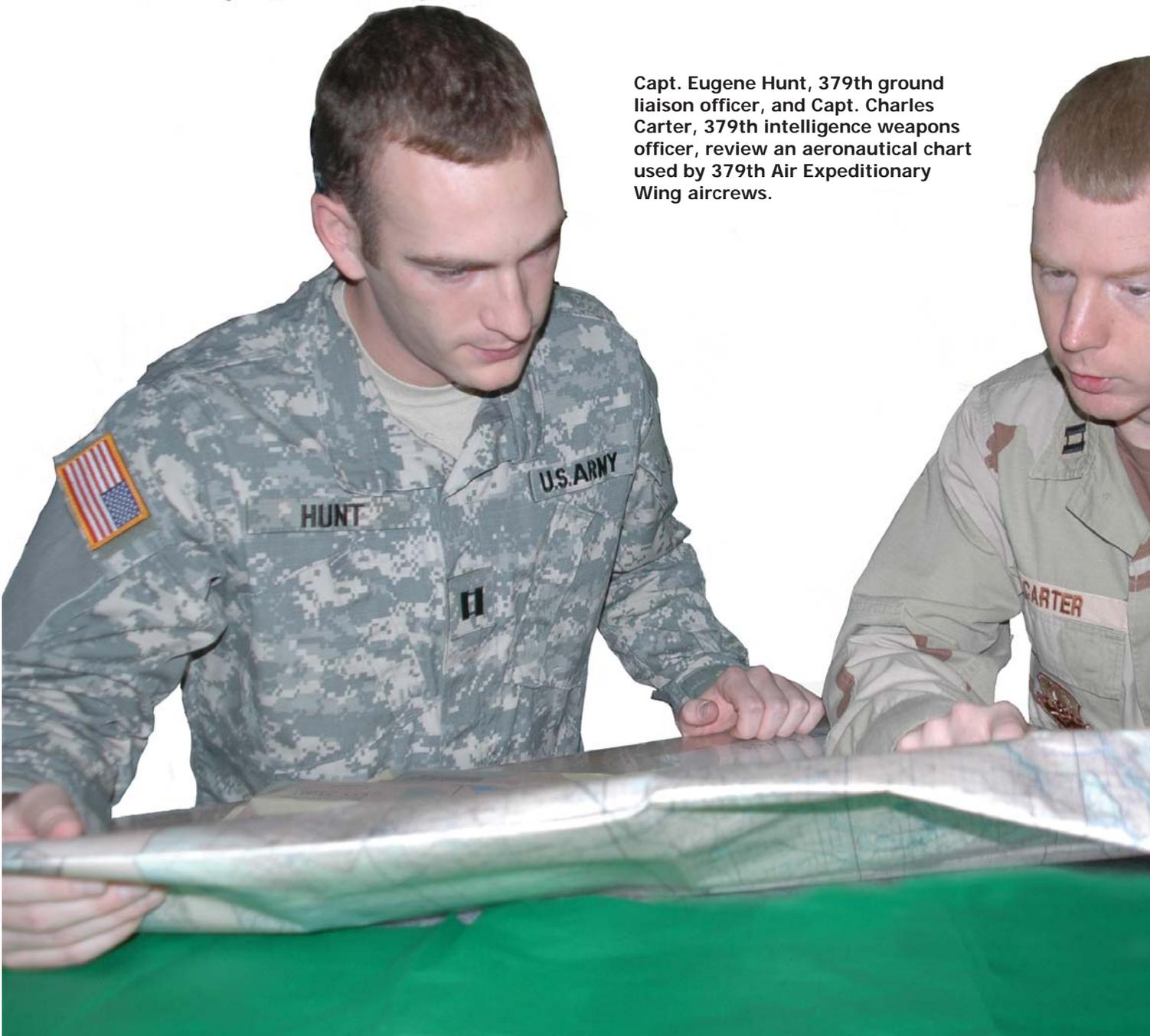


Behind the “green door” – Demystifying the mystique of Intel

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Capt. Eugene Hunt, 379th ground liaison officer, and Capt. Charles Carter, 379th intelligence weapons officer, review an aeronautical chart used by 379th Air Expeditionary Wing aircrews.



They work behind locked doors, in a building with no windows. They are closely integrated into the flying operations and force protection aspects of every Air Force Wing, but most of us know very little about what they do.

"That's part of the mystique surrounding Intel," said 379th Air Expeditionary Wing Intelligence Officer Maj. Ed "Tornado" Horner. "We can't always say that much about our job. It wasn't that long ago that Intel worked exclusively behind a green vault door. Aircrew interaction with intel was often limited to a target folder provided to the aircrew before each mission and a short debrief by intel after the mission. But we've changed a lot in the last two decades and continue to play a critical role in GWOT."

Since Sept. 11, the Air Force intelligence community has focused more on "actionable intel" used by warfighters and leadership. In the case of the 379th AEW, this means examining threat streams and communicating the essential information back and forth between troops on the ground and aircrew throughout the AOR.

