

AFSA

MAGAZINE

MAY/JUNE 2015

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE AIR FORCE SERGEANTS ASSOCIATION | www.hqafsa.org

ALIGNING AIRMEN

BMT undergoes biggest changes in 68 years and restores respect to MTI role



GLOBAL ALLIANCE
The role of Airmen in NATO's ACT

PAC UPDATE
Bylaw changes, agenda, and more

FAITH AND WAR
The history of USAF chaplains



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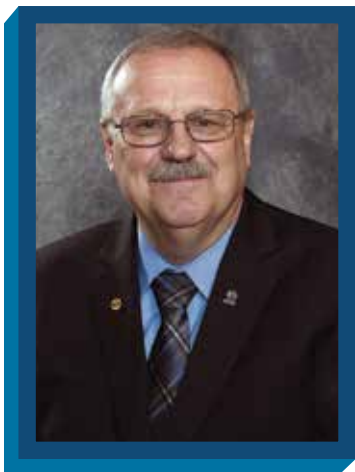
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Daniel Yeomans,
CMSgt, USAF Retired
AFSA International
President

FAMILY MATTERS

Hello again, AFSA nation. It is once again my great pleasure and honor to share my thoughts with you as we enter the spring of 2015. I hope this letter finds you all happy and well!

I have had the opportunity to travel extensively during the first part of this year. I enjoyed the excitement of the Chapter 751 annual awards at Wright-Patterson AFB. In February, I visited Chapter 1474 and experienced the splendor of Eielson's annual awards as the keynote speaker. (Did I share that the temperature there reached minus 50 at one point?) I also traveled to Georgia to visit Chapter 404 at Robins and 460 at Moody, and met with many Chapter and Wing leaders. In between, I attended super Division conferences at Divisions 1, 4, and 6. And I am packing for Division 3 as I write this column.

At each and every stop along the way, I was thrilled to see AFSA's four pillars in action:

1. The legislative front: Our AFSA membership is aware of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission and the impact it could potentially have on all Airmen.

2. The membership front: More than 8,000 members have taken advantage of our "5 years for \$25" plan to make a long-term commitment to AFSA! (Please note that this offer ends after this year—so please don't wait!)

3. The communications front: The willingness of our Chapters and Divisions to share information using email, snail mail, newsletters, websites, social media, etc., is adding

Last year, we changed our rules to allow family members to hold office at the Chapter level. In May, we initiated a focused membership campaign targeting our non-member family members to "join the fight."

to AFSA's renewed informational programs and expanding our reach to better tell our story to every member and non-member.

4. The fraternity front: The friendship and comradery in AFSA is evident and increases in strength each and every day!

One thing that has really struck me in my travels is the impact of family on our Association. Last year, we changed our rules to allow family members to hold office at the Chapter level. In May, we initiated a focused membership campaign targeting our non-member family members to "join the fight." Our family members are down in 2015, and we need to turn that around.

Why would a family member join AFSA?

- Every family member aged 18 and older is eligible for AFSA membership. For \$25 they can sign up for five years and enjoy all the benefits of AFSA membership. Have you been to the AFSA website and checked out the member benefits section? There you'll find scholarships, educational opportunities, shopping discounts, and more.

- Benefits reductions often have a greater impact on military family members than the individual or individuals in that family who wear a uniform. We are fighting to keep your commissaries open, to ensure medical care is available to you when the base cannot provide it, to make sure the pay your family receives actually covers what you need in light of increasing costs, to guarantee that all Airmen and their families have transferability options on the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and more. Every AFSA member—including family members—gives us the power we need on Capitol Hill to be effective.
- Family members are needed to allow us to initiate key family-support

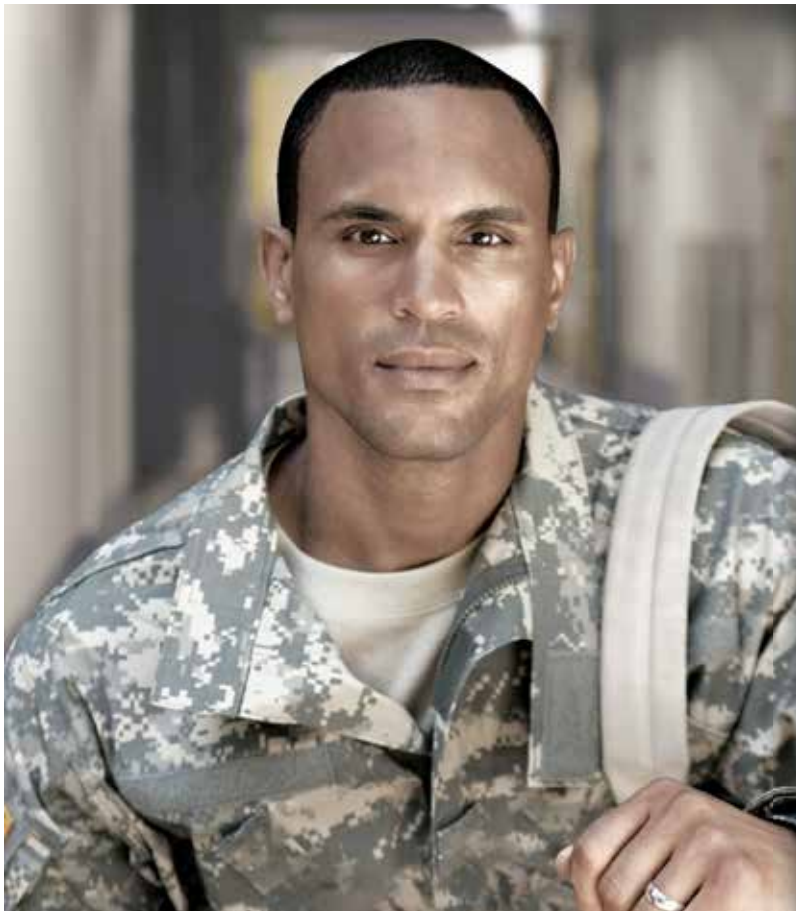
initiatives at the Chapter level. Support for family members whose spouse is deployed, child care to allow for young couples to enjoy date nights, actionable support of the Air Force's Resiliency program, fun days for children, coupons for those in need—these are but a few of the programs initiated by Chapter family members that have been successful. But to offer these great programs we need *you*, the family members, to be part of our team.

- We have a great base of family members in AFSA. We invite new family members to meet these great people, forge new friendships, network, and flat-out join AFSA and have some fun—and we do have a good time when we get together!

➔ For details on how your family members can join AFSA and the member benefits they'll enjoy, visit the AFSA home page at www.hqafsa.org.

As always, I want to end with a *big* thank you to all AFSA members for your continued support—it does make a difference. God bless you, your families, and our Air Force, as we continue to progress through 2015. I am honored to lead this Association and need your help each and every day. As always, feel free to contact me at afsa.president@roisc.com.

Daniel C. Jomans



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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*.

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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).

