

710 MEDICAL SQUADRON

MISSION

LINEAGE

710 Medical Squadron
Constituted
Activated
Inactivated, 1 Dec 2009

STATIONS

Offutt AFB, NE

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

2002-The 710th Medical Squadron coordinated a two-day exercise using a military field hospital with more than 400 airmen, soldiers and seamen participating. The hospital treated more than a hundred volunteer "patients" during a exercise which included medical intelligence, casualty movement, patient triage and wound care, night operations and real-world safety issues. An exercise one year in the planning, . Other players included members of the active duty Air Force,

Army and Naval Reserve, Army National Guard, Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps members and Navy Cadet students. High school students, eager to participate and experience a military exercise, comprised the greatest number of those who acted as patients. Patients arrived by bus, ambulance and helicopter from around the site and from a remote site at Fort Mead, Neb., 25 miles away. These “patients” were made up using moulage, a make-up appliance designed to realistically simulate battlefield wounds and injuries. To convincingly “act the part” indicated by their simulated injuries, military members on the moulage team coached them on how to act. Their performance contributed to the realistic “feel” of the exercise. The moulage team, led by the 4223rd U.S. Army Hospital, was made up of members from all three services to reflect current military operations. Col. Donald Paynter, 710th Medical Squadron commander, and his active-duty counterpart, Col. George Nicolas of the 55th Medical Group here, ran the hospital. Both colonels praised the efforts of their crews and the exercise planners. Tech. Sgt. Paul Jackson, Medical Readiness noncommissioned officer in charge, ensured that every detail of the operation was planned and any obstacles were overcome. The Medical Readiness section worked in concert with military medical professionals to conduct an exercise involving more than 400 personnel without a single injury.

2008--The 710th Medical Squadron, one of the 442nd Fighter Wing’s two geographically separated units at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., took to the field during its April unit training assembly to hone their deployed operations skills. The field-training exercise, located at Offutt’s base lake, has been something of an annual tradition for the medics and, while not as large in scope as previous exercises, was no less ambitious in its goal of keeping the squadron’s members ready to perform even under austere conditions.

Past exercises included 2005’s “Operation Prairie Medic,” a joint, mass-casualty exercise that teamed the Offutt reservists with soldiers, sailors and Reserve Officer Training Corps cadets and was based at the Army National Guard’s Camp Ashland. That FTX included Army helicopters picking up “wounded patients” at several eastern Nebraska locations and transporting them to their deployed hospital location at Ashland. “We’ve done some incredible exercises,” said Tech. Sgt. Wayne Cantwell, aerospace medical technician and one of the planners for this year’s exercise. “We want to ensure that our members are ready for the deployed environment when they get called up or when they volunteer to go overseas. It has proven invaluable.”

According to Sergeant Cantwell preparing for the exercise is very labor intensive. He said planning started four to five months before the exercise began and his “laundry list” of to-dos included organizing the logistics, getting the equipment prepared, preparing training scenarios, building documentation, obtaining commander approvals, factoring in safety considerations and, of course, meeting the financial aspect of the undertaking. “This year I was thankful to have Tech. Sgt. Shawn Barnard and Senior Airman Andrew Rebant take the lead on a lot of this,” Sergeant Cantwell said. “There are a lot of man-hours involved and Sergeant Barnard did much of the leg work.”

The 2008 exercise featured a series of stations that focused on deployed medical skills areas like triage, operating in a chemical environment and a litter-carry obstacle course. Five and six person teams circulated through each of the stations responding to scenarios, making life and death decisions and all the while digesting the lessons learned from each experience. A spirit of

competition was added as members were graded on their actions with the team accumulating the most points being declared the winner.

A hallmark of these exercises has been using lessons learned from real-world situations to help prepare the reservists for combat and this year was no exception. A veteran of deployments to Kuwait and to Iraq, Sergeant Cantwell, served as an instructor at the litter-carry obstacle course. There, the teams had to negotiate several barriers to reach a victim. Once there Sergeant Cantwell recited the wounded patient's symptoms and the teams responded accordingly to stabilize and prepare the individual for transport back over the same course just taken.

