

Airmen provide 'sky high' communications capability

by Senior Airman Eric Summers Jr.
379th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

9/9/2011 - **SOUTHWEST ASIA** -- For most passengers onboard military aircraft there's not much more to do than take a nap and try to stay warm. They're cut off from the outside world - trapped in a metal cylinder miles above the earth.

But, for senior military leaders and distinguished visitors travelling throughout the Area of Responsibility, having communication with the outside world severed is not an option. Success on the battlefield and in diplomacy can hang in the balance.

That's where a select team of Airmen at this undisclosed location in Southwest Asia come in. The 379th Expeditionary Communications Squadron Viper team is on call 24/7 to provide in-flight communication support to decision makers. The team bridges the communication gap from one location to another.

In about an hour, the team can install more than half a million dollars worth of equipment onboard a C-130 Hercules or a C-17 Globemaster III. The equipment includes secure and non-secure phone service, unclassified and classified computer network accessibility and commercial internet, according to Staff Sgt. Ron Peterson, 379th ECS Viper team member.

"You're working with the top management of the Air Force, so to get the opportunity to do that as a mid-tier NCO or a senior NCO is once in a life time," said the Chandler, Ariz., native. "It's really rewarding to know that you're providing them communications to assist them in doing their job."

The Viper Team is a one-year special duty assignment for communications Airmen. Team members must attend flight training similar to other aircrew members. This includes the altitude chamber; survival, evasion, resistance and escape training and water survival training.

The Airmen are drawn from three Air Force Specialty Codes to give the team a wide range of knowledge and experience. These include computer operators, tech controllers and satellite communications operators. The team's equipment weighs more than 1,000 pounds.

Peterson said he enjoys the challenges this deployment presents.

"Just being in a deployed environment you never know what's going to happen," he said. "There's always something new, some sort of new mission, new procedure."

"You're always mixing it up and you never get complacent," he added.



Master Sgt. Donnie Valentine, 379th Expeditionary Communications Squadron viper team member, connects a cord to a ground network operations center during a training exercise to hone skills, Aug. 26, 2011. The viper team has the capability to provide computer and phone communications on C-17 Globemaster III and C-130 Hercules aircraft for distinguished visitors while traveling throughout the area of responsibility. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Eric Summers Jr.)



Tech. Sgt. Rocky Laprade, 379th Expeditionary Communications Squadron viper team member, attaches an EMS Viper International Maritime Satellite to the roof of a C-130 Hercules, Aug. 26, 2011. The viper team's mission is to provide distinguished visitors with communications to help continue their mission while airborne. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Eric Summers Jr.)



(From left) Tech. Sgt. Rocky Laprade, Staff Sgt. Ron Peterson, and Master Sgt. Donnie Valentine, 379th Expeditionary Communications Squadron viper team members, run tests on a communications system they set up on a C-130 Hercules, Aug. 26,

2011. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Eric Summers Jr.)



Master Sgt. Donnie Valentine, 379th Expeditionary Communications Squadron viper team, performs a communications check with equipment he and his team installed on a C-130 Hercules, Aug. 26, 2011. The viper team provides communications support, ranging from Internet access to telephones, for distinguished visitor flights throughout the Area of Responsibility. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Eric Summers Jr.)



Tech. Sgt. Rocky Laprade, 379th Expeditionary Communications Squadron viper team, connects the Viper System Communication Suites to a data hub onboard a C-130 Hercules, Aug. 26, 2011. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Eric Summers Jr.)



Members of the 379th Expeditionary Communications Squadron viper team run a computer check to see if the system has connection to the Internet, Aug. 26, 2011. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Eric Summers Jr.)