

86th AIR AND SPACE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

MISSION

LINEAGE

86th Air and Space Communications Group

STATIONS

Ramstein AB, Germany

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

Col Michael Lewis

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Both a historical and futuristic event took place during the activation of the first U.S. Air Forces in Europe Air and Space Communications Group here, May 22. The first ACOMG commander, Col. Michael Lewis, is set to lead an expert team of operational communication users and maintainers, falling under the USAFE Theater Air and Space Operations Center. "Communicators

will begin to plan and work together more under one roof while producing communication operational synergy for USAFE," said Lewis. "The group ties together people related functionally, who have previously been organizationally separated." 'Ops focused - mission ready' is the motto for the new group.

"To make sure the theater stays healthy as far as communications go, we have three squadrons within the group focusing on the operational or the war-fighting piece of communications," declared Lewis. Two of the three squadrons were activated during the group activation ceremony. The 1st Combat Communications Squadron, commanded by Lt. Col. Michael Niezgoda, realigned to the USAFE ACOMG. The squadron is mission-centered on the deployment aspect of operational communications. "Members often deploy to austere locations and set up 'bare-bone' tactical communications and the air traffic control capability needed at a base when you first stand it up," said Lewis.

Wartime and contingency tasking such as rapidly installing data voice, ground, radio and tactical satellite communication services guarantee the opportunity for the combat communicators to live up to their motto, 'first in-last out'. Located at Kapaun Air Station, Germany, the 1st Communications Maintenance Squadron was activated and operates under Capt. Chad Raduege, commander. Heralding the maxim, 'proud past-strong future', squadron members are, "very valuable and very real-time folk", said Lewis.

"They are maintenance experts on different systems. If something is broken, they go out and fix it," he said. "They also perform engineering and installation work, often for long-term projects with the HQ USAFE/SC (directorate of communications and information), supporting the 'organize, train and equip' side of comm."

Lt. Col. Virginia Ashpole took the reigns as commander of the 1st Air and Space Communications Operations Squadron, also activated under the ACOMG. They are the experts in theater-wide communications for situational awareness and command and control of air and space, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, information operations, mobility and combat forces. "This squadron monitors, troubleshoots and keeps running higher-level classification communication systems within USAFE; focuses on the Global Command and Control System; and are the contingency and war-time communication planners," added Lewis.

With an operation and maintenance budget of \$3.44 million and oversight of more than \$117 million worth of equipment, Lewis is a leader determined to accomplish the mission and encompass the needs of his people. "This is the way we are -- this is the way of the Air Force. We are expeditionary," said Lewis. "I want to make sure that we have the right leaders, mentorship and people taking pride in what they do. As people make themselves better, they make the Air Force better. Then, I know we are going to accomplish the mission."

The U.S. Air Forces in Europe Air and Space Communications Group made its final transition into the 86th Airlift Wing family Wednesday. The group is now officially called the "86th Air and Space Communications Group." The ACOMG transferred out of Headquarters USAFE and into the new 86th AW in January. But the completion of the transition happened when the group officially changed its name to reflect the numeric designation of its parent wing and its sister groups.

The new name makes clear to all that the ACOMG is a proud member of the Air Force's premier airlift wing.

In keeping with military tradition and historical lineage, a name change is no easy feat. This name change took seven months.

The USAFE Air and Space Communications Group was ceremonially inactivated by furling and casing its guidon. Immediately following this action, the 86th Communications Group was redesignated the 86th Air and Space Communications Group and then reactivated. "I'm excited we will now have a name that visibly aligns us with the 86th Airlift Wing," said Col. Mike Lewis, 86th ACOMG commander. "I'm also excited about picking up the proud history and lineage of the 86th Communications Group."

The ACOMG was created May 22, 2003, and is made up of former USAFE Theater Air & Space-operations Center and USAFE Directorate of Communications units. The 86th ACOMG is composed of almost 500 Air Force communications specialists in three squadrons: 1st Air & Space Communications Operations Squadron, 1st Combat Communications Squadron and 1st Communications Maintenance Squadron. While other USAFE communications units focus on their main operating base's communications needs, the 86th ACOMG focuses on providing tactical, airfield, maintenance, classified network and engineering, and installation communications support throughout the entire European Command theater, no matter how austere the environment.

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.
Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.