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Matthew S. Console

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On the Cover: An Air Force trainee uses a rope to cross an artificial stream during the week-long Basic Expeditionary Airmen Skills Training portion of Basic Military Training. (Photo by Shane S. Karp)

AFSA Q&A

Among the priorities in AFSA's 2015 Legislative Platform are issues like establishing a catastrophic leave program for military members and continuing to monitor policies related to Veteran health care benefits. As such, we recently asked our members to weigh in on both topics.

TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT?

Question: *If the Department of Defense allowed military members to transfer their leaves to another person, would you ever take advantage of that opportunity?*

"I earn my leave. While I have leave saved for emergencies, I plan my leave usage every year to ensure I don't lose any. If members truly needed more leave, there should be reasons authorized under permissive."

—D.A.

"I've earned it and should do the best I can to use it to maintain my resiliency."

—T.L.

"If members are responsible enough to agree on giving/taking leave, it should be acceptable."

—M.L.

"There is absolutely no need to transfer leave to another military person. There are so many programs available for absences from work to utilize if it was for any type of medical absence, including [for] family members. Thirty

“ I would take advantage of it, however, I feel it could get taken advantage of as it would be a 'pressured' or 'Air Force' thing to do. It would have to be a closely protected and scrutinized process.

—G.C.



days is plenty. If anything, we should get the thirty days but not be required to take leave on our scheduled off days (normal Saturday or Sunday off)."

—T.S.

"I am now retired, but there were many times while in active duty that I scrambled to take use/lose leave by the [end of] September. If I had the opportunity to give it to someone who really needed it, I would have transferred some days. It should mirror the civil service leave-transfer rules for those in need of extra days."

—M.A.

CARD OF CHOICE?

Question: *If you have received a Veterans Choice Card, have you been able to see a private doctor?*

"I received my card but have not used it due to the reason that I live within 40 miles of the VA hospital and my appointment was made less than a month ago."

—C.A.

"I tried to find out *how* to use it and ran into double iron doors! No one wanted to talk about it, and I still have no answers [as to] whether I am eligible."

—M.D.

"The nearest VA clinic is 42 driving miles across two very large mountains, (Allegheny and North). When I called in to sign up, I was curtly told I could not do so because as a crow flies I was within 40 miles."

—D.M.

"VA interpreted the 40-mile rule as the crow flies."

—G.M.

Comments appearing in the Airmen's Forum are culled from letters, emails, and social media posts sent by our members and supporters to Headquarters AFSA. The Forum serves as a platform for members to voice their opinions on a given subject, which may or may not reflect the views or positions of the Association as a whole. AFSA Magazine reserves the right to select and condense letters for publication. Send your questions and comments to AFSAComm@hqafsa.org.

AFSA Comment: Good news: VA recently changed the way it calculates the 40-mile rule. Under the previous guidelines, Veterans had to reside at least 40 miles in a straight shot, or "as the crow flies," from the nearest VA clinic. The new guidelines use the actual driving distance as calculated by commercial mapping services such as Google Maps or MapQuest.

"Have not received Veterans Choice card. All my medical needs are handled here in Nashville and Murfreesboro, Tenn."

—C.M.

"I have yet to receive a Veterans Choice Program card. I am within 40 miles of a clinic, but it only has limited services and a shortage of doctors. I cannot get an appointment; I am a Priority 1 Veteran."

—H.W.

AFSA Comment: The Choice Card was distributed in late 2014 and early 2015 to all Veterans enrolled for care at VA. The card provides back-up care if VA cannot see a Veteran in 30 days or if VA's closest medical facility is

challenging to access. In situations like this, Veterans are eligible to receive care outside VA. Letters were mailed to Veterans along with the Choice Card and information about eligibility. If you did not receive yours, contact your Enrollment Coordinator at your nearest VA medical facility and/or call 1-877-222-VETS (8387).

“ I love this program! I was finally able to receive much-needed chiropractic care. My health and my entire way of life is so much improved in just the last two months! My only concern with this program is my chiropractor still has not received any payment from the VA or a response regarding the request for more treatment.

—K.M.

”



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VA'S PROBLEMS PERSIST A YEAR AFTER THE SCANDAL OCCURS, WAIT TIMES REMAIN LONG

Last year, a major scandal involving medical appointment wait times at the Department of Veterans Affairs contributed to the resignation of one VA secretary and the appointment of a new one. However, after numerous hearings, signed legislation, and billions of dollars appropriated, VA medical appointment wait times continue to be dangerously long, which is unacceptable. The “Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act,” passed last August, has yet to yield any apparent major improvements.

In fact, according to an Associated Press report based on a study of hundreds of VA facilities from Sept. 1, 2014, to Feb. 28, 2015, the number of medical appointments with wait times of 90 days or more has nearly doubled, despite legislative and leadership changes. It is apparent that the VA health care system as currently structured may well be an “untamable monster” that needs to be (at least partially) replaced by a new system based on an entirely different paradigm.

AFSA has called for a legally binding “Veterans’ Bill of Rights” that guarantees specific benefits and assured levels of customer service from “cradle to grave”—from entry into military service until separation, and for the rest of a Veteran’s life (including for those who serve full military careers). However, in the meantime, we will continue to urge Congress to make systematic changes until the American people can know that its government will return the honor, commitment, and faith of those who have sacrificed so much on behalf of our national interests.

KEEPING FAITH AFSA BACKS TRICARE PRIME ACT LEGISLATION

On March 19, Rep. John Kline (R-MN) introduced H.R. 1500, the “Keep Faith with TRICARE Prime Act.” AFSA is endorsing Kline’s legislation, which, simply put, seeks to ensure we keep our promises to provide the best quality and most cost-efficient health care for our military retirees. Readers may recall that back in 2013, DoD eliminated TRICARE Prime for retirees who lived farther than 40 miles from a Military Treatment Facility (MTF). In response, Rep. Kline

introduced legislation to roll back these changes and was able to ease some of the burdens of the change in the FY14 NDAA.

Unfortunately, that legislation did not provide all retirees negatively impacted by the option to retain TRICARE Prime. H.R. 1500 would give all retirees who lived 100 miles or more from an MTF on the date the President signed the FY14 NDAA a chance to get back on TRICARE Prime. Joining Rep. Kline in this effort to keep our promises to military retirees were a number of original co-sponsors, including Rep. Erik Paulsen (R-MN), Rep. Tom Emmer (R-MN), Rep. Collin Peterson (D-MN), Rep. Bob Latta (R-OH), and Rep. Bill Johnson (R-OH).

A VOICE FOR RETIREES EXCHANGE ADVISORY COUNCIL FOCUSES ON RETIREES’ NEEDS

Since 1997, the Army & Air Force Exchange Service has relied on a select advisory team known as the Exchange Retiree Advisory Council to advise senior leaders on issues specific to the retiree community, including preserving the military resale benefit.

Morgan Brown, AFSA Military & Government Relations Director, serves as AFSA’s representative on the



REPRESENTING AFSA

Leaders from the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate presented the Congressional Gold Medal to the Doolittle Tokyo Raiders April 15 at the U.S. Capitol Visitor’s Center Emancipation Hall. Rob and Mendy Frank had the opportunity to visit with House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) following the ceremony.



