

AFSA

MAGAZINE

WINTER 2016

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Daniel Yeomans,
CMSgt, USAF Retired,
AFSA International
President

LOOKING FORWARD TO A SUCCESSFUL YEAR!

I hope that 2016 has brought you prosperity and happiness thus far, and that the rest of the year brings more of the same. As always, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your continued support of AFSA and your service to our country.

You may have received some yellow postcards in the mail asking for you to verify or update your information. I authorized our staff to allow these requests so that we can publish an AFSA 55th Anniversary Directory. This will serve AFSA in three ways. First, this action allows us to update member information through an approved third-party group, which saves time and allows our staff to concentrate on other important business. Second, income from any potential book sales will help AFSA attain critical non-dues income to help keep our costs to you—our members—low. Finally, we are confident that those who do elect to purchase the publication—though, of course, *you do not have to*—will receive a pretty cool anniversary edition of the product.

I also want to provide you with some information about the edition of *AFSA Magazine* you're holding, or perhaps reading digitally. You'll probably notice some significant changes, and I want to explain the logic behind those changes.

To begin with, you'll see that this is a "Winter" issue, rather than "January/February," as the first issue of the year has been in the past. There are a couple reasons for this, but the driving factor is cost. Frankly, the magazine is the Association's most expensive product, and in order to be

continued on page 2

2016 AFSA MEMBERSHIP DUES INCREASE

The cost of gas, eggs and going to a movie has steadily increased since 2003, but AFSA dues have remained at \$25 per year for 12 years. But in order to remain a financially sound Association with a strong voice for members on Capitol Hill, membership dues increased in 2016.

"AFSA remains committed to its four pillars: legislation, membership, communication and fraternity," says International President Daniel Yeomans. "The cost of doing business in each of those areas is increasing, and thus, we increased our dues to properly deliver on our promises for members today, and ensure this Association remains strong for those members we will serve in the future."

The cost of a one-year membership is now \$36, two years is \$63, and three years is \$89. Life memberships will also remain available at the rates of: \$650 (age 40 and under), \$550 (41–50), \$450 (51–60), and \$350 (61-plus).

good stewards of your money, we are changing the number of times the magazine is published each year from six to four, and keeping the page count at 36 pages.

In addition, you'll see that this issue is not a 64-page Almanac. What we found in researching and putting together the Almanac in the past couple years is that as soon as the information is published, it is out of date. The best place to find the most up-to-date information on military and Veteran programs is on the Web, where it is updated in real time. Therefore, this edition only includes a smaller Quick Reference section, on pages 20–27, to direct you to the most up-to-date information on TRICARE, VA programs, and other important military and Air Force contacts. We also include information on Senior Enlisted Leaders, Former CMSAFs and AFSA Chapter locations that may be hard to find compiled in one place anywhere else.

Want more information than our quarterly magazine provides? In the past two years, we have stepped up our outbound communication and leveraged technology to engage members. Rather than wait to print information in the magazine, our headquarters staff now pushes information out to our members weekly. If you're not receiving our e-newsletters—*Headline Roundup*, *Washington Report*

In the past two years, we have stepped up our outbound communication and leveraged technology to engage members.

and *e-News*—you're missing out! To opt in to these emails, please update your email address on the member site to be sure you get the latest information. And stay informed by visiting the AFSA website (www.hqafsa.org) as well.

Communication is one of AFSA's four pillars, and the magazine remains a valuable service to our members. We plan to continue to publish the magazine in the future and believe that a quarterly publication is the right frequency. I encourage each of you to share the magazine when you receive it; it's a great way to tell others about AFSA and its relevance to today's Airmen, Veterans and families.

As always, if you have questions or comments, feel free to contact me at dyeomans@hqafsa.org. God bless all—and have a safe and wonderful 2016. I promise AFSA will be there for you!

Daniel C. Yomans

We are Airmen, united in our desire to maintain the best Air Force in the world.

We are brothers and sisters joined in the profession of arms.

We are families, linking arms and standing strong through deployments and separations.

We are Veterans... of wars abroad and battles we've fought when we return.

We are the flag wavers and caretakers of Veterans' final resting places.

We are the scholarship providers, we help families pay for college.

We are the leaders, the teachers, the mentors eager to share our knowledge.

We are the protectors of those who protect us.

We are an international association with 7 Divisions and 132 Chapters across the world.

We are 100,000 strong; one powerful voice sharing Airmen's stories and concerns with our Nation's congressional and military leaders to continually advocate for promised military benefits.

We are the Air Force Sergeants Association, we take care of Airmen and their families... past, present and future.

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MEMBERSHIP

One-year, two-year, three-year and life membership options are available. Please call Headquarters for pricing. A subscription to the *AFSA Magazine* is included in membership dues. Non-member subscription rate is \$27 per year.

EDITORIAL STATEMENT

AFSA Magazine is the only magazine dedicated solely to serving the Total Air Force enlisted corps and their families. We are obliged to serve the interests and concerns of Air Force enlisted personnel and our members by striving to report timely and accurate information. The editors

reserve the right to edit all submissions but will never materially alter the author's viewpoint. The opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Air Force Sergeants Association or its editors.

AFSA does not necessarily endorse products or services advertised in *AFSA Magazine*.

Produced in the United States of America.

AFSA

Founded in 1961 by four Air Force enlisted people, AFSA is a non-profit, tax-exempted organization representing the professional and quality-of-life concerns of the Total Air Force (active duty and components) enlisted members in active, retired, and veteran status, and their families, on Capitol Hill and in the Pentagon. Through its many programs and worldwide chapters, AFSA also reaches out to bases and communities to help those in need and to raise awareness of the sacrifices, concerns, and contributions of those who have worn or are wearing enlisted chevrons.

AMF

An AFSA affiliate, the Airmen Memorial Foundation (AMF) provides educational assistance to dependent children of the *Total Air Force* enlisted force. It is also an annual participant in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC #10517).

AMM

An AFSA affiliate, the Airmen Memorial Museum (AMM), located in AFSA's Airmen Memorial Building, features rotating exhibits and stands as a tribute to those who have served. It is also an annual participant in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC #10518).

IMPORTANT AFSA NUMBERS

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On the Cover: Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force James A. Cody speaks with 423rd Security Forces Airmen during a visit to Royal Air Force Alconbury, England. Cody praised the 501st Combat Support Wing for its commitment to innovation. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Jarad A. Denton)



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18 FY16 NDAA TAKEAWAYS A BREAKDOWN OF S.1356, PENDING UNFORESEEN CHANGES

There hasn't been any shortage of coverage for the Department of Defense's Fiscal Year 2016 spending plan due to the many factors that impacted its initial veto by President Obama. Since then, compromises have been achieved and adjustments have been made. What follows is AFSA's initial analysis of the legislation that was re-sent to, and now is signed by, the president. Keep in mind that as AFSA previously reported, the NDAA is the spending plan and is dependent on the FY16 Defense Appropriations Bill, one of 12 mandatory funding bills, being passed in order for the provisions of the NDAA to take effect. A Continuing Resolution (CR) in any form could change these findings, so your team here in Washington, D.C., will keep you advised if we discover anything that might deviate from what follows:

