



AIR FORCE TECHNICAL APPLICATIONS CENTER

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Not just a buzzword; AFTAC showcases innovation to ISR community

By Susan A. Romano, AFTAC Public Affairs

PATRICK AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – Thirty-five Airmen from across the Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance enterprise converged at the Air Force Technical Applications Center here recently to get a first-hand view of how the nuclear treaty monitoring center applies innovation techniques to its worldwide mission.

Chief Master Sgt. Michael Joseph, AFTAC's Command Chief, thought it would be beneficial to have Air Force ISR counterparts meet with members of AFTAC's Innovation Lab to learn how Airmen have capitalized on the vast amount of knowledge, expertise, skill and talent within the center to find non-traditional ways to solve problems using innovation. So he invited three dozen people from ISR units across the U.S., including Airmen from the 9th Reconnaissance Wing at Beale AFB, Calif.; the 319th Air Base Wing at Grand Forks AFB, N.D.; the 480th ISR Wing and 363rd Wing at Langley AFB, Va.; the 70th ISR Wing at Ft. Meade, Md.; and the 655th ISR Group and National Air and Space Intelligence Center at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio.



AFTAC, a surveillance wing of 25th Air Force's ISR structure, created its Innovation Lab in 2014 as a way to encourage the workforce to figure out ways to develop and streamline technologies and processes at a cheaper cost while simultaneously addressing mission gaps.

According to Joseph, innovation has been part of the AFTAC culture and is nothing new for the nuclear surveillance organization.

"The men and women of AFTAC have been doing innovation for 70 years," he said. "The purpose of this visit was to see how we can collaborate better and highlight issues to remove barriers our Airmen face. We have smart, innovative Airmen across the Air Force and in the 25th, and each wing has programs and initiatives that can make our Air Force better and more effective in accomplishing our mission."

During their visit, the group toured various places within DoD's sole nuclear treaty monitoring center. Some stops on the itinerary included AFTAC's machine shop, Ciabrone Radiochemistry Lab, Heritage Room, Logistics Warehouse, Innovation Lab and Operations Center.

On the last day of the visit, Joseph ensured time was carved out to break the teams into groups for brainstorming and collaboration sessions, as well as to capture takeaways for both the visitors and the hosts.

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Chief Master Sgt. Jessica L. Bender, Command Chief for the 9th RW, took note of the Airmen she met during her visit.



"I was very impressed with the skills and expertise of even the youngest Airmen here," Bender said. "Everyone seems proud to be part of AFTAC and it was a very positive environment."

She added that this was a great opportunity to network with other Airmen from different bases to help develop innovative programs at their respective organizations.

"We gained a greater perspective on the capabilities of other units, what projects they are working on, and how to reach out to ask for assistance if needed. Our Airmen were already floating ideas prior to the last day (of our visit). They were thinking outside the box, and that's good for any career field or specialty."

David Paynter, Logistics Flight Chief in the 709th Support Squadron, was glad host the group that visited his warehouse to showcase some of the innovative ways his section has improved logistic processes and procedures.

"I have been pushing innovation and thinking outside the box in terms of logistics support to AFTAC for some time now," said Paynter. "Tom Lehnerz, our materiel management lead, and his team of experts took that to heart. During this recent visit, we were able to showcase some of the projects we've been working on, including a prototype diagram of a crate that houses precision seismic components related to our worldwide mission to ensure the equipment can be safely and securely shipped. This prototype is expected to decrease maintenance preparation and annual inventory time in half, improve our inventory accuracy, and save nearly \$20,000 in commercial fabrication costs."

He added, "The visitors seemed to be very impressed with our creativity and innovative approach to logistics, and I'm extremely proud of a job well done!"