WOMEN AND THE VA

Rep. Corrine Brown (D-FL), Ranking Member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, discusses with AFSA's Rob Frank ways the VA can improve care for women Veterans.

council. He and the other members meet twice a year with Exchange executive leaders, including Director/Chief Executive Officer Tom Shull and Deputy Director Mike Immler. "AFSA's participation on the advisory council helps foster a relationship between the Exchange and the retiree community," Immler said. "The Exchange values input from these longtime shoppers and having their direct input helps us constantly improve."

At the council's most recent meeting in January, Immler briefed Brown and other members on the Exchange's newly updated shopping website, shopmyexchange.com. The brand-new site received its first major overhaul in a decade this past fall. Other Exchange priorities in 2015 include offering more national brands in stores and online. The Exchange also plans to roll out BE FIT Experience Centers at 50 locations. These centers will focus on national-brand athletic clothing and shoes for men and women. In Express locations, the Exchange is focused on healthy options and adding island

coolers for grab-and-go convenience items. The Exchange is also exploring the creation of entertainment centers, with multiplex theaters showing first-run movies and casual dining restaurants on many Army posts. These centers are expected to bring active-duty and retired Exchange shoppers back onto their nearest military installation. The Exchange's first entertainment center at Fort Bragg is in the early planning stages, and other possible locations are being determined.

HOUSE MILCON-VA BILL SPENDING BILL IS FAST-TRACKED

In early May, the House passed H.R. 2029, the FY2016 Military Construction/Veterans Affairs appropriations bill by a vote of (255-163). As written, this legislation provides \$76.6 billion to house, train, and equip military personnel; provide



AFSA FACE TIME

During any given week AFSA has numerous opportunities to interact with congressional members on behalf of AFSA members. Here, longtime AFSA supporter Sen. John Boozman (R-AR) is pictured with M&G Deputy Director Scott Porter.

housing and services to military families; and help maintain base infrastructure. It also funds Veterans' benefits and programs. Rarely controversial, the MILCON/VA bill and the FY 2016 Energy and Water Appropriations bill, which the House also passed, are the first two appropriations bills to advance in Congress this year. Highlights of H.R. 2029 by its three main functional areas are as follows:

1. MILITARY CONSTRUCTION

The bill provides a total of \$7.7 billion for military construction projects—an increase of \$904 million above the enacted fiscal year 2015 level and \$755 million below the President's request. This includes funds for large and small construction and renovation projects on military bases within the U.S. and around the globe. Note: \$532 million of the total amount provided for military construction projects is designated for Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO).

- **Military Family Housing:** The bill provides \$1.4 billion to fund construction, operation, and maintenance of military family housing for fiscal year 2016—\$223 million above the fiscal year 2015 level and the same as the budget request.

- **Military Medical Facilities:** The bill includes \$607 million for construction and alterations for new or existing military medical facilities—an increase of \$121 million above the fiscal year 2015 enacted level.

- **Department of Defense Education Facilities:** The draft bill provides \$334 million for essential safety improvements and infrastructure work at 10 DoD Education Activities facilities located within the U.S. and overseas.

- **Guard and Reserve:** Includes \$512 million for construction or alteration of Guard and Reserve facilities in 28 states—an increase of \$85 million above the fiscal year 2015 enacted level.

2. VETERANS AFFAIRS

The legislation includes a total of \$163.2 billion in both discretionary and mandatory funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs, an increase of \$4.1 billion above the fiscal year 2015 level.

- **VA Medical Services:** The bill funds VA medical services at \$48.6 billion—providing for approximately 6.9 million patients to be treated in fiscal year 2016. Within this total, funding includes: \$7.5 billion in mental health care

services; \$144 million in suicide prevention activities; \$232 million for traumatic brain injury treatment; \$6.7 billion in homeless Veterans treatment, services, housing, and job training; and \$250 million in rural health initiatives.

- **VA Electronic Health Record:** The bill contains \$233 million for the modernization of the Veterans Affairs electronic health record system. To help ensure our Veterans get proper care through the timely and accurate exchange of medical data between VA, DoD, and the private sector, the bill includes language restricting funding until the VA demonstrates progress on the system's functionality and interoperability.

- **Disability Claims Processing Backlog:** The bill provides \$290 million for the paperless claims processing system, \$141 million for digital scanning of health records, and \$26 million for centralized mail. The bill also includes funding to support the hiring of 770 new staff members to tackle claims appeals and other needs resulting from the progress in reducing the claims backlog.

- **Construction:** Major and minor construction within the VA will be funded at approximately \$968 million. The bill provides funding for hospital replacement and allows the VA to continue to correct seismic safety issues and deficiencies.

- **VA Mandatory Funding:** Fulfills mandatory funding requirements such as: Veteran disability compensation programs for 4.7 million Veterans and their survivors; education benefits for nearly 1.2 million Veterans; and vocational rehabilitation and employment training for more than 137,000 Veterans.

- **Advance Appropriations:** Contains \$63.3 billion in advance fiscal year 2017 funding for Veterans' medical programs—the same level as the President's request. This funding will provide for medical services, medical support and compliance, and medical facilities, and ensure that our Veterans have continued, full access to their medical care needs. For the first time, the bill includes \$104 billion in advance funding for VA mandatory benefit programs, as requested in the President's budget.

3. ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

The legislation includes \$71 million for the Arlington National Cemetery, an increase of \$5 million from the fiscal year 2015 enacted level. Another \$30 million was allocated in military construction for Defense Access Roads to improve traffic flow/access to Fort Myer, Va., and to increase the amount of land available for burials and interments.

THE BREAKFAST CLUB A GROUP OF DIVERSE BILLS, EACH STUCK IN POLICY DETENTION

"Don't you forget about me, I'll be around ..." is how the theme song by Simple Minds from the iconic '80s movie *The*

Breakfast Club starts out. Well, there's a hodgepodge of legislative issues that seem like they're stuck in the legislative equivalent of Saturday detention, and like the movie's rebel character, Bender, who faces a seemingly endless string of such detentions, there appears to be no relief coming anytime soon for these platform issues.

- **Concurrent Receipt:** DoD's retirement pay (service) is "offset" by VA's disability (sacrifice) for under 50 percent ratings. To pay the VA portion outright would require significant funding in a sequestration era.

- **SBP-DIC Offset:** Often referred to as the "Widow's Concurrent Receipt," it parallels concurrent receipt both in concept and in cost, although to a much smaller demographic.

- **Lower Guard Retirement Age:** Righteous perhaps, but also costly—every year of reduction in age equates to an increase of future year outlays.

Fortunately, like AFSA, there are some on Capitol Hill who won't let these issues die. For example, bills have been introduced and re-introduced in each Numbered Congress for years on concurrent receipt as well as for SBP-DIC. For more details on H.R. 303, H.R. 333, S. 271 (concurrent receipt), H.R. 1594 (SBP-DIC offset), and other bills of interest, be sure to check out the Legislative Action Center on AFSA's web page.

