ll the technology in the world is useless if you can’t work together to use it. Everyone working together as a team, a spirit of cooperation, is what makes it all work.”

This is how Cindy Farkus, chief of staff for the Medina Regional Signals Intelligence Operations Center, Medina Annex, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, described what makes the MRSOC work.

The MRSOC is a multi-service organization whose mission is to provide timely, accurate and actionable intelligence collected from regions across the world to tactical commanders and strategic decision makers.

The MRSOC commander is dual-hatted. He functions as commander of MRSOC, as well as the 543rd Intelligence Group, Medina Annex, Lackland AFB, Texas.

While wearing the 543rd IG/CC hat, the Commander, Col. Randy Roberts, is in charge of oversight for both units.

The 543rd IG serves as the headquarters for both the 31st Intelli-
gence Squadron, located at Fort Gordon, Ga., and the 93rd Intelligence Squadron, which is collocated with the 543rd IG.

While wearing the MRSOC hat, Roberts is in charge of a multi-service organization that must work seamlessly in order to get the job done. This is no small task.

**Different strokes for different folks**

“Throwing a bunch of unique cultures together and asking them to play in the sandbox is difficult, especially when the cultures are so unique,” said Master Sgt. Jack Bannin, superintendent of MR-SOC’s Office of Organizational Development.

Bannin explained that each of the other military branches has its own element:

- **Army** -- 748th Military Intelligence Battalion
- **Navy** -- Naval Security Group Activity Medina
- **Marine Corps** -- Company H Marine Support Battalion

In this mix you also have Department of Defense civilians from different services as well.

“Each of these elements contribute to the manning pool and they each have their tactical assets,” said Bannin.

**Smooth sailing ahead**

The Office of Organizational Development was formed to help make integration of the services smoother at the MR-SOC.

They came up with the MR-SOC’s board of directors, which consists of each service component’s commander, in order to channel feedback from each service to the MR-SOC commander, thus facilitating the decision process, Bannin said.

Farkus feels the board of directors has been a major success.

“We really believe the team concept is very important. We’ve changed things we had originally planned on doing based on the service command- ers’ inputs,” she said.

**Cold War sparks concept**

The MR-SOC concept came as a result of the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the drawdown.

Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, each military service did its own “MR-SOC-type” mission. There was a lot of overlap (two or more services collecting the same information) and it was expensive to operate a center for each military branch, Bannin said.

“With the advent of technology that allowed reachback, you could have one facility, one overhead budget, and one base to pay for instead of four. It makes a whole lot more money sense to do things this way in today’s world,” said Bannin.

An organization that can gather information from multiple regions of the world and use this to provide tailored information to its customers will have many prominent players on its team.

Two key elements of the MR-SOC organization are the 93rd Intelligence Squadron Logistics Division and the Joint Language Center.

The 93rd IS/LG performs maintenance on combat intelligence, analysis, and information processing systems at the MR-SOC. They are responsible for maintenance on equipment located locally and at remote locations, some up to 1,000 miles away from the site.

LG provides direct maintenance support for 130 major missions comprised of more than 5,000 individual equipment items.

**Always working**

In essence, LG is tasked with making sure everything works at MR-SOC 24-hours-a-day, 365-days-a-year. It’s a major undertaking that brings out the best in the men and women who must rise to the occasion.

“We do things that don’t necessarily fall into our Air Force specialties. We’re fixing stuff and taking care of things that aren’t necessarily our job, but people work hard to make sure things are working. It’s the strong individual effort that

"All the technology in the world is useless if you can’t work together to use it."

-- Cindy Farkus, chief of staff for the Medina Regional Signals Operations Center
makes up the teamwork,” said Maj. Tony Robertiello, chief of Logistics.

Robertiello then emphasized the strong work ethic of his troops.

“They want to see it through, and they work on it until it’s done. They take ownership of a problem until it’s solved. It’s amazing what we do with the resources we have,” he said.

Chief Master Sgt. Joel Wintheiser, superintendent of Logistics, echoes this sentiment.