Safety and risk management took precedence over all activities, a fact pointed out by the 710th's commander, Col. Joan Gonzalez. "I was real impressed with my instructors. They were focused on training and yet always aware of potentially unsafe actions," she said. "When they saw something that concerned them they stopped the activity and corrected the action, which was very good," She cited the careful-transport training for litter patients over obstacles as an example.

Another experienced 710 MDS member is Lt. Col. Howard Phillippi, the squadron's chief nurse. Colonel Phillippi recently returned from an Afghanistan deployment where he gained a wealth of experience. When he first got to Afghanistan he thought he'd be working in a real hospital but two days after he arrived they had told him he would be going to "Salerno" and immediately visions of Salerno, Italy came to mind. "I got so excited, I couldn't see straight," Colonel Phillippi said with a smile. Camp Salerno, however, was a forward operating base near the Pakistan border just north of Khwost, Afghanistan.

With the only similarity of the two locations being the name, the colonel soon faced the realities of life at a forward operating base treating not only coalition wounded but also local Afghans and even some Taliban. It was an experience that he knew would be valuable in teaching his fellow squadron members about when he returned home and the FTX gave him the perfect opportunity. "We're taught in the United States that the first things you start with (when assessing a trauma patient) are airway, breathing and circulation, in that order (to stabilize patients)," Colonel Phillippi said. "On the battlefield, in a surgical field hospital at a forward operating base like where I was, we always had to take care of the bleeding problems first along with the breathing problems. Usually the injuries are so massive and traumatic that they would bleed to death very quickly so stopping the bleeding was a top priority." taught other valuable lessons he learned in Afghanistan.

"I was training them (in the exercise) that when you do your primary assessment – checking them from head to toe – that it's not over," he said. "You go over them again, or you turn them over and you look at them on the back side too. You may roll somebody over and they've got a bigger wound there than they did on the front." Another reality was the composition of the various medical disciplines in each team. While there might be nurses and doctors assigned at a forward location, they might not be in a position to perform triage. They might be in surgery when more wounded are brought in and the others present – medical technicians, lab workers or x-ray technicians – would have to do all of the triage and care.

"We had three technical sergeants, an airman 1st class and a senior airman (on my team)," said Tech. Sgt. Angela Harroun, a medical material troop. "I had to ask a lot of questions because I wasn't sure of all of the terms or how to treat a lot of the wounds." For the exercise, members of a Boy Scouts of America troop filled in as patients and moulage wounds were used to

add realism. The boys took their roles seriously by mimicking the actions of someone wounded.

“The obstacle course and the station with the Boy Scouts acting as victims with blast and concussion injuries from a building collapse were the most beneficial training stations,” Sergeant Harroun said. “If I’m on my own now I’ll know what to look for and how to treat it. I’ll be able to instruct other people on how to help too. “If I do deploy and they look at me and say ‘I need help’ then I’ll feel more confident in helping them,” she said. “We tried to get these teams to function together, to communicate with each other, to get the job done, to get the mission accomplished, to retrieve the patient, to treat their injuries and get them back the quickest, most efficient and safest manner possible,” Sergeant Cantwell said. For him, Sergeant Harroun’s words translated into “mission accomplished.”

Even though the training goals for the exercise were met, and Colonel Gonzalez was proud of the Squadron’s performance, she felt another valuable by-product of the effort was learning where the Squadron’s weaknesses lay and factoring that knowledge into future training plans. “If we ran a flawless exercise every time I would question if we were pushing our people hard enough,” Colonel Gonzalez said. “This is the opportunity for me to be able to see where we are and what we can improve upon. All of this helped me see what kind of training we’ll need to do over the next 12 months.”