Here at AFSA Headquarters, we fight for whatever our membership tells us to and their target list ends up as our Legislative Platform. While the fiscal reality of today's environment makes it appear pointless to argue for funding that isn't coming (for now), we need to stay engaged, even if only loosely so. We can't allow Congress to allow these issues to fade away, but we also need to be ready when the environment is right to get them out of legislative detention.

THE MILITARY FAMILY HONORING THE SACRIFICE OF THE ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCE

In August 2013 at Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany, Mrs. Betty Welsh and Mrs. Athena Cody made some comments about the need for mutual support and the great way military families contribute to the Air Force mission. Their words then still resonate today. Mrs. Cody said, "Continue to encourage each other. There are many family members today who need that support. They need your help through today's challenges, and they'll most definitely need others for the challenges of tomorrow." Mrs. Welsh added, "Keeping the home front going means so much to our military members. You make us proud. We know the mission, and we appreciate how you support that mission. Thank you for supporting our Air Force." America's leaders should never forget the powerful influence a strong family life can have on the maintenance

of a solid military career force. In every sense, military family members are key players in our nation's military effort, but the support of our government for them wasn't always strong.

Following the direction of President Richard Nixon and recommendations of the Gates Commission, by 1973 our nation abandoned the draft and began the All-Volunteer Force (AVF), a move toward a smaller, but higher-quality military establishment. We believe that one great reason the AVF has thrived is because military compensation and benefits and the support for military families have improved. Another factor is that there has been an explicit recognition that military spouses, children, and survivors are instrumental members of the All-Volunteer Force.

Although many of today's Airmen cannot relate to the pre-AVF days, those who served back then can remember the very low pay and allowances; the relatively poor quality of base facilities including dormitories, family housing, and other facilities; relatively poor education benefits for Airmen; the almost complete lack of child care; the few benefits and support programs for family members; the almost total lack of support for family members separated from military members due to deployments (e.g., no family separation allowance); the few health care options available to military family members; and the extremely poor schools for military children. Congressional leaders knew that the status quo simply could not support an All-Volunteer Force. Changes had to be made, and they were.

Over the years, the Air Force Sergeants Association has worked hard to convince elected leaders to increase compensation, benefit programs, family programs, and base facilities. We have lobbied to recognize the service and sacrifice of military family members. We know military life is often tough—no less so for military spouses and children. And yet, in recent times, it has seemed apparent that the Obama Administration and Congress have been making military personnel-related decisions with an underlying assumption that compensation and benefits for military members and their families have become too generous. However, AFSA disputes that. We continue to maintain that a high-quality, non-conscription military comes with a price, and this “expense” is a cost-effective investment toward protecting our security at home and our interests abroad.

Every cut to compensation, allowances, family support programs, retirement programs, and base commissaries and exchanges suggests that national leaders are taking military members and their families for granted, and that sincere appreciation is lacking. Every allowance or benefit cut is, in effect, another pay cut—not just for the military member, but for the entire military family. Tangible support is needed. So, AFSA is always looking for and promoting those who would champion the quality of the lives of those who sacrifice so much.

Many military spouses sacrifice their livelihoods, giving up seniority and good jobs, to travel with and support this

nation's warriors. They hold their families together and raise children in unique, often-challenging environments at home and overseas. They endeavor to keep the morale of service members strong.

Military children also contribute to this nation's All-Volunteer Force. Over the years, AFSA has made a consistent, concerted effort to fund and support Child Development Centers, good DoD dependent schools, the appropriation of Impact Aid to support local schools that help educate military children, base programs that serve military kids, and the successful, protracted effort to have all 50 states ratify the “Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children.”

An exhaustive Rand Corporation study by Bernard Rostker titled, “I Want You, The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force,” contended that one great reason the AVF has succeeded in maintaining an effective career component is that, “Besides good pay, careerists demanded quality-of-life benefits such as good housing, child care, health benefits, family advocacy programs, and military stores. It was crucial that the services become ‘family friendly.’” The expression “Recruiting Service members, Retaining Families” came into clear focus with the advent of the All-Volunteer Force, and AFSA has diligently worked to remind elected leaders of that fact.

A BAD DEAL WHY TO THINK TWICE ABOUT THE CAREER STATUS BONUS OPTION

Questions regarding the Career Status Bonus (CSB) often come up. This is a bonus that DoD offers to military members as they approach their 15th anniversary of entering military service. DoD offers them \$30,000 (less taxes) if they agree to abandon their current “High-3” retirement system, agree to remain in service for at least 20 Years Of Service (YOS), and agree to retire under the non-beneficial REDUX retirement system.

AFSA has long maintained that the CSB is, in the vast majority of cases, an extremely bad deal. DoD offers the CSB simply to save retirement dollars—and a lot of them! To put the CSB/REDUX Retirement choice in context, it is useful to examine the military retirement system and changes that have taken place in the past three and a half decades.

Those who came in on or after Sept. 8, 1980, fell into the High-3 retirement system, in which the high base pay for the final 36 months is averaged. That final average is then multiplied by 2.5 percent times YOS (e.g., 20 YOS equals 50 percent, 22 YOS equals 55 percent, 30 YOS equals 75 percent). Also, High-3 retirees receive an annual inflation-protecting Cost Of Living Adjustment (COLA) based on the Consumer Price Index.

In 1986, the military retirement law changed, and those entering service on or after Aug. 1, 1986, fell under the “REDUX” retirement system. Their monthly retirement pay also is determined by averaging their final 36 months, but the multiplier is reduced depending on length of service. The first 20 years of service is worth 2 percent, rather than 2.5 percent. Each year after 20 YOS is worth 3.5 percent. So, 20 years of service has a multiplier of 40 percent, rather than the High-3’s 50 percent. However, like in the High-3 system, 30 years of service has a 75 percent multiplier in the REDUX system.

Additionally, under the REDUX retirement system, the annual COLA is reduced. Instead of an inflation-protecting COLA, REDUX retirees get 1 percent less than that (CPI minus 1 percent) each year up to age 62.

There is a two-part, one-time formula adjustment at age 62. The first part raises the multiplier for number of YOS to what it would have been under the High-3 plan. Secondly, DoD factors in what COLAs you would have gotten under the High-3 to compute a new base retirement pay. However, the reduced COLAs continue for life.

Thanks to the hard work of AFSA and our coalition partners, the retirement system was changed in the FY 2000 National Defense Authorization Act, allowing service members a choice: Service members may retire under the High-3 plan or take the CSB at the 15-year point of service and retire under REDUX.

What this all adds up to is that a person retiring under the REDUX system receives far less in retirement pay.