“Our entire logistics organization has faced some tremendous challenges during the past several years. We’ve carried the additional workload required to support a growth in mission that’s been nothing short of explosive -- more than 200 percent in personnel and more than 400 percent in new systems and yet we continue to pay the price to train and prepare for these new and expanded capabilities so system support would be seamless to the MRSOC. I’m extremely proud of how our LG team members performed throughout the course of our growing pains.”

**Maintenance Control**

One of the key elements of the LG team is Maintenance Control.

When speaking of his four maintenance production work centers, Chief Master Sgt. Pete Anderson, maintenance supervisor, stated, “Over the last year these people have come a long way. There’s a lot of responsibility and they do an excellent job within a unique environment.”

As explained by the Maintenance Control supervisor, Tech. Sgt. James Terry, “maintenance control is a focal point for anyone who has a problem: power, air conditioning, telephones, etc. If you have a problem you call us and we coordinate the maintenance effort.”

Terry stressed the biggest obstacle is the sheer number of systems LG is responsible for. Systems are continually being updated or replaced and Maintenance Control has to keep up with this in order to find the right person at the right time to fix any problems which arise. Maintenance Control is the first place to get the call when things go wrong.

“There is a constant state of change and we are responsible for knowing what goes on,” said Terry.

One of the most prominent successes of Maintenance Control came over a seven-month period when MRSOC was without a civil engineer and experienced months of power problems.

“Maintenance Control was extremely involved in this aspect. I know there were a lot of headaches for people involved. It was constantly one thing after another, but they did a great job,” said Terry.

**Systems down**

In November 1997, commercial power failed at MRSOC. This happened several times, often for unknown reasons. The news went from bad to worse when LG found out the back-up power system was faulty. LG had to develop a plan of action and act on it quickly.

The short-term solution to the problem was to bring in a temporary generator and have LG switch over
power to that generator. This would give them time to work out problems with commercial power and to get MRSOC’s back-up power problem fixed.

LG and the 93rd IS Commander, Lt. Col. Dan Faulkner, worked with Headquarters Air Intelligence Agency and Headquarters 67th Intelligence Wing, both located at Kelly Air Force Base, Texas, to produce a long-term solution to the problem. They called in outside experts from several agencies to assess and recommend design changes to improve the survivability of MRSOC’s power plant.

Based on their recommendations, purchases were made and an implementation plan was put together, resulting in a back-up capability that’s far superior to the power plant originally installed.

These solutions included burying power lines, taking a new look at MRSOC’s power plant and making purchases to ensure back-up power will be there when it’s needed.

Another success story was the installation of an 11-meter antenna critical to future mission expansion. Tech. Sgt. Charles Ham, was the NCOIC of Antenna Wire Systems Maintenance at the time. Ham explained his office did all the site preparation work to install antenna.

This included coordinating with Lackland Civil Engineering to lay very detailed concrete dimensions for the antenna’s foundation. Also, Ham’s people had to coordinate power hook-ups, a crane to lift the antenna and all other aspects of pre-installation site support.

“When you actually go out to the ops floor and see what people are collecting on these things there is a sense of satisfaction that what you did makes a difference. I wouldn’t have wanted to have a different team [Antenna Maintenance] of people out there,” Ham concluded.

**Joint Language Center**

The other major success story for the MRSOC is the Joint Language Center. The JLC is responsible for assisting all linguists in the Kelly and Lackland area with maintaining their linguistic skills.

Three highlights of the JLC are platform course training, the Language Olympics, and technologically-enhanced learning.

Platform courses are “refresher” courses that are offered by the JLC teaching faculty. Staff Sgt. Lynne Snyder, Noncommissioned Officer in Charge of the JLC, said these refresher courses are aimed at different levels of linguists in order to help them maintain and improve their skill levels.

As NCOIC, Snyder fills in for the director, Frank Buschgans, when he’s not available. She schedules and coordinates all classes and works with linguists and units to get the linguists into the classes they need.

