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Unique program keeps STS troops healthy

By Staff Sgt. Vicky Spesard
123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

Pararescuemen from the Kentucky Air National Guard's 123rd Special Tactics Squadron spend their deployments evacuating troops wounded in combat, but what happens when one of them gets injured?

Master Sgt. Jeff Gantt, a pararescueman with the 123rd STS, thought his career as a special operations Airman was over as he was being medevaced out of Afghanistan.

"In my mind, I knew it was over," Gantt said. "There would be no way that I could recover from basically a broken back, and expect to jump, dive and carry a load of gear across rugged terrain."

That was two and a half years ago. Today, Gantt is on full combat status and an active member of the squadron thanks to the development of the 123rd STS Human Performance Program.

The HPP is a holistic approach to caring for the health of special operators here, using strength and conditioning programs, perfor-

mance testing, injury assessments, physical therapy, corrective exercise and nutrition education. The objective of the program is to prevent injuries with screening and proper exercise, rehabilitate existing injuries, and develop well-rounded fitness.

"The mind-set that working out is all about how hard you hit the gym and how fast your run can be was one of the major hurdles we had to overcome when the program began here at the base," said Jake Kilbride, facility manager and a soft-tissue expert.

"Breaking that mold and have us come in and show them how to do correct movements, along with injury prevention and rehabilitative techniques, we have seen chronic injuries go way down and performance levels go way up."

Performance level was a major factor to Gantt as he began using the individualized workout and rehabilitation program created for him by the HPP staff

"It was hard coming in every day when I first started the program," Gantt explained. "I wasn't used to slowing down and working out

in the way the staff wanted me to. It really was a new way of doing things for me.

"There were some dark days for sure," Gantt said. "But every day I came in, and the guys here would never let me quit. They encouraged me, taught me better techniques, monitored my progress and made adjustments to my plan."

"The guys" mentioned by Gantt are Kilbride, Rich Moravec and Will Lawhorn, all certified strength and conditioning coaches, each with additional skills and certifications.

Gantt and other STS operators say they have experienced positive results and progress, and they attribute that progress to HPP.

While the program grew in participants, it also expanded in its different capabilities. New workout apparatuses and new physical testing and evaluation equipment were added.

"One of my goals for this program is the education aspect," explained Lt. Col. Sean McLane, commander of the 123rd STS, who was instrumental in bringing HPP to the squadron. "Teach our guys how to work out intelligently, avoid and recognize an injury; step back and get help for that injury and not just push through it.

"They're doing a variety of techniques that teach them how to jump and absorb the force better, land better, climb better, run better," McLane continued. "The HPP develops the operators and helps them sustain a usable career, longer."

Having a longer career as a special operations Airman was the driving force for Gantt, whose steadfast commitment to HPP helped him get back into the physical condition that he is in today. He also credits the dedication of the staff who built a personal connection to him and many of the STS operators.

"I could walk into the facility and just by my walk or attitude I was portraying, the guys would know what my body could do that day and make adjustments to my work out on the spot," Gantt said. "I know that I am a viable special operator because of what we're doing here.

"I think this program adds literally years to a special operator's operational life, which is substantial to the military. Having my health back is everything to me."



Staff Sgt. Vicky Spesard/Kentucky Air National Guard

Master Sgt. Jeff Gantt, a pararescueman from the 123rd Special Tactics Squadron, works through an individualized conditioning and maintenance program designed by the staff of the squadron's Human Performance Program.

Thermal imagers help conserve energy

By Master Sgt. Phil Speck
123AW Public Affairs

Facilities managers at the Kentucky Air National Guard have launched several new projects to conserve energy and increase systems reliability, including the use of infrared thermal imagers.

When the 123rd Airlift Wing receives new equipment such as heating or air conditioning units, workers use the imagers to take temperature readings of different components, explained Tom Spalding, base energy manager.

The imager is pointed at motors and other components that cause friction and heat, creating a color picture that provides the temperatures ranges of the items in the image.

The images are then saved, providing a baseline record of the equipment's "heat signature" that can be re-evaluated as the equipment ages.

Spalding said images of equipment will be made twice a year. If temperatures inside a piece of equipment rise, Civil Engineering will know that a component might be failing and needs attention.

"It's important because as its thermal image increases, more BTUs are being used as its tem-



Master Sgt. Phil Speck/Kentucky Air National Guard

Tom Spalding, base energy manager for the Kentucky Air National Guard, uses a thermal imager to create images of equipment here Sept. 25. The images can be used to identify failing components, saving energy and increasing reliability.

perature rises," Spalding said. "We can fix that because we can replace a motor before it breaks."

Another project is the re-commissioning of equipment. Maintenance workers are looking at the original and current configuration of equipment on base, Spalding explained.

In some cases, energy can be conserved if equipment is reset to original specifications, which may have fallen out of adjustment over time.

Spalding says the base currently uses about 300 megawatt hours of electricity per month, but there many small things that can be done to reduce usage.

"Picking out a new power strip is not the biggest win, but when you add it together, if we have 200 power strips on base, were saving 40 watts a day from each desktop — that's huge. It's a couple of megawatts a month."

Spalding recommended plugging your computer into a separate power receptacle, but plugging peripherals such as speakers and monitors into a surge protector that you turn off every day when you leave.

Spalding said other energy conservation projects are on the horizon, including solar arrays for the base.

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