1. Air Force-related end strengths as of 30 September 2016 will be:
 - Active Forces: 320,715
 - Air National Guard: 105,500
 - Air Force Reserve: 69,200
 - Reserves on Active Duty in Support of Reserves
 - ▶ ANG: 14,748
 - ▶ AFRC: 3,032
 - Dual Status Military Technicians
 - ▶ ANG: 22,104
 - ▶ AFRC: 9,814
 - Non-Dual Status Technicians
 - ▶ ANG: 350
 - ▶ AFRC: 90
 - Maximum Number of Reserve Personnel on Duty for Operational Support
 - ▶ ANG: 16,000
 - ▶ AFRC: 14,000
2. The number of days of active duty that reserve component members need to perform for their duty to be considered Federal Service for purposes of unemployment compensation for ex-service members increased from 90 to 180.
3. DoD is prohibited from paying to honor members of Armed Forces at sporting events.
4. A process by which members of the Armed Forces may carry an appropriate firearm on a military installation was established.
 - NLT 31 December 2015, SECDEF shall establish and implement a process by which the commanders of military installations in the U.S., or other designated military commanders of military reserve centers, recruiting centers and other such defense facilities as the Secretary may prescribe, may authorize a member of the Armed Forces who is assigned to duty at the installation, center or facility to carry an appropriate firearm on the installation, center or facility if the commander determines that carrying such a firearm is necessary as a personal- or force-protection measure.
5. Transition Assistance Program (TAP) training opportunities were expanded.
 - Training should be made available in any of the following subjects:
 - ▶ Preparation for higher education or training.
 - ▶ Preparation for career or technical training.
 - ▶ Preparation for entrepreneurship.
 - ▶ Other training options determined by the Secretary of Defense.
6. The receipt of unemployment insurance while receiving post-9/11 education assistance was prohibited.
7. Impact Aid to assist local educational agencies that benefit dependents of members of the Armed Forces and DoD civilian employees will be as follows:
 - \$25 million basic assistance
 - \$5 million aid for children with severe disabilities
8. A 1.3 percent military pay raise was made effective 1 January 2016.
9. Special pays and incentives were extended one year.
10. Basic Allowance for Housing value will phase down from 100 to 95 percent of average monthly cost of housing as follows:
 - Any month in 2015: 99 percent
 - Any month in 2016: 98 percent
 - Any month in 2017: 97 percent
 - Any month in 2018: 96 percent
 - All months after 2018: 95 percent

Eye on Washington reports on all of the legislative activity that AFSA is either involved with or tracking on behalf of our members. The Military & Government Relations Team of Morgan Brown, Paul Grugin, Jennifer Davis and Jim Lokovic write each issue's compilation.



CONGRATULATIONS, SERGEANT MAJOR

AFSA's Rob Frank, Morgan Brown and Jennifer Davis and representatives from other military organizations recently met with USMC Sergeant Major Bryan B. Battaglia (far left), the Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (SEAC). Organized by CMSgt (Ret.) Allen Usry (center), the meeting was requested by Battaglia before his retirement in December in order to thank AFSA for its support of enlisted personnel during his tenure. Asked about his proudest accomplishments as SEAC, Battaglia said the pride "simply comes in the form of the opportunity to continue to serve. It stops there."

11. A proposal to reduce BAH for dual military couples was rejected.
12. A new "hybrid" retirement plan, combining a new, reduced defined benefit with a government-matching Thrift Savings Plan was proposed.
 - The plan would apply to new entrants after 1 January 2018 and those already-serving members who choose to opt into the new program.
 - Only those already-serving members with less than 12 years of service (YOS) will be able to opt into the new program.

- New defined benefit for those who serve at least 20 years will be 2 times YOS, rather than the current 2.5 times YOS.
- The modified cost-of-living adjustment for those under age 62 made by the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 is repealed.
- TSP details:
 - ▶ 1 percent automatic agency contribution to all members upon reaching 60 days of service and continuing until their second year of service.
 - ▶ At two YOS, members' TSP would vest and the Secretary concerned would begin matching TSP

- contributions up to 5 percent of members' base pay for a maximum government contribution of 5 percent.
 - ▶ Members would be automatically enrolled at 3 percent matching contributions with the option to raise or lower their contribution level.
 - ▶ Government matching would continue through 26 YOS.
 - Lump Sum Option of Retired Pay for those who serve at least 20 years.
 - ▶ May take 50 percent or 25 percent of the discounted present value of their defined retirement benefit that would be due to them prior to becoming fully eligible for Social Security.
 - Continuation Pay at 12 YOS for those participating in the modernized retirement system who reach 12 YOS and agree to serve another four years.
- 13.** Under the Survivor Benefit Plan, an individual can elect a new spouse beneficiary after the death of a former spouse beneficiary.
- 14.** DoD was required to produce a plan for budget-neutrality of the defense commissary and military exchange systems.
- Must report plan to Congress NLT 1 March 2016 for making the commissary and exchange benefit budget neutral by 1 October 2018.
 - ▶ Report must include description of modifications to commissary and exchange systems to make them budget neutral, including:
 - Plans to exploit synergies between the operations of exchanges and commissaries,
 - Any plans to privatize operations in whole or in part,
 - Engagement of major commercial grocery retailers or other private-sector entities to determine their willingness to provide beneficiaries with discount savings on grocery products and certain household goods,
 - The closure of commissaries in locations in close proximity to other commissaries or in locations where commercial alternatives through major grocery retailers may be available,
 - An analysis of different pricing constructs to improve or enhance the delivery of commissary and exchange benefits,
 - An analysis of the impact of any modifications on Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) quality-of-life programs, and
 - The report shall ensure:
 - The maintenance of high levels of customer satisfaction in the delivery of commissary and exchange benefits.
 - The provision of high-quality products.
 - The sustainment-of-discount savings to eligible beneficiaries.
 - The level of savings to commissary and exchange patrons under any pilot program under this subsection is not less than the level of savings to such patrons before the implementation of such pilot program.
- ▶ DoD could conduct two-year pilot program with changes to gauge feasibility of privatization efforts.
- No fewer than five commissaries in largest markets in the commissary system.
- 15.** Financial literacy and preparedness training was implemented.
- Requires training for enlisted below E-5 and officers below 0-4 as follows:
 - ▶ Arrival at first duty station
 - ▶ Arrival at each subsequent duty station
 - ▶ Additional training at various career and life milestones
 - ▶ Regular DoD financial literacy and preparedness surveys
- 16.** TRICARE pharmacy benefit cost shares will increase slightly in 2016.
- \$8 is increased to \$10
 - \$20 is increased to \$24
 - \$16 is increased to \$20
 - \$46 is increased to \$49
- 17.** Joint Formulary DoD-to-VA Transitional Care will be established.
- Require the Secretaries of Defense and Veterans Affairs to establish a joint uniform formulary that would include pain, sleep disorder, psychiatric drugs and drugs for other conditions critical for transition of a service member from treatment furnished by the Department of Defense to treatment furnished by the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- 18.** A three-year pilot program on urgent care under TRICARE will be created.
- Program would commence NLT 180 days after this NDAA is enacted.
 - It would authorize a covered beneficiary under the TRICARE program to access urgent care visits per year without the need to obtain pre-authorization for such visits.
 - A nurse advice line would be incorporated in the pilot to direct beneficiaries seeking access to care to the source of the most appropriate level of health care required to treat the medical conditions of the beneficiaries, including urgent care under the pilot program.

