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332d Air Expeditionary Wing, Balad Air Base, Iraq



**Tigers give
Falcons flight**

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TIGERS GIVE FALCONS FLIGHT

by Senior Airman James Croxon
332d Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

Like an experienced pit crew, the 332d Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron aircraft maintenance unit, known as the Tiger, keeps the F-16s of the 332d Expeditionary Fighter Squadron in top form.

The crew chiefs, back shops and support Airmen assigned to the squadron's Tiger AMU are primarily from Montgomery Ala.; Madison, Wis., and Springfield, Ill.

"Springfield and Madison are our sister wings," said Senior Master Sgt. Michael Mullins, a crew chief deployed from the 187th Fighter Wing, Montgomery, Ala. "We are tied to (Air Expeditionary Force) cycles, but the manning usually gets filled between the

three wings. The amazing thing is we don't have shortfalls. Every Airman we needed to fill the rotation volunteered."

More than half of the Airmen assigned are full time Guardsmen working solely as maintenance Airmen. For them, deployment is a chance to work with other units.

"This is one of the few times we get to work with different folks and learn from each other," said Tech. Sgt. Tony Broome, a Prattville, Ala., native deployed from the 187th FW. "The technical orders tell us how to fix a problem, but we learn a lot of techniques from the other Guard units and the active-duty AMU."

In addition to learning from other units, the increased operations tempo here gives ju-

nior enlisted troops valuable experience they may not acquire back home.

"This is more intense than technical school was," said Senior Airman Joshua Harrison, a jet engine mechanic from Monroeville, Ala., deployed from the 187th FW. "I'm a traditional Guardsman so I don't see the jets this much normally."

During their rotation, the Tiger AMU fixed or inspected the jets twice as much as they would in the states. This is because the jets are flown more often and on longer sorties than they do at home.

"At home, the sorties average about an hour and a half," said Tech. Sgt. Johnny Tucker, a jet engine mechanic from New Site, Ala., deployed from the 187th FW "Here at

Balad, the sorties are almost five times longer on average. This increases the number of phase inspections we do and shortens the time between inspections."

Most of these Airmen have worked together for a long time, more than 30 years for some. This camaraderie gives the back shops an almost a neighborhood garage feel.

"We are so used to working together that we can do what needs to be done without even talking about it," said Staff Sgt. William Blackmon, a jet engine mechanic from Selma, Ala., deployed from the 187th FW "One Airman can be working on one part of an engine phase inspection and I'll move over to another piece."

For most Airmen, the Tiger AMU is a chance to serve in the war and see their maintenance put to use by giving the pilots a well-maintained weapon system to drop munitions on the enemy.

"This is a chance to see Tony's Pony in action," Sergeant Broome said referring to the moniker given to his assigned F-16.



Photo by Senior Airman Kerry Solan-Johnson

Staff Sgt. Kenny McDonald, a crew chief with Tiger AMU, prepares to tow an F-16 to the tarmac for an engine test.



Photo by Senior Airman James Croxon

Senior Airman Joshua Harrison, a jet engine mechanic assigned to the 332d Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, checks the fan blades on a spare F-16 engine. Both the 332d and 524th Expeditionary Fighter Squadrons deploy with spare engines in case of emergencies.



Photo by Senior Airman Kerry Solan-Johnson

Staff Sgt. William Blackmon (center) and Staff Sgt. Charles Brown (right) with the Tiger aircraft maintenance unit test a newly-installed engine on an F-16 Fighting Falcon assigned to the 332d Expeditionary Fighter Squadron. The Airmen of the Tiger AMU and the 332d EFS are deployed from Guard units across the United States.