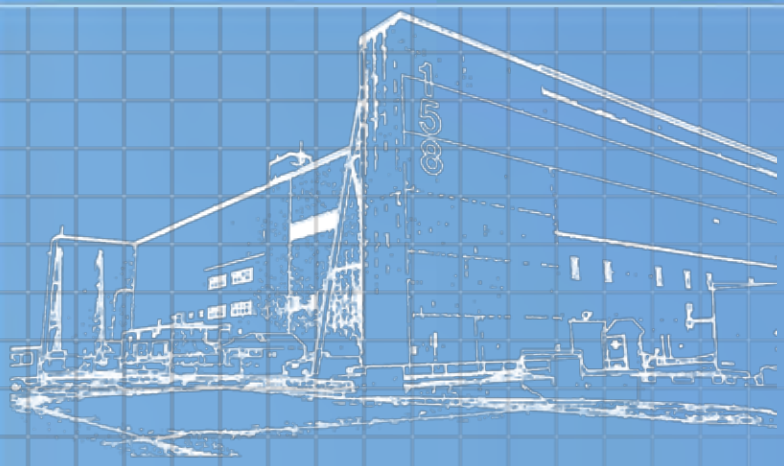


Building an Intelligence Wing - One year later

By Lt. Col. Richard Sweeten
102nd Air Operations Group Commander

What a difference a year makes! Recently, I went back and looked through the April 2008 edition of the Seagull magazine. It was titled "The Legacy Issue" and was the first edition stamped with "102nd Intelligence Wing." It was filled with tributes to our exemplary flying history, 35 years of continuous NORAD alert, and put solid closure to a mission we all loved. But it also set a tone of excitement and hope as we moved into a new era.

Colonel Anthony Schiavi, 102nd Intelligence Wing commander, said at the time, "With all endings come new beginnings…the 102nd Intelligence Wing will begin a different kind of watch as we embark on a new 24/7 mission centered on intelligence."

Command Chief Master Sgt. Wayne Raymondo said, "Change is inevitable, but growth is optional."

Well, it's now April 2009…and what a difference a year makes!

It is probably safe to say that we are further along with our new missions than anyone could have imagined. The Distributed Ground Station (DGS) set up shop in the F-15 maintenance hangar, and the Air Operations Group (AOG) moved into the F-15 operations building. Everyone hit the ground running. There have been the normal speed bumps along the way and funding for facilities and equipment can never come fast enough. But with good old-fashioned ingenuity and motivation, the men and women of the 102nd Intelligence Wing didn't let anything stand in the way. And grow we did! The Wing saw 2008 as the most successful recruiting year in history! So here is a quick look back at the changes that have taken place in 12 short months. It is impressive.

Since April 1, 2008, the 102nd DGS has seen their manning levels go from 60 percent to 80 percent, and they continue to climb. The intelligence mission and skill sets have proven to be very attractive to new recruits.

Colonel James LeFavor, 102nd Intelligence Group commander, said, "We have become a magnet for intel in the northeast."

The DGS has gone from seven Combat Mission Ready (CMR) Airmen to more than 70, with several achieving tiered crew positions, instructor and evaluator ratings. At any given time, approximately 40 DGS Airmen are deployed all over the world, gaining experience that will be vital when the DGS ops floor is operational in June. More than 120 Airmen have graduated from intelligence and communications school with more than 20 being named "distinguished graduates." The old F-15 hangar and associated industrial workspaces have been transformed into top notch facilities, all in large part due to self-help projects. And the new workout facility is a sight to behold! Funding has been approved for the future state-of-the-art DGS facility with construction scheduled to begin in October. All in all, the DGS mission could not be off to a better start, and the future looks extremely bright.

The 102nd AOG unofficially stood up on April 1, 2008, as well, but funding for manpower was unavailable until Oct. 1, 2008. Despite the six month gap, the Wing stepped up and developed a bridge plan to carry our full time force through the period. Over the past year, manning in this new command and control (C2) mission has gone from 40 percent to 70 percent, and excitement has grown as the relationship with the 608th Global Deterrence Force (GDF) Air and Space Operations Center at Barksdale AFB, La., continues to develop. The AOG, despite delays in funding for training equipment and facilities, have let nothing slow them down. With creative "out of the box" thinking, the AOG is already accomplishing the real world "battle watch" mission for Barksdale from right here at Otis. This concept of "distributed operations" is giving the 608th AOC the experienced manpower they desperately need and eliminates temporary duty (TDY) costs at the same time.

Colonel Stephen Luxion, 608th AOC commander, said, "To our knowledge, we are the first AOC in the Air Force to conduct distributed operations with an Air National Guard unit in this manner."