What is the impact of taking the \$30,000 Career Status Bonus and retiring under REDUX rather than retaining High-3 retirement? Independent analysis done by the Center for Naval Analysis shows just how bad the REDUX system is in relation to the High-3. For example, an Airman retiring as an E-7 would sacrifice about one-third of a



DOC-FIXED

When current Military & Government Director Morgan Brown came to AFSA in 2002, the “Doc Fix” was one of the first issues he recalls working on. For a dozen years, Congress has haggled over the issue of reimbursement payments for doctors who treat Medicare and Tricare patients. The 18th attempt by lawmakers was a charm, and in mid-April Congress finally put it to rest. While transparent to many because of temporary fixes through the years, the now-permanent solution allows AFSA and others to redirect their energies toward other issues.

million dollars (\$333,333) over the full course of retirement. Of course, that dollar amount would be higher or lower depending on grade and YOS over the final 36 months of service. The bottom line: Taking the \$30,000 Career Status Bonus at the 15-year point of service and agreeing to retire under REDUX always benefits the DoD alone; for every three Airmen whom DoD can convince to take the CSB and retire under the REDUX system, the government saves about \$1 million in retirement spending.

➔ **We urge all who face the Career Status Bonus decision as they approach their 15th year of service to do so with the facts in hand and a clear understanding of the impact of the decision they make. A High-3/REDUX calculator can be found at militarypay.defense.gov/mpcalcs/Calculators/compare.aspx.**

CAPSTONE WEEK

BASIC MILITARY TRAINING SEES ITS BIGGEST CHANGES IN 68 YEARS

Story and photos by Shane S. Karp

It is the moment no enlisted Air Force member ever forgets: stepping off the bus at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, and beginning the journey through Basic Military Training.

More than 7 million trainees have made that same first step since 1946, and while the buzz cuts and rigor of becoming an Airman have not changed much since the training mission was moved to Lackland 68 years ago, BMT kicked off a new era on March 23.

This new era marks the beginning of “Capstone Week,” a five-day program utilizing what was the eighth week in BMT. The week is meant to better equip Airmen transitioning from Lackland to the operational Air Force.

“As we looked at the current structure, we saw an opportunity to further enhance those Airmanship skills with a final week focused entirely on character development,” says Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force James A. Cody, the person credited with the idea of Capstone Week. “These are core skills every Airman needs to be successful in our Air Force.”

According to Gen. Robin Rand, Capstone Week is the biggest change to BMT in 68 years, and it will have one of the biggest impacts on the Air Force for years to come. General Rand took the helm at Air Education and Training



The gateway to the newly constructed Pflugston Reception Center on Lackland Air Force Base: Aside from being the first thing new trainees see upon arriving at Lackland, this building is where civilian contractors will host college-style lectures for Airmen going through Capstone Week.



Master Sgt. Raul Hernandez Jr., 326th Training Squadron instructor supervisor, stands in front of the dorm, which underwent a major renovation and will now house the Capstone Week program. Hernandez, along with others, has been tasked with developing the curriculum, lesson plan, and policies for the Capstone Week program.

Command in October 2013, and has been selected to command Global Strike Command at Barksdale AFB, La.

“The goal is to produce professional, competent, capable, and committed Airmen who are inspired by our heritage, dedicated to Air Force core values, and motivated to deliver decisive air power for America,” says Master Sgt. Raul Hernandez, 326th Training Squadron instructor supervisor and one of the people tasked with developing the curriculum, lesson plan, and policies for the Capstone Week program.

“THE AMOUNT OF BLOOD, SWEAT, AND TEARS IT TOOK FOR OUR STAFF OF DEDICATED MTIs AND FLIGHT COMMANDERS TO GET THIS FACILITY TRANSFORMED IS ALMOST UNFATHOMABLE.”

**—Master Sgt. Raul Hernandez Jr.,
326th Training Squadron
instructor supervisor**

Keeping Airmen in line during BMT is easy; ensuring they make good decisions once they arrive in the technical training environment and then at their duty station can be the hard part, Hernandez admits.

“When I have my campaign hat on, when I’m right there over you yelling at you to do something, you’re going to do it,” says

Hernandez. “However, we’re not going to always be over these individuals; they’re going to be operating on their own in the Air Force. What we need is for Airmen to *want* to do the right things.”

CAMPAIGN HATS ASIDE

The new Airmen partaking in Capstone Week can plan on experiencing a significant change in environment compared to what they grew to expect the 7 ½ weeks prior, Hernandez explains.

“We’re trying to do small things to make them feel at ease,” he says. “For example, we’re going to let them put pens and pencils inside of their Airman Battle Uniform pockets ... so very small nuances to try and make them feel more comfortable.”

There were also changes to the interior design of the old 326th Training Squadron in order to give the area a different

look and feel for those Airmen attending Capstone, says Chief Master Sgt. Louis D. Orrie, command chief of the 37th Training Wing at Lackland.

“We wanted to ensure the ‘wow’ factor was in place the moment those new, young Airmen showed up to highlight the fact this was something different than BMT,” Orrie says. “This included everything from substantially changing the [dining facility] to how the bays in the dorms are set up.”

The changes to the dorm layout include reducing max capacity from 60 Airmen per dorm to 48, making access to wall lockers easier and more streamlined by putting them



right next to the Airmen's bunk beds, and carpeting the front and back of the dormitory, Hernandez says.

"The amount of blood, sweat, and tears it took for our staff of dedicated MTIs and flight commanders to get this facility transformed is almost unfathomable," Hernandez says. "We painted all dorms and doors, put up chair rail and base boards, stripped floors, moved all wall lockers and beds in and out of facilities, and rearranged it all to provide a different-from-BMT atmosphere."

Living areas still must be clean and presentable, but white-glove inspections, hospital corners on beds, and the dreaded "Lackland Laser" flashlight will all be things of the

past. The hope is this newfound level of comfort creates an environment that makes absorbing the curriculum easier.

"The dormitory is where they're going to learn; we don't want it to be a high-stress environment," says Hernandez.

The changes in mood and environment are paying off, as recent graduates report feeling like actual members of the Air Force they just spent 7 ½ weeks training for.

"When we first arrived, I was very apprehensive, unsure what Capstone would be," says Airman Basic Darius E. Jackson, a recent graduate of Capstone Week. "To my relief, we were treated as Airmen. The MTIs seemed more like real noncommissioned officers and not just MTIs; we could talk to them without fear of being yelled at."

THE CAPSTONE CURRICULUM

Those tasked with bringing the idea of Capstone Week to life have overcome many hurdles. According to Orrie, solidifying the curriculum for Capstone week may have been their biggest triumph.

Airmen from the 323rd Training Squadron sit at attention before a lecture during BMT on Feb. 10. Capstone Week serves as a way to reinforce the lessons learned during the 7 ½ weeks at BMT.



THE HOPE IN THE END IS THAT THIS EXTRA WEEK OF TRAINING ENSURES AIRMEN LEAVE LACKLAND BETTER PREPARED FOR THE OPERATIONAL AIR FORCE, WITH A COMMON-SIGHT PICTURE OF WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE BY AIR FORCE CORE VALUES.

"We were funded in October of 2014 and had to get everything squared away in time for the first class that started March 23," Orrie says.

Capstone relies on handpicked MTIs and civilians to walk through different situations where Airmen fresh out of BMT must apply the various things that they learned in their training up to that point.

