationals...you’re dealing with people from all over the world,” he said. “We’ve all got different backgrounds and experiences.” “It’s something no one can ever take away from you as far as what you’ve done for your country, what you’ve done for your state,” he added. “You’re representing the Air Force.” Johnson said he’s also learned a little bit about a part of the world few back home even know exists. “A lot of people don’t even know where Kyrgyzstan is or anything about the country,” said Johnson. “We’re in support of the war in Afghanistan. What we’re doing is protecting this installation and its resources. According to many of the Nebraskans, working in Kyrgyzstan as part of a multi-state security forces squadron has served as a leadership laboratory of sorts. Here, they say, they’re learning how to refine working habits and develop better leadership skills. “You can take all that back – what worked over here, what didn’t. Many situations are obviously different...(but) I think we can take a lot back to the base (in Nebraska,)” Johnson said. For Senior Airman Andrew O’Grady, an Omaha native who took a break from studying Criminal Justice and Marketing at the University of Nebraska- Omaha, the deployment to Kyrgyzstan is providing him with an opportunity to learn more about realworld law enforcement and military security operations than what he’d studied in college. “The reason I enlisted was that I wanted to get the police experience,” he said. “This deployment has shown me how military law enforcement works. It’s something we read about at times. Now I get to apply a lot of the stuff I’ve studied and gotten to see how it actually works in the real world.” “In that respect, it’s been really interesting,” O’Grady added. “I’ll be able to take that away to my classes back at home.” Master Sgt. Daniel Emken is another case in point. A native of Lincoln who works as a police officer in Beatrice, this is Emken’s first deployment after being promoted to the rank of master sergeant. He said the experiences he’s gaining as a leader in Kyrgyzstan are invaluable, both militarily and for his civilian career back home. “I’m gaining leadership experience on how to handle different situations with different personnel,” he said. “It’s not just Nebraska personnel either...it’s Oregon, Alaska, Vermont...all those other states that are here.” Because of this, Emken said he’s learning a variety of new real-world skills that leaders need to be successful. “If you can adapt to any situation here, it’s going to be easier to adapt to normal situations back home where we can speak (to people) in English versus here where we have that language barrier,” he said. “If (a person) can handle it here, I’m pretty sure they can handle it back home.” The education isn’t just confined to within Manas’ walls, either. Because of its location and the nature of the local environment, groups of Airmen are allowed to occasionally travel to nearby Bishkek or other communities. Often these trips revolve around community partnership efforts at local schools or orphanages, cultural awareness

visits to local Kyrgyz sites or even morale, welfare and recreational outings up into the mountains.

When Hurricane Gustav hit the Gulf Coast region in early September, Louisiana officials requested assistance to augment their local law enforcement to help keep the peace in affected communities. Twenty-five members of Lincoln's 155th Air Refueling Wing Security Forces Squadron responded to that call for assistance. The main purpose for members of the security forces squadron deploying to Louisiana was to assist the civilian law enforcement in their efforts, said Master Sgt. Craig Shrimpton, non-commissioned officer-in-charge of the 155th SFS forces that deployed to the Gulf Coast. "Anything that a civilian law enforcement officer would respond to, we were a second person with them," said Shrimpton. That meant going wherever the local police went, said another member of the 155th SFS. "Depending on how many local police officers were available that day, we would usually buddy up one person with them," said Master Sgt. Teresa Deschuiteneer, 155th SFS. Shrimpton said he and a group of seven other security forces members were sent to Jennings, La., a community of approximately 13,000 people, to assist their local law enforcement. Deschuiteneer and the remaining 17 members provided assistance and security at a relief center in Ville Platte, La., she said. "It was a distribution point, but it was run by just the local community... giving out food stamps" said Deschuiteneer. Both Deschuiteneer and Shrimpton said local law enforcement, along with residents, were happy for the help and support. "The people we dealt with, they were real happy to have us," said Shrimpton, "just to have (those) extra eyes out and about." 2008

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Sources

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