

Citizen Airmen support global ISR mission at NRO

By Master Sgt. Beth Anschutz, Air Reserve Personnel Center Public Affairs / Published June 15, 2017



1 of 1

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More than 100 Individual Mobilization Augmentees are assigned to the National Reconnaissance Office, the government agency tasked with the oversight of the United States' intelligence satellites. Many of these IMAs also work within the intelligence, space or cyber communities, bringing a breadth and depth of knowledge and skill to the agency.

BUCKLEY AIR FORCE BASE, Colo. -- High above the clouds, intelligence satellites operated by the National Reconnaissance Office keeps a close watch on the world below.

Air Force Reserve Individual Mobilization Augmentees (IMA) play a key role in ensuring those satellites remain a viable component of global vigilance for the nation.

The NRO is the government agency tasked with oversight of the United States' intelligence satellites and is a crucial piece of the Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) mission, which is one of the Air Force's five enduring core missions.

More than 100 IMAs are assigned to the NRO. Many of them also work within the intelligence, space or cyber communities in a civilian capacity. This cross pollination of experience ensures a unique blend of skills and experience is available, ensuring the country's fleet of satellites is performing at their best.

"Our reservists work on operations floors, in labs and in offices," said Lt. Col. Sheila Wilds, director of the Reserve Management Office at the NRO. "They are a highly experienced and diverse workforce with unique skill sets derived from their connections with the civil sector."

Finding the right match of skills and experience is Wilds' priority. She works to familiarize the leaders at the NRO with the best way to align the right Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC), rank and skill level with the right position.

"It is important to help leaders understand how to utilize IMAs properly and what kind of support they can provide," she says.

In addition to supporting ISR functions, reservists at the NRO also support the cyberspace mission. Cybersecurity is a critical enabler of the warfighting mission.

Senior Master Sgt. Nick Multari works at the NRO in support of the Special Communications office as an information system security manager. He is employed at the NRO in and out of uniform and helps the organization deliver cutting edge ISR capabilities, providing an asymmetric advantage in the field. He works with system engineers and program managers to build security into their communications platforms. His subject matter expertise in security architecture and engineering plays a key role in meeting cybersecurity objectives.

"Knowing that what I do enables our systems to deliver capabilities in a manner that is secure and readily available to those whose lives depend on that capability, motivates me and is personally rewarding," Multari said.

Multari's said his service in both civilian and military capacities has given him a multi-dimensional outlook on the mission and a unique perspective on cyberspace operations.

The depth and breadth of knowledge the IMAs provide to the NRO is a calling card of the reserve Citizen Airman contribution to the force.

Technical Sgt. Sharon Hazel, who is currently assigned to the Intelligence Support Division in the National Reconnaissance Operations Center, said the IMA program affords her maximum flexibility and management of her own career. She has more than 16 years of experience in the Intelligence Community (IC) and says her team at the NRO capitalizes on the strengths of each other's diverse skillsets.

"We rely on the talents of our highly diversified team to help the NRO solve the toughest challenges," she said.

Hazel said, as an IMA, she can leverage her civilian experiences to further the mission when in uniform. The ISR capabilities Hazel and the other IMAs support are the bedrock of Air Force support for successful joint, interagency and coalition partners operations around the globe.

In her civilian career, Hazel has been a senior intelligence advisor, providing executive management consulting to national level collaboration, resource planning, geospatial intelligence (GEOINT) mission management strategies, and integration efforts between the IC, the Department of Defense and other GEOINT communities. She has also established insider threat programs for Industry.

"One of the greatest values our team brings to the NRO is our diverse skillsets," Hazel said.

This diversity of skillsets helps the IMA team seamlessly integrate with their active duty partners and the leaders they support. On any given day, nearly 5,000 Air Force Reservists are serving on active duty worldwide in support of

combatant commanders and other agencies and major commands. Within the NRO, IMAs create an agile environment in the face of day-to-day operations and contingency mission execution.

Contributing to mission sustainability during high operations tempo is a cornerstone of the AFR mission. Maj. Jason Mellein is an IMA assigned as a mission director at an NRO Mission Ground Station (MGS). He said his team provides surge support that can be employed both as a steady state augmentation and as a targeted fix when there are challenges. Additionally, Mellein can serve as a backfill for active duty members who are deployed or deploy himself to support the team and the mission.

Mellein said the MGS is like a small city dedicated to mission operations, supported by different teams and administrative staff who are critical to mission success and protection. As a mission director, Mellein acts as the MGS commander's administrative and operational representative in leading the teams that fly the satellites producing intelligence data. His Air Force skillset is not only technical, but executive, giving him a diverse toolkit to support the mission and the people who execute the mission.

"It's energizing and humbling to know that on a daily basis the team has real and positive impacts on the missions of people across a broad swath of the national security enterprise," Mellein said.

The Air Force Reserve contribution to the fight is undeniable.

"The IMAs at the NRO not only augment active duty forces when they deploy or mobilize, they also provide strategic depth to the intelligence community," Wilds said. "They are a ready force that is called on to provide surge support during crisis operations, exercises and special projects."

Editor's note: Information for this article was taken from the Air Force Waypoints. For more information about the NRO, visit <http://nro.gov>. For up-to-date information, visit the NRO social media pages:

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