"We have provided them the opportunity to take the cognitive lessons learned in BMT, personalize them, and move that information into the affective domain of learning," Hernandez says. "So much of BMT is instilling and providing the fundamentals; however, with Capstone, we have taken those imperative fundamentals and expanded them into critical thinking through scenarios, shared experiences, and guided discussions."

The Airmen going through Capstone Week attend classes ranging from large college-style lectures taught by civilian contractors in the newly constructed Pfingston Reception Center, to much smaller group sessions facilitated by MTIs, notes Hernandez.

"The first 7 ½ weeks of Airmen's careers are where our MTIs give them the knowledge. That just means those Airmen can recite the data and core values, yet we have no guarantee of them living by them or using them in various circumstances and situations," adds Orrie. "Capstone takes our Airmen out of the very rigid environment of BMT and puts them into an effective learning environment."

Although there are no written tests during Capstone Week, the true test is of the new Airmen's character—an assessment to see if they are able to accept the way of life in the profession of arms by incorporating Air Force core values into their everyday lives, according to Orrie. For example, nine Airmen from the inaugural Capstone Week were "given the opportunity" to retake the program because of integrity violations, he says.

The hope in the end is that this extra week of training ensures Airmen leave Lackland better prepared for the operational Air Force, with a common-sight picture of what it means to live by Air Force core values, Orrie explains.



U.S. Air Force Capt. Christopher D. Stephen, flight commander at the 326th Training Squadron, helps with renovations to the old dorms.

NOT A SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM

A common misconception is that Capstone Week is an attempt to fix BMT. That couldn't be further from the truth, according to the 37th TRW command chief.

"BMT is fine the way it is, and Capstone Week is not changing how we do business in that environment," says Orrie. "What we are doing is putting those new Airmen into situations where they must use the knowledge gained during BMT and actually apply it in those various scenarios."

In order to make room for Capstone week, the BMT length was shortened from 8 ½ weeks to 7 ½. This led to another misconception that BMT is getting easier, Orrie says.

"BMT is actually harder now, rather than easier, since we didn't take anything out of the BMT curriculum," he points out. "What was done in 8 ½ weeks is now done in 7 ½ weeks."

To make this happen, instructors found down time in the former BMT training program and were able to maximize scheduling efficiency, Hernandez says.

THE INAUGURAL CAPSTONE WEEK

There were 522 Airmen who participated in the inaugural Capstone Week, and although it was not perfect, all signs point to the program being a success.

The first-ever week of Capstone was hectic, according to Hernandez. The schedule was packed with daily discussions and working groups, physical fitness training every morning,

and visits from distinguished visitors like General Rand and Chief Cody.

"The first week of Capstone was both challenging and enthralling," Hernandez recalls. "As a new program, we have a couple of things to work out; however, every member of the staff is dedicated to building on what BMT has done."

According to those involved, the challenges faced, the obstacles overcome and the scramble to make Capstone a reality have paid off.

"I feel absolutely confident that this class is leaving with a better understanding of Airmanship," says Hernandez. "We are developing a new class of Airmen who have greater confidence in their ability to make practical decisions based on the Air Force core values."

Perhaps the most important thing is the new Airmen going through the program agree about its effectiveness.

"In BMT, you always heard about the core values, you were always told to use the core values. But what does that really look like? In Capstone, I was able to see that," says Airman Basic Avery K. Allen, one of the inaugural Capstone graduates. "I was able to watch and discuss the scenarios that were more applicable to my everyday life and determine what I was supposed to do and how I am to apply the core values."

➔ Check out more photos from Basic Military Training at www.hqafsa.org/basic-military-training-photos.html.

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REGAINING

MTIs evaluate a flight of trainees as they practice drill and marching techniques.



RESPECT

IN THE WAKE OF SCANDAL, SWEEPING CHANGES SEEK TO RESTORE THE ROLE AND REPUTATION OF THE MTI

Story and photos by Shane S. Karp

Three years ago, Air Force Basic Military Training was rocked by accusations from 48 female trainees claiming victimization during BMT on JBSA-Lackland, Texas, and the title of Military Training Instructor was sullied. Since then, the Air Force has worked diligently to rebuild BMT and ensure nothing of that nature happens again.

The allegations brought on a commander-directed investigation, commissioned by Gen. Edward Rice and led by Maj. Gen. Margaret Woodward, who were, at the time, the commander of the Air Education and Training Command and the Air Force Chief of Safety, respectively.

The result of the Woodward Report, which included 215 in-depth interviews and surveys of more than 18,000 Air Force Personnel, was 22 findings and 46 recommendations for action within the BMT environment.

Although all of those accused were held responsible for their actions, the report also cited several institutional issues at BMT that contributed to something of this magnitude occurring.

“We did not help the situation by setting the conditions over time for the MTIs where they were undermanned, undersupervised, overworked, and oftentimes inadequately trained,” says Chief Master Sgt. Louis D. Orrie, command chief of the 37th Training Wing at Lackland. “This allowed the handful of those bad actors to overshadow the individuals doing the right thing and putting the BMT environment in a negative light.”

LESSONS LEARNED

The Woodward Report was just the first step the Air Force took to understand what happened, and measures have been taken to keep it from happening again. The 37th TRW continues to confront the issue head on, even three years later.

Today, every commander, chief, first sergeant, and MTI associated with BMT, including every technical training Military Training Leader, goes through a “lessons learned” briefing that dissects the series of decisions and circumstances from as far back as the 1990s that led to what happened at Lackland.



MTIs Tech. Sgt. Christopher Hemgesberg and Tech. Sgt. Porsha Livings-Visor give a “warm welcome” to Air Force trainees upon their arrival to BMT.



MTI Tech. Sgt. Christopher Hemgesberg briefs a trainee on the correct way to display an Air Force all-weather coat.

“We don’t shy away from it,” Orrie says. “We want folks to understand what happened; we want to ensure the same kinds of decisions aren’t made that could lead our Air Force to the same place 20 or 30 years down the road.”

Of the MTIs who were at BMT during the crises, more than 80 percent are no longer there, according to Orrie.

Gone too are the 18-to-20 hour workdays, working seven days a week for months on end, only one MTI assigned to a flight, and inadequate training programs.

The report led to sweeping changes in a number of areas, according to Orrie. One of the most positive was improvements to MTI manning.

Admittedly understaffed prior to the report, BMT now has close to a 2-to-1 trainer-to-flight ratio and has sufficient manpower to fill all but 4 percent of the authorized MTI slots, compared to 204 unmanned slots at the time of the report. Female MTIs at Lackland are now 30 percent of the population, the highest in BMT history, according to Orrie.

DSD NOMINATIONS

Another decision not only improved manning, but also put commanders in the process of selecting who would become an MTI. The Air Force moved away from a system that allowed Airmen to volunteer for MTI duty, to today’s system, in which Airmen must be nominated. Commanders throughout the Air Force now submit their best performers to serve in developmental special duty positions.

“The Air Force tried the volunteer route for many of the [developmental special duty] positions, and they’ve been chronically undermanned for years,” says Orrie. “We couldn’t afford to let these key roles continue to go unfilled and undermanned.”