TESTIMONY, LOBBYING AND YOU WHY AFSA'S NUMBERS AND OUR COLLECTIVE VOICE MATTER

Air Force Sergeants Association representatives on Air Force bases often urge non-members to join AFSA. They do so to try to beef up the size of our membership. Why? Because the larger an association is, the more attention its representatives in Washington will have on Capitol Hill and when speaking with other government agency officials. Size opens doors and translates into access, influence and success.

For enlisted members, this is especially important because, in this time of fiscal austerity, quality-of-life (QOL) benefits are in the spending cuts "cross hairs" as the government looks for ways to spend less. For example, recent changes to the military retirement system were made primarily to cut military personnel spending. Congressional offices have indicated that military health care may be next to face scrutiny. In every case, DoD and congressional officials assert they are doing so to "improve" these programs for those who serve. But AFSA members should not be fooled by these claims. During tough budgetary times, changes to QOL programs (by the government and DoD) are sought in an effort



Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-AL), who chairs the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs and the Senate Select Committee on Ethics, discusses policy issues with AFSA CEO Rob Frank.

A ONE OF A KIND COMMUNITY, A KIND & CARING MISSION



Your Air Force Enlisted Village is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose core mission is to provide a safe, secure home for surviving spouses of retired enlisted U.S. Airmen. Bob Hope Village is a residential, independent living community with its own assisted living and memory support residence, Hawthorn House, located on the campus. Eligible residents in need may apply for financial assistance through our Benevolent Program which is funded by donors like you.

*"We worked together to support
our family and our country."*

—Marjorie, Bob Hope Village resident

Read Marjorie's story at afev.us/news

For more information about residency at Bob Hope Village or Hawthorn House, call 800-258-1413
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The Air Force Enlisted Village is an official charity of the United States Air Force and a worthy charity of the Air Force Sergeants Association.



To make a contribution to
your Air Force Enlisted Village,
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Appearing before a Joint Session of the Senate and House Committees for Veterans Affairs, AFSA CEO Rob Frank testifies along with fellow witnesses from The Military Coalition.

to cut spending. AFSA's role is to fight for enlisted equity if changes are to be made.

Many current enlisted members believe that DoD and their chain-of-command officials fight for their benefits. Unfortunately, this is not true because that very chain is always part of the Administration and must support the budgetary priorities that work their way down from the White House to government agencies and all the way through the chain of command. In fact, military personnel programs are relatively low in spending priority for DoD, whose top priority is to fight and win wars and protect the homeland—not to run QOL programs. Simply put, Airmen need a strong voice in Washington for them to gain new benefits and to protect those they currently have.

For your Association, it is even more important that Congress understands how its decisions may impact the successful recruiting and retention of members of the All-Volunteer Force—*over 80 percent of which are enlisted members*. When policymakers make cuts, they primarily (potentially) harm enlisted members and their families. When they support such programs, they are showing that they understand the importance of enlisted members to this nation's well-being. So it is relatively common for AFSA to be fighting for priorities that are counter to those being pursued by DoD and military leaders. That is one reason why it is so important to have a strong, effective voice outside of the chain of command. Not because DoD doesn't support the efforts of enlisted members—they do, but not always as a budget priority.

It is easy to take such benefits for granted. Over the years, AFSA has been instrumental in attaining the vast majority of military pay, allowances, education and other QOL programs. These improvements did not come from military leaders or government officials. They came about in large part because of the hard work of people on AFSA's headquarters lobbying team who communicated with Congress and were successful in persuading elected officials to support these objectives.

However, just as we had to fight to achieve these benefits, today we must fight to maintain them.

Few Airmen take time to communicate with their elected officials. However, they do have a very powerful voice, so AFSA assumes that role on their behalf and does so in a positive, professional way. Association representatives regularly walk the halls of Congress, meet with members of Congress and their staffs, build relationships on the Hill, act to educate appropriate influencers as required, testify at congressional hearings and work to elevate awareness of enlisted QOL matters. So how exactly does this work, and why do all enlisted Airmen need to be a part of the Association?

Associations that are respected and have built relationships with members of Congress and their staffs are afforded opportunities to testify at congressional hearings. These hearings are little like what we see on television. The hearings that accomplish the most, and those that are most important to AFSA members, are those before specific subcommittees. These subcommittee hearings each typically focus on a specific subject for possible inclusion in major bills that will advance to the full floor later in the year. In the Defense arena, most QOL matters are developed each year by the military personnel subcommittees of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees. Their recommendations, based on the information they have collected, will become part of that year's National Defense Authorization Act. For that reason, AFSA lobbyists work very hard to get opportunities to speak at these hearings to promote enlisted QOL programs. That may entail striving to achieve a new benefit. However, because of DoD budget priorities, AFSA often must concentrate its efforts on fighting to maintain the benefits already on the table—to protect enlisted Airmen and their families.

It is also interesting to note that such hearings may involve AFSA lobbyists speaking to only a handful of



Legislative Assistant Jen Davis (left), the newest member of AFSA's Military & Government Relations team, poses with Deborah Lee James, the 23rd Secretary of the Air Force.

members of the subcommittee who happen to be present, and that committee members may come and go during the hearings. But all members of the subcommittee will know where AFSA stands because a written statement will have been submitted a few days before each hearing. The AFSA speaker (referred to as a “witness”) is typically afforded three to eight minutes to make an oral statement, then members of that subcommittee will ask questions they’ve prepared based on the written statements they have read—or based on some major point that the AFSA witness may have emphasized during oral remarks.

However, the impact of these hearings is relatively minor unless AFSA’s team has taken actions in advance. It is important to remember that the majority of influence of a committee or subcommittee actually happens during lobbying visits. These may be with the actual elected officials who are on the key committees. But, more often, the most influential work is accomplished by convincing key congressional staffers to include language in upcoming bills that we are trying to advance. If we have been successful in that effort during lobbying visits, the combined impact of lobbying and testimony can be powerful.

For that reason, it is extremely important that AFSA’s headquarters team works to build positive relationships on the Hill, with DoD and in other government agencies. We do so through efforts to be viewed as the subject-matter expert on enlisted QOL matters. We want to be the go-to source that members of Congress and their staffs think of as these matters arise. We want them to trust what we say and believe any commitments or promises we make. We want them to understand that we are cognizant of budgetary priorities, and that our comments and positions must be taken seriously. Indeed, building such relationships and being accepted as a knowledgeable, consistent, dependable, reasonable voice is paramount to our Association’s success.

Another major aspect of building such respect is in working to educate members of Congress. Because Administrations and their respective Defense Departments will usually hold QOL matters at low priority relative to other budgetary priorities—and military retirement programs are generally at the bottom of those QOL spending priorities—it is important that we serve as a trusted voice to educate members of Congress and their staffs on such matters. It is critical that these members understand how DoD forms its budget priorities and generally works to convince Congress to cut spending on these benefit programs first.

So, if we do it correctly, what is the impact of having built such relationships, having established solid trust? AFSA’s collective experience has shown that these off-the-record, behind-closed-doors “lobbying” meetings yield frank give and take. They allow deeper discussions of the issues. In fact, because (in a relative sense) testimony opportunities have diminished in recent years, these meetings have become paramount. They



AFSA Director of Military & Government Relations Morgan Brown (center) co-chairs The Military Coalition’s annual board meeting in November 2015.

are critical to getting the job done. These very important engagements in which AFSA lobbyists are regularly involved happen because we have built the respect and trust that afford these opportunities. Bottom line: We have built these strong, critical interaction opportunities by doing what we say we will; by maintaining the confidence of those with whom we meet; and by providing honest, dependable information.

