

Canadians aboard AWACS in Southwest Asia, 2010

By Master Sgt. Scott Sturkol

To U.S. members of the 965th Expeditionary Airborne Air Control Squadron (EAACS), the five Canadians who work with them are part of the team.

Each day the Canadians work as part of a crew on E-3 Sentry AWACS aircraft supporting missions in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility from an air base in Southwest Asia. The Canadian airmen live and work at Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma.

“At Tinker we are (partners)” said Maj. Scott Marshall, an E-3 mission crew commander, whose hometown is Sudbury, Ontario. “We are not exchange officers or exchange personnel. It’s a co-manning situation based on the NORAD agreement.”

He said there are about 50 Canadian airmen working at Tinker’s 552nd Air Control Wing. They “get farmed out to all the different sections and squadrons” and integrate with U.S. airmen. “For our current deployment, it *includes* supporting Operation Enduring Freedom and International Security Assistance Forces in Afghanistan.” (Emphasis added)

As far as what they bring to the fight, each of the Canadian airmen said they seamlessly fit into operations.

“It’s just like when I was back at (Canadian Forces Base) North Bay where we have Americans there and they integrate into our forces,” said Master Cpl. Mark Keown, a senior air surveillance technician and nine-year veteran of the Canadian Forces.

“They are all very good people too, so it is very easy to integrate,” said Keown, from Powassan, Ontario.

Capt. Chris Horner, an E-3 senior director and weapons officer and 11-year Canadian Forces member who has been with the 965th EAACS for more than three years, said when he and fellow crewmembers are out on a combat sortie, their only concern is supporting the troops on the ground. “They are...the ones serving as the pointed end of the sword versus us playing a supporting role,” said Horner from Collingwood, Ontario.

“Coming out here is great,” said



U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Scott T. Sturkol

Maj. Scott Marshall, Capt. Chris Horner, Lt. Will Natynczyk, Sgt. Theresa McLaren and Master Cpl. Mark Keown

Canadian AWACS crew back in Iraq, 2010

The accompanying article is deliberately cagey about which Southwest-Asian combat missions these Canadians are supporting. The article says their “current deployment ... *includes* supporting Operation Enduring Freedom and International Security Assistance Forces in Afghanistan.” This means they are *also* supporting *other, unspecified* operations.

Fortunately, there are dozens of references on official US Air Force (USAF) websites, in the first four months of 2010, which clearly state that the 965th EAACS squadron (which includes the “Canadian Component”) “also supports Operation Iraqi Free-

dom” (i.e., the Iraq war).¹

For example, many USAF articles about, and photographs of, the early-2010 deployment include the following, or similar statements: “The 965th EAACS, as part of the 380th AEW, supports operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.”²

References

1. Web search engines find articles and photographs on the official websites of “USAF Central,” “380th AEW,” “Tinker Air Force Base” and the “Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System.”
2. “Freedom’s call,” March 31, 2010. www.380aw.afcent.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123197550

Lt. Will Natynczyk, an E-3 air weapons officer and 6.5-year veteran of the Canadian Forces. “It’s a great group and we laugh a lot.” [Will’s father is Canada’s Chief of Defence Staff, Walt Natynczyk. See p. 16.)

Sgt. Theresa McLaren, with more than 19 years in the Canadian Forces, [is] an E-3 air surveillance technician. [W]hen she’s talking to family about why she keeps doing what she’s doing, she gives a simple answer, “For the love of the game.”

“It’s truly exciting,” said Sgt. McClaren of Calgary, Alberta. “We do

a lot of training...but when you do it for real and get that adrenaline rush... you go home with a lot of job satisfaction.”

“It doesn’t matter what uniform we are wearing—it’s interchangeable,” Marshall said. “We have a really great relationship with the American forces ... [N]o matter where we are, it’s very easy to get the job done as one team.”

Source: Excerpted from “Tinker’s Canadian airmen support airborne control in Southwest Asia,” Armed Forces News Service, February 11, 2010. www.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123189284