

Aerial Spray Squadron recognized at CDC ceremony

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CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, Atlanta-- Air Force Reserve Command's Aerial Spray Squadron from the 910th Airlift Wing, Youngstown Air Reserve Station, Ohio, answered another call from the CDC May 1, but this time it wasn't in response to a natural disaster.

This time the squadron was asked to be represented at the 2006 National Center for Infectious Diseases (NCID) Recognition Awards Ceremony here in Atlanta.

During the ceremony, Air Force Reservists representing the Aerial Spray Squadron received an NCID "Partners in Public Health" award for the squadron's response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Col. Timothy J. Thomson, commander of the 910th Airlift Wing, home to the only full-time, fixed-wing aerial spray capability in the Department of Defense received the award from Ms. Rima Khabbaz, director of the NCID, on behalf of the Aerial Spray Squadron.

"The NCID is a group of people that dedicates their lives to studying and preventing infectious diseases. It says something that we've been recognized by such an agency for what all the Airmen with our Aerial Spray mission at Youngstown do as part of homeland defense and while protecting our military personnel from Vector-borne diseases no matter where in the world they may be," said Col. Thomson.

The award was presented to recognize the efforts of the people assigned to the Aerial Spray Squadron while containing the threat of mosquitoes and minimizing their negative impact on the morale of those working and living without electrical power following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Air Force Reservists from the 910th Airlift Wing deployed to Duke Field, Fla. in Sept. 2005 to set up a base of operations for Aerial Spray missions after the hurricanes ravaged the Gulf Coast area of the United States.

The CDC's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, on an annual basis, recognizes individual and group achievements of staff and collaborators in approximately 25 categories of nominations. Nominations are provided by each of the many centers or programs at CDC. In the case of the Air Force Reserve Aerial Spray mission, staff members at the Fort Collins, Co.-based Division of Vector-borne Infectious Diseases submitted the nomination to the National Center for Infectious Diseases (NCID) here in Atlanta, to compete against other nominees at the center level for the "Partners in Public Health Improvement" award. The Air Force Reserve's spray mission was selected by NCID to go forward as a winner to the CDC-level competition. The May 1 awards ceremony recognized the winners at the NCID level, regardless of the outcome of the competition at the CDC level (to be decided later this spring).

"The vector control missions to Louisiana and Texas were successful mainly because the aerial spray squadron was able to mount stop gap spray missions while local mosquito control districts worked toward resuming normal functionality," said Ms. Mel Fernandez, deputy director of the CDC's Division of Vector-Borne Infectious Diseases.

The hurricane response missions were entirely voluntary for the personnel of the Aerial Spray Squadron. Many of the reservists who participated used personal leave from their place of employment to participate in the relief effort.

"These officers and enlisted personnel were instrumental in providing timely relief to the citizens and relief workers in both Louisiana and Texas from the affliction of mosquitoes and flies produced by these storms. Their tireless efforts to ensure that the mission was successful should be commended," Ms. Fernandez said.



Tech. Sgt. Shawn David McCowan

910th military entomologists conduct on-going testing to ensure the correct product is used to combat biting insects such as sand fleas that can harm Marines at the Parris Island Marine Corps Recruit Training Depot, S.C.

According to the award narrative, aerial spray squadron personnel worked efficiently and professionally with multiple agencies, federal (FEMA, DHS, EPA and the CDC), local within Louisiana and Texas (Dept. of Health, Dept. of Agriculture and Dept. of Environmental Quality) and other branches of the military, to ensure that these states could provide relief from irritant mosquitoes and potential disease vectors in a timely and safe manner.

The narrative further states that surveillance data was used in the most efficient manner possible to ensure the least environmental impact while attaining the maximum effect on mosquito and fly populations. Following the storms mosquito populations surged to 800 percent higher than what is normal for the months of September and October. Reductions in mosquito populations of up to 100 percent were attained in most areas after an aerial spray flight. More than 2.8 million acres, or 4,501 square miles (about the size of Connecticut) were treated in Louisiana and Texas by the aerial spray squadron while these states worked with their local mosquito control districts damaged by the storms to restore their functionality and/or get contracts in place with the private sector to fill in while they rebuilt.

"When the states' or local districts surveillance data were scarce, Maj. Mark Breidenbaugh, and Capt. Karl Haagsma, entomologists with the aerial spray squadron, took it upon themselves to seek out the help of qualified military entomologists and medical personnel assigned to the area for other tasks to help provide accurate assessments on which entomologists from the Louisiana and Texas Departments of Health could base control decisions," said Maj. Bill Whittenberger, director of operations for the 757th Airlift Squadron. "This ensured that citizens and responders were minimally exposed to pesticides by targeting only those areas of greatest need for vector control," he said.

The 757th has four, specially-modified C-130H aircraft to conduct Aerial Spray missions with a primary mission to protect military personnel from vector-borne diseases.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is one of the 13 major operating components of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which is the principal agency in the United States government for protecting the health and safety of all Americans and for providing essential human services, especially for those people who are least able to help themselves.