Maryland Guard Information Operations Team deploys to Horn of Africa

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ANNAPOLIS, Md. – The Maryland National Guard’s 110th Information Operations Battalion announced the upcoming deployment of its thirteenth field support team to the Horn of Africa, May 28.

The team, referred to as HOA 13, will be led by Maj. Lesley Dowdle. HOA 13 will replace the previous team, also comprised of 110th Information Operations soldiers, led by Maj. Dave Jeffries. The transfer of authority is expected to take place in late June.

For the next nine months, HOA 13 will integrate and synchronize various information-related capabilities for Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), functioning as information operations planners.

Each team member brings unique skills and experience in specialties such as planning for electronic warfare, cyber, operational security, and others, with the goal of gaining and maintaining the advantage in a complex informational environment.

While deployed, Dowdle, will lead the information operations directorate, also known as the J39. As the director of information operations, she will oversee the entire integration of conventional non-kinetic fires into the more traditional operations.

“Our current operational environment is ever changing, and Information Operations plays an integral role in achieving the desired outcomes,” said Dowdle. “The HOA 13 Team will provide relevant, robust and real-time expertise in the Information Environment through the integrated use of Cyberspace Operations, Intelligence, Public Affairs, Civil Affairs and other Information Related Capabilities.”

“In today’s fight, this unique capability is more important than ever. As information warfare becomes more prevalent, we see an increased demand from combatant commands to bring these specialized integrators to the fight,” said Lt. Col. Kirstie Roy, commander of the 110th IO Battalion. “We are proud to be able to provide this critical capability, functional area 30, to the Combined Joint Task Force in Djibouti.”

To prepare for this deployment, the HOA 13 team underwent a rigorous training regimen, increasing each team member’s knowledge of how the different information-related capabilities contribute to the fight.

“Prior to mobilization, HOA 13 completed Information Operations training that was related to the U.S. Africa Command-specific mission and guidance. This will enable the team to be more astute of the environment they will be supporting and understand cultural aspects and technical capabilities,” said Dowdle.

Part of the training included completion of the 1st IO Command Information Operations Capabilities Application and Planning course and the Joint Information Operations Planners’ Course at the Joint Staff College in Norfolk, Va.

“Through IO, we can influence, disrupt, corrupt or usurp the decision-making abilities of our adversaries and potential adversaries in the region,” said Dowdle.

CJTF-HOA is U.S. Africa Command’s only permanent presence on the African continent and conducts security force assistance and military engagements. It also provides force protection and military support to regional counter-violent extremist organizations.

The Joint Task Force works with U.S. and international partners in East Africa to support regional efforts, ensure access and freedom of movement and protect U.S. interests there.

In this role, the Joint Task Force helps fight against violent extremist organizations, such as al-Shabaab and ISIS in Somalia. It leverages U.S. diplomatic, informational, military and economic power to support our international partners throughout East Africa and help build their capabilities and capacities to defend themselves and shape their future.

The 110th IO Battalion, which falls under Task Force 291, Maryland National Guard, has supported 13 HOA rotations since it transformed from an artillery battalion in 2009.

Lt. Col. Roy and Command Sgt. Maj. Joseph Yeglic, the command team for 110th, are focused on the strategic benefit these missions bring to their formations.

“Our soldiers have to stay on the cutting edge to be successful on these deployments – always honing their skill and expertise while paying attention to how our adversaries use information to gain the advantage,” said Roy. “These global missions help us keep our team members sharp and engaged.”

The 110th IO Battalion is based in Annapolis, Maryland, and conducts information operations for global military operations from the tactical through strategic levels. 110th Soldiers receive ongoing training to ensure they are culturally aware, regionally focused and equipped with the latest skills and expertise necessary to gain information superiority in the information environment and defeat our nation’s adversaries.

Two 110th IO Battalion FSTs are currently deployed, one each with U.S. Africa Command and U.S Cyber Command.

The unit also provides support to state and local authorities during governor-declared state emergencies. For its federal mission, the unit is organized under the 56th Theater Information Operations Group of the Washington National Guard. For state missions, the 110th falls under the Task Force 291, Maryland National Guard.

For more information, to learn how to become a part of the unit or for any interview requests, please contact the unit public affairs officer, Maj. Aaron Testa, at aaron.m.testa2.mil@mail.mil or 330-304-2867.