She’s also the point of contact for diagnostic profiles for the Defense Language Institute in Monterrey, Calif., (where the Department of Defense does the majority of its initial foreign language instruction) uses to evaluate the skill level of local linguists.

An illustration of how Snyder schedules platform classes would be if someone had a skill level below what they are expected to maintain, Snyder would enroll them in a four- to five-week long course in order to help them improve those skills. For those right at the skill
level they are supposed to have, Snyder would enroll
them in a one- to two-week course.

William McMillen, a senior language instructor at the
JLC, is one of the primary teachers of platform courses.

“The most gratifying thing to me is the language
instruction is different here than in Monterrey. Out
there they’re native speakers. They [the native lan-
guage speaker/instructors] can’t explain why something
is the way it is,” said McMillen.

At the JLC, the instructors can explain to the
students because the instructors learned from the same
perspective as the students: as English speakers learn-
ing another language.

McMillen, who served four years as an Army
linguist, feels his military experience comes in very
useful in the classroom.

“I have a good idea of what people need to know
and what the work environment is because I’ve been
where they are. It’s fun to see the lights come on.
That’s when their enthusiasm starts to roll.”

A major obstacle for the JLC was getting enough
students for the classes.

“In the year before Sergeant Snyder came out,
between 30 to 50 percent of my courses had to be
canceled [due to lack of students]. Sergeant Snyder is a
go-getter and a real fireball. She eliminated all
that,” said McMillen.

Classes are considered full at 10 students and
maxed out at 12. Due to Snyder’s efforts, classes are
continuously being maxed out, said McMillen.

“My challenge to myself is to meet the schedule I’ve
created. My goal is to get every linguist here through a
platform class while they’re here,” said Snyder.

The Language Olympics Program, run by a JLC
language facilitator and adjunct faculty member, Senior
Airman Sarian Scott, is another example of how the JLC
strives to ensure its linguists maintain and improve
their skill levels.

Scott explained the Language Olympics is a compe-
tition among American Department of Defense linguists
(both military and civilian) to see who is best and
provides extra practice that improves the languages of
the linguists. It has two levels, MRSOC level and the
World Language Olympics.

There are two rounds at MRSOC level, the first
round tests individuals and consists of reading, listen-
ing and “Picture Perfect.”

Picture Perfect is viewing a collection of pictures on
a computer screen and being able to recall and describe
details in the language you are being tested in. The
second round tests linguists as teams and consists of
working with vocabulary cards, Scott said.

She went on to explain the top three MRSOC
winners are sent TDY to Monterrey to compete at the
World Language Olympics. The next three winners
participate via video teleconferencing. Each group is
tested (as teams) in five different categories, which
differ depending on whether the participant is TDY or
“virtually” there.

“I think it’s wonderful. It allows linguists to practice
what they learn. It lets linguists see how their language
skills are compared to others, because often you don’t
know. I think everyone should do it,” said Scott.

Technological initiatives round out what the JLC is
doing. This includes computer-aided, self-paced programs
that enable students to work and learn at their own pace,
and VTT or Video Tele-Training that allows students to
speak with instructors at Monterrey for class time.

Computer-based training programs are being de-
veloped by the JLC, although it’s at an early stage.
McMillen has contributed material for this. Snyder sees
this type of training as playing a bigger role in the future.
“We’ve just touched the tip of the iceberg; however, it
(computer-based training) doesn’t take the place of one-
on-one instructor training.”

VTT capability is used for classroom instruction,
diagnosing student’s abilities and for the Language
Olympics. Snyder mentions that the VTT is best
utilized for diagnosing student’s abilities and scoring
the Language Olympics because of the strength of the
JLC’s instructors.

The Department of Defense has a high opinion of
the JLC and its program as well. The JLC won the
Department of Defense Command Language Program
of the Year for 1996. This is given to the Department
of Defense’s best language training program. It can’t
be given to the same unit two years in a row so they
are gunning for 1998.

Whether it’s gathering and processing information
for customers, ensuring that systems are operating, or
keeping linguists up to speed, the MRSOC is prepared
to keep performing at top levels as one team for the
Department of Defense. ☞