It is very important that all enlisted members be part of the AFSA program. They need to do so to maintain the size, voice and impact of the Association. The larger we are in membership, the more doors that open for us on Capitol Hill—in turn, we have more QOL influence as an Association, which impacts individual benefits.

We hope our members understand how important they, and their activity, are to many parts of the process. We need their help to achieve our mission of protecting the quality of their lives, their families, their futures and even their survivors. Enlisted Airmen, especially AFSA members, are the eyes and ears of the AFSA headquarters team. And as AFSA educates its members on key matters before Congress, members need to participate in campaigns to magnify the headquarters’ voice, to petition their members of Congress on key issues and to generally complement the efforts of the headquarters team. This can be done via pen, ink and USPS, or electronically via AFSA’s online Legislative Action Center.

The net result of maintaining a strong voice through greater AFSA membership numbers, through the testimonial and lobbying efforts of our headquarters teams, through the strong relationships built with key government officials, and through the support of our members will be to achieve a greater likelihood that we will have success in convincing Congress to support enlisted programs. That is why all Air Force enlisted members should be part of this team—their team—because it is clearly in their interests.



TMC 30TH ANNIVERSARY

In December of 1985, a group of military members, Veterans and uniformed services organizations officially banded together to establish The Military Coalition. Today, TMC has 31 member organizations representing 5.5 million members and their families, making it a strong advocate indeed. It is so strong, in fact, that *Military Update* syndicated columnist Tom Philpott once said, "It may be the most formidable lobbying force ever to fight on behalf of service members, retirees and families." In November TMC's leadership came together for its annual board meeting, and posed for this photo in recognition of the Coalition's 30th anniversary.

FULFILLING LINCOLN'S PROMISE SEEKING A FIX TO THE SBP-DIC OFFSET

In March 2015, AFSA Chief Executive Officer CMSgt (Ret.) Rob Frank testified before the Military Personnel Subcommittees of the Congressional Armed Services Committee and also before a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees. One common theme that Chief Frank drove home on behalf of the AFSA membership was that Congress needed to eliminate the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) Dependence and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) offset this year.

The DIC program, administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), was established in 1956. This program

provides a tax-free monthly cash payment to the survivors and dependents of those who die from service-related conditions and to the survivors and dependents of certain disabled military retirees. Current law provides payments to these survivors of up to \$15,000 per year.

Created in 1972, SBP is, in effect, an insurance-type plan that a military retiree may purchase. It is a Department of Defense (DoD) program designed to leave an annuity to the survivors of retirement-eligible military personnel. As a voluntary program, a military retiree decides whether to purchase the coverage, and the survivor can receive up to 55 percent of the military retiree's pay, depending on the amount the retiree paid into the program each month.

Here's the problem: Despite the fact that a military retiree has purchased the SBP program, current law allows DoD to reduce the SBP annuity for survivors by \$1 for each DIC dollar the survivor receives from the VA. We refer to this as the SBP-DIC offset. It is also widely known as the "Widow's Tax." It currently affects about 63,000 military families.

Remember, not all survivors who receive SBP annuities also receive DIC dollars. However, only those who do receive DIC payments are penalized, many up to \$15,000 per year. This is an unfair gimmick in the law that needs to be rectified.

While the programs have been altered somewhat in the past half century, much still remains to be done. Despite over three decades of advocacy efforts toward eliminating the offset, Congress has only been willing to respond in half measures. Over the years, Congress has acknowledged that the Widow's Tax is wrong, but the best it would do is go ahead and penalize the survivors with the offset, then pay them a much, much smaller stipend (about \$310 per month), returning part of the offset. This modest stipend is called the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA). However, it is obvious that if the entire offset were eliminated, no SSIA would need to be paid.

While AFSA and The Military Coalition (TMC) point toward fairness and equity, Congress has been driven primarily by dollar signs. Congress emphasizes that to eliminate the offset, which it acknowledges is unfair, a \$1 billion annual DoD cost increase would accrue. In fact, when the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) addressed the offset issue earlier this year, it noted the Widow's Tax in recommending that the SBP program be altered and that premiums be hiked for retirees. Its point was that if retirees paid more for SBP and annuities were adjusted, no offset would be necessary. However, we noted the unfairness of that approach because SBP premiums would increase for all, annuities would no doubt go down for all, and there was no correlation between those who do or do not have service-connected disabilities.

In addition to providing separate testimony to Congress, AFSA often also provides testimony as one of the 27 signatory associations of TMC. On 10 December 2015, TMC had another chance to try to convince Congress to rectify the

ways we treat (and mistreat) the survivors of military retirees/Veterans. This time, the hearing was before the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) Subcommittee on Military Personnel. DoD programs fall under this committee and subcommittee. Remember, it is DoD's program (SBP) that is reduced. Personnel Subcommittee Chairman Rep. Joe Heck (R-NV) wanted to take another look at the situations that survivors face surrounding these two programs.

During this hearing, TMC emphasized the following areas, urging Chairman Heck's subcommittee to make changes to SBP and DIC to benefit military survivors:

- First, and highest priority, the offset needs to be eliminated entirely.
- Currently, SBP annuitants who remarry before age 55 lose the SBP payments entirely and permanently. However, if a DIC payment recipient remarries before age 57, he or she loses DIC payments. This is not only patently inconsistent, it is also unfair. Why should a military survivor lose the annuity in either case? At a minimum, TMC urged that the remarriage ages be made consistent at age 55.
- Members of the Selected Reserve may also participate in both programs. However, the payments to their survivors are much lower because of the formulas for their retirement pay and the resultant annuity levels. Therefore, in almost every case, if a Reserve survivor should have received both SBP and DIC payments, his or her SBP payments will almost certainly be wiped out.

As an Association keenly aware of the extraordinary contributions of military spouses and family members, we will continue to fight against the SBP-DIC Offset or "Widow's Tax." We urge our members to direct their elected officials to follow our lead on the issue by visiting AFSA's Web page and utilize the Legislative Action Center.

34 U.S. CONGRESS MEMBERS NOT SEEKING RE-ELECTION

The following table lists the members of Congress who are retiring at the end of the current 114th Congress or seeking other political office in lieu of running for re-election.