Although the intel flight falls under the 379th Expeditionary Operations Support Squadron, it communicates sensitive information to key decision-makers in the Operations Group, Wing staff, and throughout the AOR. They are a key enabler not only to the Wing's flying mission, but also to the Wing's robust Force Protection program. The EOSS Intel Flight runs 24/7 and put up some impressive numbers in 2006, analyzing more than 13,000 aircrew mission reports and producing more than 10,000



Photo illustration by Maj. Ann Peru Knabe

intelligence products for users as diverse as flying squadrons and wing commander to special operations forces deep in the battlefields of the AOR.

With more than eight years experience in the field, Staff Sgt. Allyson Smith works in the Combat Intelligence Cell with intel officer Lt. Byron Mills. The CIC intel team looks at classified and unclassified message traffic, and both open source and secret documents for potential threats to wing operations.

"Our cell serves as the wing's intelligence focal point," explained Sergeant Smith. "Our job is to filter through all the message traffic and provide the wing leadership and squadron level intel officers with usable, actionable information."

Each of the wing's flying squadrons has an intel team of at least three people. Mirroring the flying missions in the AOR, the squadron intel teams operate 24/7.

Capt. Sean Piccirilli, 494th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron's intel officer, said internet relay chat called MIRC helps the CIC and flying squadron's communicate with each other.

"The cell analyzes and filters information for us to maintain real-time situational awareness," said the captain. "They display a common operating picture that depicts the disposition of aircraft in the AOR."

In turn, the squadron level intel Airmen debrief aircrews returning from missions, and collect information that is turned over to the cell. This could include information about enemy actions, troop movements or other information observed during sorties. The combat intelligence cell collects this information and passes to the Combined Air Operations Center where the information helps leadership shape future operations.

Another facet of wing intel is the 379th Mission Planning Cell. The MPC team creates detailed mission graphics combining classified imagery with a variety of operational and intelligence info for aircrews flying around the AOR.

"We're very technology dependent," said Tech. Sgt. Lee "Thumper" Thomas, describing the electronic distribution of maps detailing projected troop movements, locations planned for insurgent raids, convoy operations and other strategic locations. "But, if need be, we'll run our mission products to aircrew by hand, even to the jet, if the situation warrants."

Sergeant Thomas said in addition to supporting the wing, the Mission Planning Cell also provides mission products and imagery to units throughout the AOR, including coalition partners.

"But our day-to-day bread and butter is creating mission folders for aircrew," she said, referencing the mission graphics built by the MPC and used by aircrew to gain situational awareness on the ground operations they are supporting.

Another key player in the mission planning process is the ground liaison officer who works for the 379th Expeditionary

Operations Group. The GLO serves as the primary communication conduit between the wing mission planning cell and troops on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"When you have aircrew and ground forces referring to the same electronic imagery, we save time," said Major Horner. "Something that might take 30 minutes to talk about over secure phone can be communicated over the Internet and understood in less than five minutes. When you're a JTAC (joint terminal air controller) on the ground, time and accuracy could mean saving the lives of friendlies."

"The current fight in Iraq and Afghanistan is a very ground-oriented, asymmetric one. The situation changes daily, and the target sets are not easily defined" said Major Horner. "It is critical we have a clear picture of what kind of air support the ground commanders are requesting."

"Typically, we look at the air support requests processed through MNCI (Multi-National Corps Iraq) headquarters," said Army Capt. Eugene Hunt, a ground liaison officer attached to the 379th EOG. "If we have further questions about the ASR, we can go right to the JTAC."

Captain Hunt said his role is all about "pushing information" to and from the right folks.

"We collect information from the ground, translate the Army speak into Air Force, so the aircrew clearly understand the mission before they fly," he said.

While the different levels of intel all have different roles in supporting the warfighter, mission planning cell intel officer Capt. Charles Carter thinks Gen. Chuck Horner summed it up best.

"Everything begins and ends with intelligence," said General Horner, the joint air force component commander during Desert Storm. "Ops without intelligence is blind. Intelligence without ops is irrelevant."

Major Horner (no relation to the general) agrees.

"When intel falls under a flying wing like the 379th it tends to be more integrated directly into the mission," said Major Horner. "It's an exciting career field to work in. However, wing-level intelligence is just one aspect of our diverse career field. Intelligence Airmen also serve with major commands, in weapons systems analysis, at national agencies, and fly on ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) platforms like the RC-135 Rivet Joint."

Major Horner said Intel Airmen are always in high demand, and are often offered re-enlistment bonuses up to \$60,000. "Intel is the best job in the Air Force; each assignment can be completely different and a whole new challenge" said Major Horner. When asked to describe some of the best jobs he's had, he just smiled and used the old intel saying "I could tell you, but I'd have to kill you". He's kidding ... I think.