She was quick to add that she knew her people had a culture of continuous improvement and they were ready for it. “The members here love the mission, they love what they do and they love supporting the war fighter,” Colonel Gonzalez said. “They are staunch believers of the Wingman concept and they have a true patriotism that I would argue would be hard to match.”

The 710th Medical Squadron conducted its final unit training assembly Nov. 8 in preparation for its official inactivation Dec. 1. The 710th is a geographically separated unit of the 442nd Fighter Wing at Offutt Air Force Base. Col. Joan Gonzalez, the 710th MDS commander, said she is very proud of her unit and is filled with mixed emotions. “It’s bittersweet,” Colonel Gonzalez said. “The 710th was No. 1 in the Air Force Reserve at being ready to deploy, and we are so good at what we do; it is sad to see us be inactivated,” she said. “But, there will now be a number of quality individuals to be infused into other units, and that can only help to strengthen our overall reserve force.”

Offutt's 710th Medical Squadron The 710th MDS has supported Air Force missions in many aspects throughout its existence, such as providing aid for Hurricane Katrina victims and individual deployments for Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. Included also are individual deployments to Guam, Surinam, Tunisia and Korea. The squadron also provided support for the 55th Security Forces Squadron at Offutt throughout the Global War on Terrorism. At full capacity the 710th Medical Squadron was comprised of 160 Airmen who needed new units upon discovering their unit’s deactivation. They were faced with the challenge of finding new units and securing their future military careers.

“We had recruiters from just about every branch of the military visit us. The 442nd Military Personnel Flight came up to give us information and leadership and made a lot of personal calls to provide our people with every possible opportunity that may be out there,” Colonel Gonzalez said. “At this point almost everybody has orders in their hands,” she said.

Lt. Col. Shelly Kinney, 710th MDS flight commander has served her entire 21-year Air Force career at Offutt Air Force Base. “Even though people knew they had to find new units, they hung around as long as they could,” Colonel Kinney said. “Many of those who found new homes still stuck around all the way to the very end.” Many retirees and past members of the 710th MDS returned for the deactivation ceremony where the squadron flag was rolled up one last time. Master Sgt. Kelly Kay, 710th MDS first sergeant, described it as an emotional event.

2010

Although the 710th Medical Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base conducted its final unit training assembly in November, their hard work and dedication didn’t go unrecognized. The 710th MS, one of the 442nd Fighter Wing’s geographically separated units, deactivated Dec. 1, 2009 – and within only a few short weeks, learned they had been recognized by Air Force Reserve Command as an outstanding unit for 2009.

Tech. Sgt. Eric Anderson, now a 442nd medical technician, was stationed with the 710th MS for seven years before transferring due to the unit’s deactivation. He said Airmen from the 710th MS worked hard to receive such an award. “We put a lot of hard work into it,” Sergeant Anderson said. “Certain people put in a lot of extra hours – it wasn’t just an 8 to 4 (p.m.) job. A lot of people went above and beyond and it was great to get that recognition.” Senior Master Sgt. Cruz Torres Jr., noncommissioned officer in charge of nursing services agrees. Sergeant Torres was also stationed with the 710th MS for seven years prior to its deactivation.

“(The 710th MS) accomplished a lot over the last five years,” he said. “I think this award shows that we were able to go out on a high note – a note of recognition.” Over the last few years, the 710th MS participated in more than four deployments. They successfully completed several inspections including a health services inspection, which according to Sergeant Torres, is like a medical version of an operational readiness inspection. “(This award) means a lot for those of us who were deployed and committed a lot to the unit,” Sergeant Torres said. He also said he hopes his and Sergeant Anderson’s experience with the 710th MS can bring positive education and motivation to the 442nd MDS and assist with preparation for the upcoming operation readiness inspection follow up. “There is always room for improvement,” Sergeant Torres said, “and we need to be improving constantly to carry out the mission.”

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE UNIT HISTORIES

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.