Name	Chamber Party	State	First Elected	Reason	Announced
Total Leaving: 34					
Senate:					
David Vitter	Rep.	Louisiana	2004	Retire	11/21/15
Marco Rubio	Rep.	Florida	2010	President	04/13/15
Harry Reid	Dem.	Nevada	1986	Retire	03/27/15
Dan Coats	Rep.	Indiana	2010	Retire	03/24/15
Barbara Mikulski	Dem.	Maryland	1986	Retire	03/02/15
Barbara Boxer	Dem.	California	1992	Retire	01/08/15
Name	Chamber Party	State	First Elected	Reason	Announced
House of Representatives:					
Ruben Hinojosa	Dem.	Texas	1996	Retire	11/13/15
Cynthia Lummis	Rep.	Wyoming	2008	Retire	11/12/15
Sam Farr	Dem.	California	1993	Retire	11/12/15
Joe Pitts	Rep.	Pennsylvania	1996	Retire	11/06/15
Richard Nugent	Rep.	Florida	2010	Retire	11/02/15
Ed Whitfield	Rep.	Kentucky	1994	Retire	09/29/15
Randy Neugebauer	Rep.	Texas	2003	Retire	09/17/15
John Carney	Dem.	Delaware	2010	Governor	09/16/15
Dan Benishek	Rep.	Michigan	2010	Retire	09/15/15
John Kline	Rep.	Minnesota	2002	Retire	09/03/15
David Jolly	Rep.	Florida	2014	Senate	07/20/15
Todd Young	Rep.	Indiana	2010	Senate	07/12/15
Alan Grayson	Dem.	Florida	2008	Senate	07/09/15
Joe Heck	Rep.	Nevada	2010	Senate	07/06/15
Ann Kirkpatrick	Dem.	Arizona	2008	Senate	05/26/15
Loretta Sanchez	Dem.	California	1996	Senate	05/14/15
Marlin Stutzman	Rep.	Indiana	2010	Senate	05/09/15
Ron DeSantis	Rep.	Florida	2012	Senate	05/06/15
Lois Capps	Dem.	California	1998	Retire	04/08/15
Tammy Duckworth	Dem.	Illinois	2012	Senate	03/30/15
Patrick Murphy	Dem.	Florida	2012	Senate	03/23/15
Donna Edwards	Dem.	Maryland	2008	Senate	03/10/15
Candice Miller	Rep.	Michigan	2002	Retire	03/05/15
Chris Van Hollen	Dem.	Maryland	2002	Senate	03/04/15
Janice Hahn	Dem.	California	2011	County Board	02/18/15
Chris Gibson	Rep.	New York	2010	Retire	01/06/15
Mike Fitzpatrick	Rep.	Pennsylvania	2004	Retire	11/04/14
Charlie Rangel	Dem.	New York	1970	Retire	11/04/14

NOTE: Former Speaker John Boehner, an Ohio Republican, resigned from Congress on Oct. 31. A special election will be held on June 7, 2016. Sen. Coats previously served from 1989-1999; Reps. Kirkpatrick and Grayson did not serve from 2011-2013; Rep. Fitzpatrick did not serve from 2007-2011.

SOURCE: Data reported on and compiled by Greg Giroux (ggroux@bloomberg.net) and Alex Tanzi (atanzi@bloomberg.net) of Bloomberg; edited by Katherine Rizzo (krizzo5@bloomberg.net).



Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force James A. Cody introduces himself to TSgt Thomas White during his visit with Airmen assigned to the Air Force District of Washington March 23, 2015, at Joint Base Andrews, Md. White is the unit training manager for AFDW. *(U.S. Air Force photo/MSgt Tammie Moore)*

PROUD. PROFESSIONAL. PERFORMERS.



AMID UNCERTAINTY AND CHANGE, THE CHARACTER OF OUR AIRMEN REMAINS AS STRONG AS EVER

**By Chief Master Sergeant
of the Air Force James A. Cody**

The last three years have been a whirlwind of uncertainty and change. We've witnessed the constant dialogue of sequestration and threats of a government shutdown, even feeling the impacts of an actual 16-day shutdown in October 2013. Our force has downsized to unprecedented manning levels—the smallest force since we became a separate service in 1947—only to now face the challenge of growing our end strength in light of unexpected and emerging threats around the world. We've also completely revamped our enlisted evaluation and promotion systems to ensure performance is the most important factor when we evaluate and identify Airmen for promotion, specific positions and added responsibility.

The Air Force today looks quite different from the Air Force of a few years ago, with one glaring exception: you.

Through the continued churn of uncertainty and change, the character of our Airmen remains as firm as ever before. You continue to be the enlisted force that stands as the example for all other nations around the world. There are many labels that apply to the enlisted force today—most educated, most experienced and most capable in our nation's history; best trained, best equipped and best prepared enlisted force of all time. Those and others are all true, and certainly illustrate how far we've come as an enlisted force, but what rings loudest as I spend time with Airmen around the globe is that you are proud, professional performers.

PROUD

Arguably the proudest moment of any Airman's career is when he or she crosses into the blue at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas. It's a feeling of accomplishment, of stepping into a purpose and challenge greater than anything experienced before. Your pride grows and evolves throughout a career. It looks different at times, but it certainly doesn't disappear. It's clear as I meet with our Airmen that you're

extremely proud of what you do to serve our nation. You understand the immense responsibility and it shows: It drives you to stand taller.

Staff Sgt. Haida StarEagle is a clear example of the pride of our Airmen. Athena and I met Haida last year during a stop at Scott Air Force Base, Ill. She shared her story about her experience with the Single Airman Programming Initiative and how it provided the boost she needed both personally and professionally. Her smile and passion energized the room as she listed the opportunities she's had to bond with her fellow Airmen. It was exciting just listening to her story. She was not only proud to stand and represent her fellow single and unaccompanied Airmen; she was proud to simply be an Airman and to serve in our United States Air Force.

Senior Master Sgt. Hope Skibitsky is another Airman who is proud of her service to our nation. We met her during a stop at Travis Air Force Base, Calif., where at the time she was the wing's Career Assistance Advisor. As a former Military Training Instructor, Hope was certainly a sharp Airman who stood out in a crowd, but it was her pride and passion to help others that struck us most. She would talk at length about the Airmen she served and the support she was honored to provide. If you let her (and we did), she could and would talk passionately for hours on end, never mentioning herself; she was always focused on others. Her pride extended to the men and women who came in and out of her office every day, looking for the direction and spark only she could provide.

Haida and Hope are but two of the many examples of the pride we see around our Air Force. Everywhere we travel we see it firsthand from Airmen who recognize the significance of their service. You simply love what you do, and you're proud to do it.



CMSAF Cody speaks to crew chiefs assigned to the 31st Maintenance Squadron, June 16, 2015, at Aviano Air Base, Italy. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Deana Heitzman/Released)

Senior Master Sgt. Hope Skibitsky, Career Assistance Advisor, and Staff Sgt. Charles Wilson, First Term Airmen Center team leader, stand in front of the CAA's office at Travis Air Force Base, Calif. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Christopher Carranza)



PROFESSIONAL

Pride in service often motivates Airmen to go further than ever before. It's driven us to be the professional force we are today. You, the enlisted men and women serving in today's Air Force, are not simply technicians. You are professional Airmen. You voluntarily serve in the Profession of Arms, a commitment that comes with a higher calling, and a higher standard.

A few months ago, I sat with the services' Senior Enlisted Leaders and Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, and we spoke about the professionalism of today's enlisted force. While we discussed initiatives to develop the force of our future, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that today's enlisted force is the most professional and capable force in our nation's history.

Secretary Carter shared the story of one of his past executive assistants, an enlisted Airman, who completed her doctoral thesis on the F-35 and the impact acquisition delays have on national and global security. Today, now-Dr. Monique Maldonado is working on her second thesis and leading her own division of professors at American Military University.

In that same conversation, we talked about how you continue to redefine what it means to be an enlisted Airman. You've taken us to a higher platform by embracing greater responsibility and more challenging leadership positions. Enlisted Airmen fill critical roles from space to the battlefield. You fly and operate every one of our satellites, ensure our fleets of aircraft are mission ready, and provide support to all Airmen and families—the lifeblood of our force. You also collect and deliver the intelligence fellow enlisted Airmen use to engage the enemy or rescue the fallen.

