# Joint Communications Support Element:

# A voice heard 'round the world

by Capt. Michael L. Helferd

Changing world situations, increasing economic pressures and renewed Soviet adventurism have all contributed to a recent need for rapid, decisive American military action. Many servicemen and most citizens do not realize that the Pentagon's new Rapid Deployment Force depends upon communications capable of equally quick installation — which is why the Joint Communications Support Element was established. It trains the specialists and technicians and maintains the equipment needed to provide vital communications links from a deployed Joint Task Force to the National Military Command Center.

The element, assigned to MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, is a jointly-manned tactical communications unit created by and under the deployment control of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. All administrative and logistics functions and periodic testing are the responsibilities of the United States Readiness Command's (USREDCOM) Directorate of Communications-Electronics (J-6).

The USREDCOM M105-1 manual describes the four missions of the JCSE. The unit, subject to JCS direction or approval, will:

1. Provide communications support to a joint task force headquarters for the conduct of contingency military operations or disaster relief/evacuation activities or

2. Augment or provide contingency/emergency communications support to meet the critical operational and support needs of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, services, defense agencies and commanders of unified and specified commands or

3. Provide communications for joint readiness exercises on a non-interference basis and

4. Provide USREDCOM, as required, assistance in the development of joint communications doctrine.

To support these missions, the JCSE relies upon both military members and civilians. The military are selected from qualified servicemen and women of the Army, Air Force and Marines. They are assigned on a stabilized, three-year tour. The civilians are supply and motor maintenance technicians and clerical personnel.

Due to the unique nature of the unit's missions, the capabilities of the JCSE exceed those found in any service unit. Specialized services for contingency operations include small tactical satellite terminals, more than thirty authorized parachutists and the Joint Airborne Communications Center/Command Post (JACC/CP, nicknamed Jackpot).

The AN/WSC-3 (Whiskey 3) is a small, highly mobile satellite transceiver consisting of radio, teletype and security equipment. Since it can be carried or mounted in small vehicles, it has been the backbone of the unit on missions demanding low visibility and high speed of deployment. The Whiskey 3 requires minimal maintenance and logistics support.

Jackpot airborne command posts provide both secure voice and teletype communications to a JTF commander while he is enroute to or over an objective. After completion of an airborne operation, the Jackpot retransmits the secure voice communications received from JCSE parachutists who have jumped in support of the ground commander. Following the capture of an airfield, the Jackpot can also land and operate on the ground to provide the battlefield

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commander limited switchboard, communications center and radio support.

Support for an established Joint Task Force headquarters is considerably more elaborate. The JCSE provides automated (touch-tone) telephones, secure teletype, weather information, secure facsimile service between tactical operations centers, both tactical and strategic secure telephone service, multichannel communications to include both tactical satellite terminals and troposcatter equipment, radio-wire integration facilities (to interconnect vehicle mounted voice radio transmissions with the tactical telephone network) and secure high speed data service (extends worldwide military computer systems to the deployed JTF staff). The JCSE provides terminal equipment and personnel for each service at all three headquarters.

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The functions of the administration division are similar to those of an Army battalion's S-1. This division is supervised by an Air Force captain and is responsible for all administrative and personnel support.

The supply division, headed by an Air Force major, performs the S-4 functions for the element including operation of a multimillion dollar supply account and control of all aspects of the JCSE budget. The division's military manning reflects the unit's Air Force funding and logistics channels.

The Army major who becomes the chief of the operations division can anticipate an extremely challenging position with responsibilities unique in the Department of Defense. In addition to the duties normally required of a battalion S-3, the JCSE chief of operations supervises the four operational detachments and performs many of the functions of the element's deputy commander. The division also manages all airborne activities (including operation of a parachute packing facility), coordinates cryptological support, develops and implements required training and provides personnel to control various deployed task forces. A plans section reviews contingency plans and prepares JCSE annexes for five regularly scheduled exercises annually.

Each of the four detachments is commanded by a captain and provides personnel for airborne and contingency operations in addition to their primary missions. The joint task force detachment is designed to provide communications support for a deployed JTF. The air forces and land forces detachments man the communications systems between the JTF and its components. The JACC/CP detachment maintains three C-130 or C-141 deployable airborne command posts, one of which is always on 24 hour alert.

Since May 1979, the JCSE has supported the JCS in the sands of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the jungles of Africa and South America, on hurricane-ruined Caribbean islands and on naval craft embarked on each of the seven seas. This support has been of the highest technical and operational caliber, earning personal plaudits from the president of the United States. The success of the nation's military response frequently rests on the shoulders of these communicators from Florida whose motto is literally true: The voice heard 'round the world.

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