According to a 2013 Air Force memo by Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force James Cody and Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh, nomination for a developmental duty assignment is to be seen as an honor and shows a commander’s confidence in the Airman.

One side effect of the nomination process is the potential negative emotions that come with being involuntarily vectored to do something. Chief Orrie has seen those Airmen early on, and sees a change in their attitudes a few months later.

“There are some who were vectored via DSD [nomination] for this duty who frankly did not want to be here,” says Orrie. “What is interesting, though, is catching up with those same individuals six months to a year later and seeing the level of pride and enjoyment they have in being an MTI.”



According to Orrie, being an MTI isn't the career or personal-life killer it may have been perceived as in the past, but rather an awesome opportunity for those NCOs and Senior NCOs selected to train future Airmen.

“When my tour is over, I want to know that I did my

absolute best to turn civilians into Airmen whom I would be proud to either deploy with or work side by side with,” says Tech. Sgt. Thomas Dow, a military training instructor.

“I hope to retire knowing I lived up to the MTI creed: ‘I will spare no effort to properly prepare men and women for military service,’” he adds. “I take that very seriously because they are our replacements. They are the ones who will defend our families.”

Tech. Sgt. Julius Levy, a Basic Military Training instructor, stares down a new trainee in front of the Pfingston Reception Center.

Tech. Sgt. Brian Bender was not a volunteer. He is an Air Force broadcaster who started MTI School this May.

“I think the DSD selection, though being ‘volun-told,’ is a good thing,” says Bender. “It’s commanders picking their best to fill roles that need high-caliber NCOs.”

Other positive changes as a result of the Woodward Report include:

- upgrading the vetting process during the selection of MTIs,
- revamping the psychological screening process, and
- a complete overhaul of the MTI training program.

In the past, MTI training was conducted separately at each squadron, leading to differences in the training, Orrie explains. “Now the follow-on training for all new MTIs is conducted at the 323rd Training Squadron in order to standardize this training before they are released out to the line squadrons.”

The improvements at Lackland have returned pride to the position as new MTIs earn their campaign hats.



A new trainee receives some direct instruction from two MTIs upon his arrival at Lackland.



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Profession of Arms Center of Excellence
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Professional Development Forums:
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BYLAW CHANGES FROM INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MARCH MEETING

The following three changes have been proposed and recommended by the International Executive Council to amend the Air Force Sergeants Association Bylaws (AFSAM 100-1). A vote will be conducted during the 2015 AFSA International Convention, Aug 22-26 2015, at the Grand Hyatt in San Antonio, Texas. As required by AFSAM 100-1, Bylaw 15, a two-thirds majority of the respective delegates present at the conference must be in favor of these changes in order to approve the amendments.

CHANGE #1: *Change membership lapsed and terminated process to a simple "active" and "inactive" status. The individual membership would expire at midnight of the last day of the month their dues are paid up, and they can retain their original membership number if renewing at a later date.*

BYLAW 4, SECTION 6

- Strike "for 60 days from the time when such fees are due and payable" and replace with "as of midnight on their final membership day"
- Strike "Terminated by the International Executive Council" and replace with "rendered 'inactive'"
- Strike "so terminated" and replace with "inactive"
- Add "by paying membership dues to reactive their membership" at end of paragraph.

New paragraph would read:

REMOVAL FOR NON-PAYMENT OF DUES. If any AFSA member's dues remain unpaid as of midnight on their final membership day, the member's membership will be rendered "inactive" in accordance with the Policies and Procedures Manual. No person whose membership is inactive shall be entitled to any benefits of membership, thereafter, unless reinstated by paying membership dues to reactive their membership.

CHANGE #2: *Require a minimum of 6 months of membership in AFSA to hold office.*

BYLAW 6, SECTION 2

- Add "Members seeking election to any office within AFSA must be a member in good standing for a minimum of six months and must be versed in all aspects of the Chapter and/or Division operation management. Waivers to this provision must be approved by the International President."

New paragraph would read:

QUALIFICATIONS FOR OFFICE. Any respective AFSA member, in good standing, shall be eligible for nomination and election to any respective elected office of AFSA unless restricted per Bylaw 4, Section 3. Members seeking election to any office within AFSA must be a member in good standing for a minimum of six months and must be versed in all aspects of the Chapter and/or Division operation management. Waivers to this provision must be approved by the International President. However, the Retired and Veterans Affairs Trustee shall be a veteran. The Air Force Uniformed Service Trustee must be currently serving as a uniformed member of the Air Force in one of the three components: Regular, Air National Guard, or Air Force Reserve (not retired). If the status of any of these AFSA trustees changes, whereby a trustee is no longer a member of the component/group represented, that trustee's term of office shall be automatically terminated unless extended to the next AFSA International Conference, Convention, and/or Meeting(s) by the International President.

CHANGE #3: *Give voting rights to the Senior Advisor*

BYLAW 8, SECTION 2

- Strike "non-voting, ex-officio"
- Add the term "voting"

New paragraph would read:

AFSA EXECUTIVE COUNCIL COMPOSITION. The AFSA International Executive Council shall consist of the International President, Vice President, two trustees and a maximum of seven Division Presidents, who shall be elected or appointed as herein prescribed. The Senior Advisor shall be a voting member of the International Executive Council. The AFSA CEO shall serve as an advisor to the International Executive Council.

A UNITED FRONT

NATO'S ALLIED COMMAND TRANSFORMATION WORKS DAILY TO THWART MODERN ASYMMETRICAL THREATS



Chief Johnson spends a great deal of time traveling and meets regularly with military members from partner nations.

**By Chief Master Sgt. Jack Johnson, Jr.
Command Senior Enlisted Leader
NATO's Allied Command Transformation**

When I entered the U.S. Air Force 30 years ago, there were only two superpowers: the United States, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Although other national and international threats manifested across the globe, it was essentially “us” and “them” in that era. The “us” was the West, the United States, and Western Europe and its allies. “Them” were the Soviets and the Warsaw Pact countries. Although never simplistic, our doctrine was symmetrical, proportioned to fight known threats using seemingly forceful strategies and tactics in order to change the will of the adversary and ... to win!

The wall between the West and East is now gone, the Cold War is over, and the reality of a symmetrical threat is sometimes considered secondary. Today, with the advance of technology, terrorism, deception, and both hybrid and traditional warfare, there must be an organization focused on countering these incredibly complex asymmetrical

“If you want to fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together.”

—African Proverb

and unknown threats on a daily basis. That organization is NATO's Allied Command Transformation.