It's clear our senior leaders, military and civilian, know who you are and what you do. Commanders are integrating you into their staffs at every level of command, and congressmen and congresswomen now know what it's like to have your support. They are grateful for your service and sacrifice, and your commitment to development and education. Your knowledge, experience and expertise are simply unmatched. There is no doubt you are the most professional enlisted Airmen the world has ever known.

PERFORMERS

Your proud spirit and professionalism converge to produce the high-performing Airmen our nation has come to expect. Regardless of the situation, or the challenges and uncertainty you face, you continue to perform at the highest levels. This year alone you have generated 27,000 Close Air Support sorties in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria; conducted 31,000 ISR missions in the CENTCOM Area of Operations; and delivered more than 1.3 billion pounds of fuel. AFSOC Commandos have eliminated more than 1,500 enemy personnel from the battlefield, and we've completed 67 percent of the strikes against ISIL since operations began in August 2014.

Of course, that's simply a broad scope and falls short of highlighting the individual tasks and missions you execute at the local level every day. There are countless examples of Airmen making significant strides to deliver airpower, strengthen partnerships and enhance capabilities for the Air Force and America.

At Travis Air Force Base, Calif., Tech Sgt. Ana Fierro planned and executed Mobility Support Advisory Squadron training teams in both Panama and the Dominican Republic. She built and led large teams of subject-matter experts from different services, commands and countries. It was her pride and professionalism that pushed her and her team to accomplish first-of-their-kind missions to strengthen partnerships and better prepare our allies to conduct security and counter-crime operations.

At Aviano Air Base, Italy, Staff Sgt. Aaron Broyles' experience and technical knowledge delivered a new Instrument Landing System for the 31st Fighter Wing. He led a 12-person team of experts from different organizations to install, optimize, flight-check and commission the system in two weeks. It wasn't easy, but he made it look easy. Now one of the busiest wings in Europe has a more reliable Air Traffic Control and Landing System to support its flying mission.

At Kadena Air Base, Japan, Senior Airman Eric Waldrup successfully led 18 crewmembers through six priority evacuation missions, including two high-risk pregnancies, two adult severe-burn victims, a pediatric burn patient and a post-cardiac-arrest victim. His leadership calls him the premiere Aeromedical Evacuation Technician in Pacific Command's only Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron. He's been lauded by senior leadership and multinational partners alike because he is a professional and always performs at the highest level.

At every Air Force installation around the globe, there are countless examples of Airmen

Security forces personnel from the 341st Security Forces Group explain key components of a launch facility at Malmstrom Air Force Base, Mont., to CMSAF Cody (right) during a tour of the base. (U.S. Air Force photo/Airman 1st Class Collin Schmidt)

At every Air Force installation, there are countless examples of Airmen breaking new ground, establishing new standards of excellence and performance.

breaking new ground, establishing new standards of excellence and performance. We are the Air Force we are because we have Airmen who perform. Men and women like you who know "Integrity First, Service Before Self and Excellence In All We Do" are not simply slogans we paste on walls, but core values that guide our daily actions.

THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT

The uncertainty and change we've grown accustomed to over the years will likely continue for the foreseeable future. We'll move forward with the necessary agility and meet the demands the emerging environment will certainly introduce. It won't be easy, but with the proud, professional performers we have on our team, we will prevail.

America's Airmen are the asymmetric advantage we have over any other Air Force in the world. Athena and I continue to be extremely proud of who you are and what you and your families do for our country. You are the pride of our Air Force, and we are honored to serve beside you.



THE FUTURE IS NOW



The AF COOL Program has reported a 96 percent pass rate across 330 uniquely sought credentials, and more than 1,300 credentialing goals have been established.

INTRODUCING AF COOL, A NEW CREDENTIALING OPPORTUNITY FOR ENLISTED AIRMEN

By Mr. Russell M. Gray, DEAO/5038

When military members transition from their service commitments, many are looking at what their next career paths will be. When they step into an interview, they are often presented with one question, “So what do you bring to the table?” In the past, though, many of these service members have walked out of these interviews wondering where they went wrong after being told they didn’t have the certifications or licensures that their civilian counterparts walked in with—despite their years of job experience, skills and knowledge.

When it comes to training, our Airmen need to be on an equal playing field with their civilian counterparts to ensure they are receiving the same opportunities. That’s where a new

credentialing program for enlisted Airmen comes into play: AF COOL, or the Air Force Credentialing Opportunities On-Line.

AF COOL bridges the gap between military life cycle training and civilian credentialing requirements. It does this by replacing the previous MilTA funding method for civilian credentialing, allowing active duty enlisted Airmen to obtain primary AFSC credentials or SNCOs to obtain leadership/management credentials. With more than 1,800 program-recognized credentials, AF COOL already has funded over \$112,000 for Airmen seeking credentials in the past six months.

The AF COOL Program has reported a 96 percent pass rate across 330 uniquely sought credentials, and more than 1,300 credentialing goals have been established. To date, the top five credentials sought have been:

1. Airframe and Powerplant (A&P),
2. Certified Manager (CM),
3. Project Management Professional (PMP),
4. Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP), and
5. Professional in Human Resources (PHR).

In short, AF COOL has been a huge success, especially considering full implementation has only been nine months.

Here's an overview on how to get started in six easy steps:

Step 1: On the AF COOL home page (<https://afvec.langley.af.mil/afvec/Public/COOL>), select the "Search AFSC Related Credentials" screen, and you will see the AFSC-specific credentials that you are eligible for and that AF COOL will pay for on your behalf. (Each credential includes the following tabs: Summary, Eligibility, Comments, Exams, Other and Related Occupations.)

Step 2: Once you have reviewed the choices, pick one of the credentials to complete. When you click on the one you want, you will see an icon (blue with green arrow symbol). Click on this icon and an email will be sent to your supervisor. Your supervisor will then be asked to validate that you meet whatever eligibility requirements are listed for that credential.

Once you have your supervisor's approval, you are cleared to begin working towards that credential completion.

Step 3: Review the exam(s) necessary to complete the credential. Review the gap analysis and the resources page to ensure you have the required knowledge to successfully pass the exam(s). Ensure that you upload the required supporting documentation (i.e., EPRs, applications, prerequisite certifications, etc.) Once you are ready to test, go to step 4.

Step 4: Click on the "Start a Funding Request" link on the right-hand sidebar. Follow the prompts to complete the funding request application. You will need the following information from the credential website:

- Testing location
- Cost for exam including admin fees
- Testing Window; if you are testing outside of the AFVEC system-allowed 30-day window, please contact the AF COOL CPO at DSN 749-5115 or CCAF.COOL@US.AF.MIL.

Once you complete the application, an email will be sent to your supervisor, who will review the request and approve or reject the application. You will be notified via email once this action is completed.

Step 5: If approved, a funding request is then electronically routed to the AF COOL office, which will make the payment on your behalf.

Step 6: Take the exam(s) and follow up with the AF COOL CPO to ensure your scores are reported to close out your educational goal. Once the AF COOL CPO receives your grades, they will notify you via email that your educational goal has been completed and send you a voluntary End-of-Course Survey. This survey will be used to better assist the AF COOL Program in providing a better service for future applicants.