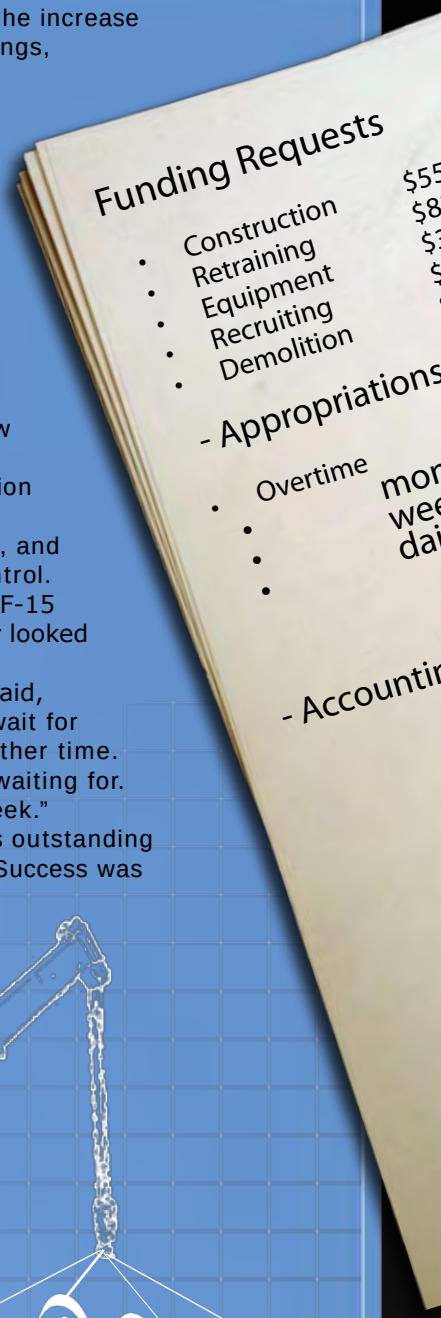
The AOG continues to work toward new and innovative ways to accomplish the mission and is setting the standard for other Guard AOC units.

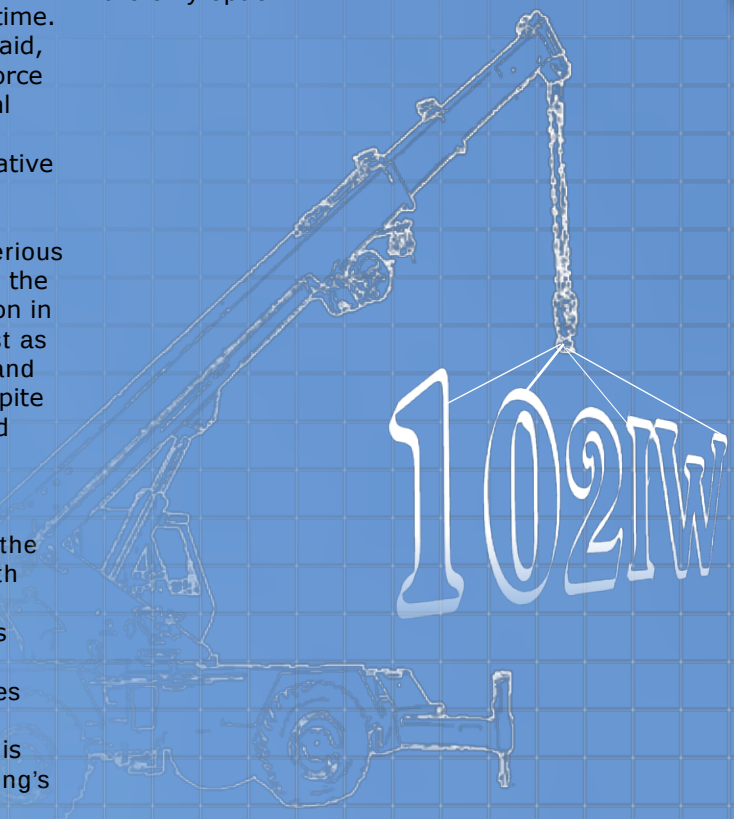
The other groups in the Wing have had to make serious adjustments as well. With BRAC and the ANG reset, the 102nd Mission Support Group was hit with a reduction in manning. However, the Wing's new missions are just as robust, the base has the same number of facilities, and the Wing has seen an increase in deployments. Despite this, the 102nd Mission Support Group has continued to excel. The 102nd Personnel Flight has handled massive amounts of paperwork regarding transfers, retirements, and new recruits. And with a recruiting shop that has seen their most productive year ever, the work keeps coming! Training has been swamped with new school requirements and the Finance Office hit with massive increases in TDY vouchers and changes to Airmen's pay status. The 102nd Civil Engineer Squadron has had to develop plans for future facilities while working to demolish those that have outlived their usefulness. The 102nd Communications Flight is accomplishing the unbelievable task of taking the Wing's outdated infrastructure and turning it into a state of the art network that supports robust and redundant communication links that can receive and send large amounts of imagery, video, and other intelligence and C2 information. While the 102nd Logistics Readiness Squadron has had to handle the increase in deployments and AEF taskings, they have simultaneously had to oversee the management of F-15 related turn-ins and transfers. The 102nd Medical Group has stepped up as well. They were swamped with new job applications requiring medical review, and then had to handle the massive shift in workforce from technician to AGR, requiring a whole new level of oversight.

The year has seen a transition from tools to technology, industrial work to intelligence, and cockpits to command and control. But as much as we loved the F-15 mission, the 102nd has never looked back.

President Obama recently said, "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

The men and women of this outstanding Wing have made it happen. Success was the only option.





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