For more information, contact the AF COOL Program Office at DSN 749-5115 or ccaf.cool@us.af.mil.

AIR FORCE CREDENTIALING OPPORTUNITIES ONLINE (AF COOL) PROGRAM TOP 5 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

★ What is the first step for an enlisted Airman to get a credential?
In order for an Airman to apply for a credential, he/she must have an approved AF COOL Credentialing goal listed. After researching the various credentials available to them, an Airman must select one as his/her AF COOL credentialing goal.

★ How many certifications or licensures can I complete & does AF COOL pay for coursework and books?
In the near future, while a member is on active duty, AF COOL will cover as many primary AFSC credentials as possible for the member to obtain as long as they remain within their \$4500 cap. This cap also covers recertification, coursework and training materials from AF COOL CPO approved sources.

★ I just took my exam and paid for my licensure myself. Is it possible to get reimbursed?
No. Reimbursements are not authorized by the AF COOL Program Office (CPO).

★ I am interested in pursuing other credentials not listed on the AF COOL site, can I pursue those credentials?
Airmen may pursue credentials that are not identified as being AF COOL-funded at their own expense, through the use of the Montgomery G.I.Bill, Post 9/11 G.I.Bill, or other programs.

★ One of the qualifications to obtain a credential is that the member must hold at least the 5 skill level. How can I load my goals?
Members assigned to AFSCs SR/SDIs without skills levels will need to contact the AF COOL Program Office (CPO) for manual loading of credentialing goals.

THE CHIEF MASTER SERGEANTS OF THE AIR FORCE



The Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (CMSAF) represents the highest enlisted level of leadership and, as such, provides direction for the entire enlisted corps while representing its members' interests, as appropriate, to the American public and to all levels of government.

While employing unique talents, top-notch skills, and invaluable perspectives, the CMSAF serves as the personal advisor to the Chief of Staff and the Secretary of the Air Force. The CMSAF is responsible for representing the USAF enlisted personnel on all issues regarding the welfare, readiness, morale, and proper utilization and progress of the enlisted force.



1st CMSAF: 1967-1969
PAUL W. AIREY
(Deceased: March 11, 2009)



2nd CMSAF: 1969-1971
DONALD L. HARLOW
(Deceased: June 18, 1997)



7th CMSAF: 1981-1983
ARTHUR L. ANDREWS
(Deceased: Oct. 26, 1996)



8th CMSAF: 1983-1986
SAM E. PARISH



13th CMSAF: 1999-2002
FREDERICK J. "JIM" FINCH



14th CMSAF: 2002-2006
GERALD R. MURRAY



3rd CMSAF: 1971-1973
RICHARD D. KISLING
(Deceased: Nov. 3, 1985)



4th CMSAF: 1973-1977
THOMAS N. BARNES
(Deceased: March 17, 2003)



5th CMSAF: 1977-1979
ROBERT D. GAYLOR



6th CMSAF: 1979-1981
JAMES M. McCOY



9th CMSAF: 1986-1990
JAMES C. BINNICKER
(Deceased: March 21, 2015)



10th CMSAF: 1990-1994
GARY R. PFINGSTON
(Deceased: June 23, 2007)



11th CMSAF: 1994-1996
DAVID J. CAMPANALE



12th CMSAF: 1996-1999
ERIC W. BENKEN



15th CMSAF: 2006-2009
RODNEY J. MCKINLEY



16th CMSAF: 2009-2013
JAMES A. ROY



17th CMSAF: 2013-Present
JAMES A. CODY

COMMAND SENIOR ENLISTED LEADERS AND COMMAND CHIEF MASTER SERGEANTS

Major Air Commands are major subdivisions of the Air Force and are assigned major segments of the Air Force's overall mission.



CMSgt JAMES DAVIS
U.S. AIR FORCES IN EUROPE



CMSgt STEVE McDONALD
AIR COMBAT COMMAND



CMSgt DAVID STATON
AIR EDUCATION AND
TRAINING COMMAND



CMSgt CALVIN WILLIAMS
AIR FORCE GLOBAL
STRIKE COMMAND



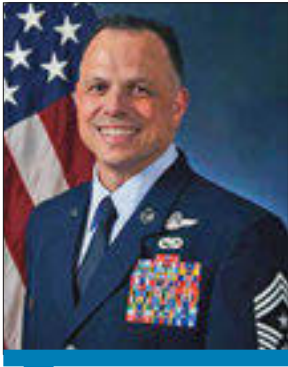
CMSgt MICHAEL J. WARNER
AIR FORCE MATERIEL
COMMAND



CMSgt CAMERON KIRKSEY
AIR FORCE RESERVE
COMMAND



CMSgt PATRICK McMAHON
AIR FORCE SPACE
COMMAND



CMSgt MATTHEW CARUSO
AIR FORCE SPECIAL
OPERATIONS COMMAND



CMSgt SHELINA FREY
AIR MOBILITY COMMAND



CMSgt HAROLD HUTCHINSON
PACIFIC AIR FORCES



CMSgt JAMES HOTALING
AIR NATIONAL GUARD
HEADQUARTERS



CMSgt MITCHELL BRUSH
HEADQUARTERS NATIONAL
GUARD BUREAU



CMSgt WALKER COTTINGHAM
AIR FORCE OFFICE OF
SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS



CMSgt FARRELL D. THOMAS
AIR FORCE DISTRICT
OF WASHINGTON



CMSgt MAXWELL GRINDSTAFF
U.S. AIR FORCE ACADEMY



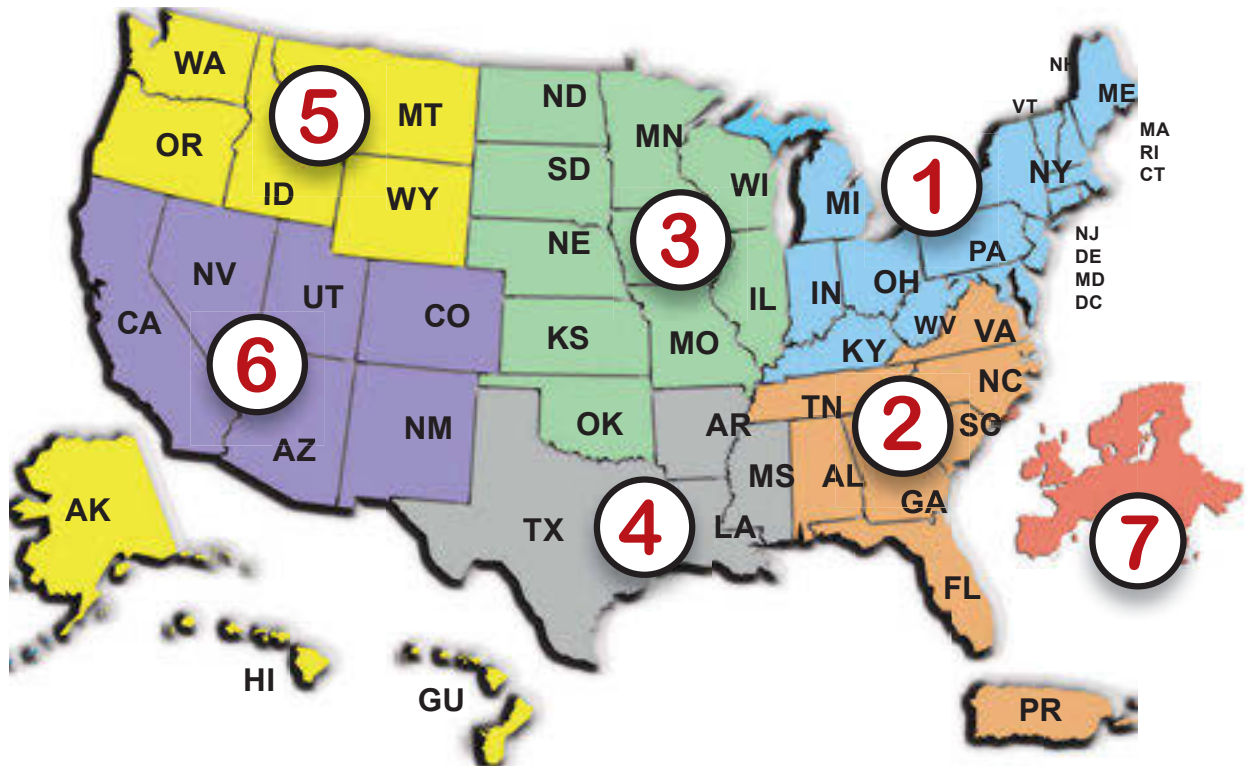
CMSgt JACK JOHNSON
NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY
ORGANIZATION
SUPREME ALLIED
COMMANDER
TRANSFORMATION



CMSgt WILLIAM TURNER
U.S. TRANSPORTATION
COMMAND



CMSgt RAMON COLON-LOPEZ
U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND



DIVISION 1

CONNECTICUT

F0182: Bradley/Hartford, CT

DELAWARE

F0201: Dover AFB, DE

INDIANA

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Two F-16 Fighting Falcons fly over desert terrain circa 2000. (USAF photo)

THE F-16 AT 40

STILL GOING STRONG AFTER FOUR DECADES, THE FIGHTING FALCON IS A TESTAMENT TO AERONAUTICAL DEPENDABILITY AND ADAPTABILITY

By Sean M. Miskimins, AMM Curator

As the Vietnam War (1961–1975) was coming to a close, the desire for a lightweight fighter with greater air maneuverability prompted General Dynamics to create the F-16 Fighting Falcon. Despite this official moniker, the F-16 was soon nicknamed “Viper” due to its resemblance (especially in the nose area) to the Colonial Vipers from the TV series *Battlestar Galactica*. (Those of us old enough to remember the 1970s will recall that Sci-Fi was all the rage at the time.)

While the Fighting Falcon (aka Viper) may not have flown in space,

it has shown its durability—as well as its ability to adapt and thrive—in the last four decades.

The F-16 was originally conceived as a good-weather day-fighter capable of supersonic speeds. It was given a bubble canopy to help improve the pilot’s vision. It was armed with 20 mm canon (Vulcan M 61) for close combat but also carried missiles (in modern times Sidewinder or Sparrow missiles). Air-to-ground missiles were also part of its arsenal. Like the Minutemen of America’s Colonial times, the Fighting Falcon would come to be known for its

constant state of readiness, as well as its ability to take flight quickly should the need to defend America arise. It was first produced in 1973 and would make its initial flight in 1975—the last year of the Vietnam War.

After the Vietnam War with another U.S. war not on the horizon for another decade and a half (the Gulf War of 1991), the use of the F-16 was limited. With no demand from combat, the F-16 saw action of another sort, as it quickly became the plane of choice for the highly marketable USAF Thunderbirds air

Ground crewmembers make their final pre-flight checks under the noses and in the cockpits of the most famous F-16s, the USAF Thunderbirds, at Nellis AFB, Nevada, in 1983. Two years later the Israeli Air Force would achieve the first air-to-air "kill" by an F-16 in combat. (SSgt Bob Simons photo, USAF)



demonstration team. Millions of Americans over the years have seen just what the nearly 33-foot-wide fighter can do in flight, thanks to the thousands of air shows the Thunderbirds have performed. While its speed of 1,300 MPH (Mach 2) was often on display at these air shows, its range of some 2,600 miles was not.

By the 1980s, the F-16 also became a fixture in the air force ranks of America's allies around the world. In fact, the Israeli Air Force got the first F-16 air-to-air "kill" in 1981 when an Israeli-piloted F-16 downed a Syrian helicopter. The Israeli Air Force continued to use F-16s extensively the following year in military actions against Lebanon. By the late 1980s, Pakistan's Air Force also was using them against invaders of its air space during the Soviet-Afghan War (1980–1989), and Turkey's Air Force did the same while intervening in the 1993 Bosnia-Herzegovina crisis in the Balkans.

But USAF F-16 Fighting Falcons first saw action in war in 1991's

Desert Storm, where they targeted Iraqi targets that had invaded Kuwait. More action would follow in the ensuing decades: Post-9/11, the F-16 was used in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, Operation Iraqi Freedom and in the skies above Libya during the 2011 crisis there.

As years turned to decades, General Dynamics stopped producing the F-16 and Lockheed-Martin took over. In total, some 4,600 F-16s have been produced in the last 40 years. The latest forms of the "Viper" carry LAU rocket pods, which are each capable of carrying 19 rockets per pod. Some of these pods are even packing Sniper capability. Advanced Targeting Pods, nicknamed Sniper ATP for their high level of accuracy, are just some of the latest technology to be added

to the F-16. The Royal Netherlands Air Force, which is one of the 25 Air Forces around the world still flying the Fighting Falcon, just ordered the Sniper ATP for their F-16s. And both Iraq and Egypt flew missions against ISIS targets in the Middle East in 2015 using the F-16. As of 2015, the Fighting Falcon is the second most common aircraft of all Air Forces around the world.

As for the USAF's F-16s, plans are to keep them in service through at least 2025, thus ensuring the Fighting Falcon will see a 50th anniversary in flight. While there have been F-16 accidents over the years, only two were fatal to USAF personnel. A 1982 crash in South Korea as well as a 1994 crash at Pope AFB, North Carolina, are the only fatal USAF Fighting Falcon mishaps. (In November 2014, an F-16 from Tyndall AFB, Florida, crashed in the Gulf of Mexico, killing its pilot. The pilot, however, was a civilian employee of the 82nd Aerial Targets Squadron.)

Such a safety record for such a frequently used, high-speed aircraft only speaks to the quality of the equipment as well as the dedication of the enlisted mechanics who service the F-16s every day at USAF installations around the world.

Sources Consulted:

Jane's Encyclopedia of Aircraft and Air Forces Monthly October & November 2015 issues.



Tools lay strewn about the ground as enlisted mechanics work on an F-16 circa 1990. The F-16 saw extensive action around this time in Desert Storm. (USAF photo)

A LIFE OF SERVICE AND HONOR



Remembering SMSgt (Ret.) Joseph Kuchera, AFSA International President 2003-2005

Beloved husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather Joseph John "Joe" Kuchera, 76, of Canonsburg, Penn., passed away peacefully Friday, Jan. 15, 2016, surrounded by loved ones.

Past president Kuchera also served as president of and, later, senior adviser to Golden Triangle Chapter 259 in Pittsburgh. He served on the committee that designed and implemented the Air Force Memorial in Washington, D.C., and is honored at the memorial with his name inscribed on the monument.

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