ACT in Norfolk, Va., is one of two NATO Strategic Commands and the only permanent NATO headquarters outside of Europe. Commanded by the Supreme Allied Commander, Transformation, French four-star General Jean-Paul Paloméros and staffed by 1,050-plus military officers, enlisted and civilian personnel from the 28 NATO nations, and eight additional Partnership for Peace nations, ACT exists to preserve the peace, security, and territorial integrity of NATO member states. This is accomplished by supporting operations; leading military transformation; and continuously engaging, interacting, and bridging the transatlantic link. With close coordination with its subordinate commands at the Joint Warfare Center (Stavanger,

SENIOR ENLISTED PERSPECTIVE

Norway), Joint Force Training Center (Bydgoszcz, Poland), Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Center (Lisbon, Portugal), along with more than 11 Academic Institutions and 19 Centers of Excellence across North America and Europe, ACT shapes strategic thinking, plans and policies, defense and capability development, education, training and exercises, and partnerships and outreach in order to effectively confront tomorrow's challenges. These strategic initiatives provide sharp focus on connected forces and smart defense initiatives, capacity building, missile defense, cyber defense, Joint ISR, interoperability, education and training, and more for the safety and security of all 28 countries in NATO.

The United States has always played an integral role in the success of the Alliance but has also called upon the Alliance for assistance. For example, Article V of the NATO Charter, which states, "When you attack one, you attack all." Following the attack on the U.S. on Sept. 11, 2001, NATO invoked Article V for the first time in support of the U.S.

As the Command Chief Master Sergeant and Command Senior Enlisted Leader for ACT, I am privileged to be the first U.S. Airman selected for this nominative position. The

Air Force prepared me, like it does every U.S. Airman beginning on their first day of Basic Military Training. I not only learned what to think—via core values—but how to think as a core competency, steeped in leadership. These competencies were reinforced through every level of professional military education, all the way through the Keystone Leadership Course, which is the highest level of enlisted joint and coalition military education.

Critical thinking and functioning tactically, operationally, and strategically are core expectations of each Airman. Whether Airmen take a functional developmental path or a developmental special duty and/or leadership path, our education, training, and experiences prepare us exceptionally well to lead jointly and internationally.

Our Air Force motto of "Aim High ... Fly, Fight, and Win" is infectious, and I'm proud to say, it's interwoven into all that I do in NATO's Allied Command Transformation for the peace and security of our global future!

➔ To learn more about NATO ACT and its mission, go to www.act.nato.int.



Jennifer Davis
Air Force wife.
Mother.
Full-time student.
AFSA Member.

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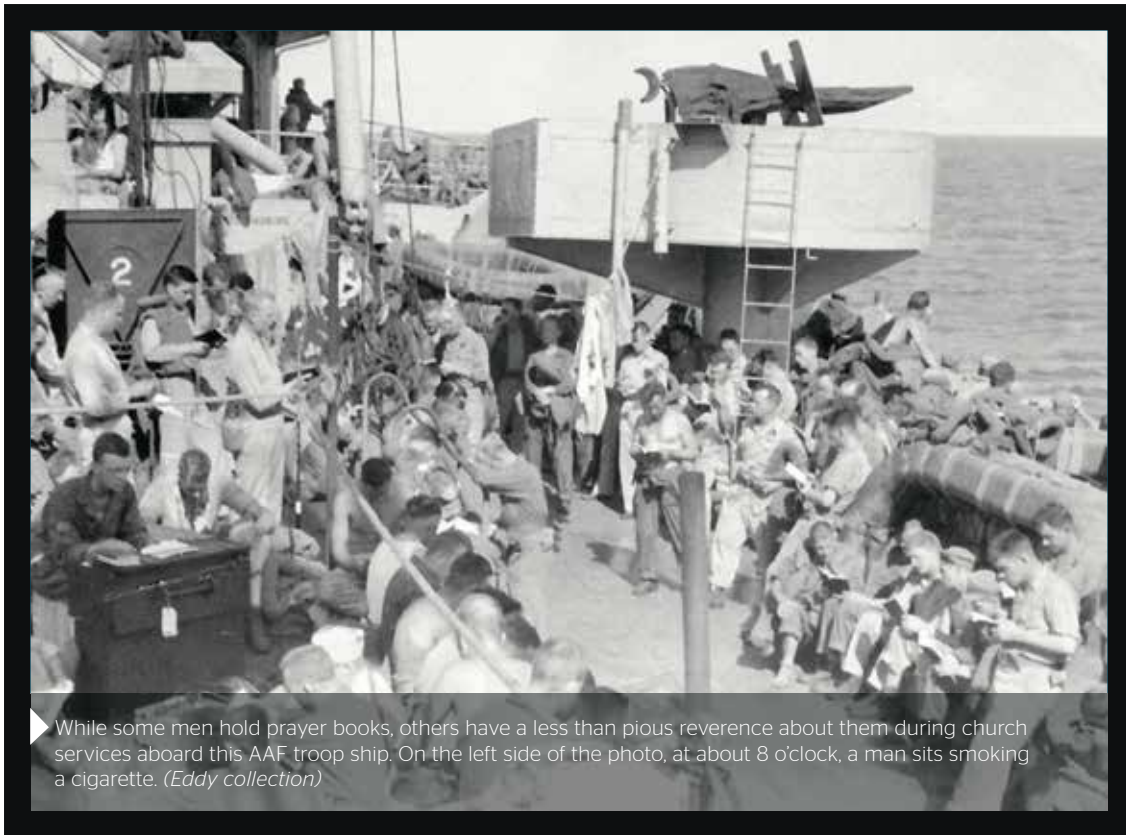
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“*AFSA takes my concerns and my family's concerns to Capitol Hill. They fight for issues that affect our everyday life. AFSA membership helps me to stay informed, connected and involved.* —Jennifer Davis



While some men hold prayer books, others have a less than pious reverence about them during church services aboard this AAF troop ship. On the left side of the photo, at about 8 o'clock, a man sits smoking a cigarette. (Eddy collection)

FAITH, COUNSEL, & FRIENDSHIP

THE LEGACY OF AIR FORCE CHAPLAINS IN THE WARTIME

By Sean M. Miskimins

Men of faith have served in America's wars going all the way back to the Revolutionary War and the birth of our nation. The parsons of the late 1700s and early 1800s even fought alongside fellow soldiers, carrying a rifle in one

hand and the good book in the other. While today's military chaplains still accompany servicemen and -women into combat zones, it's been more than a century since an American chaplain has carried arms. But, like the parsons

of old, today's chaplains still embody a combination of faith and duty.

Like all other branches of the U.S. military, the Air Force has long had chaplains accompanying the "air arm" of our fighting men into dangerous

lands. In World War II, these USAF chaplains came from a number of different faiths. Some were Protestant ministers; others were Jewish rabbis; and many were Catholic priests. Contrary to what many believe, these men of God did more than perform religious services, hear confessions, and distribute communion. They acted as quasi-big brothers and counselors when Airmen had moral dilemmas about their actions or orders, as so often happens in war zones. Chaplains also served as trusted confidants when the men became homesick, received dreaded “Dear John” letters, or, worse, witnessed the death and destruction of combat firsthand.

Many an airfield in allied England saw chaplains blessing crews of B-17s as well as the planes themselves prior to wartime missions. One such priest was Father Michael S. Ragan of the Army Air Force, an antecedent of the modern USAF. For those who saw chaplains like Ragan during such moments and might have gotten the wrong idea—that perhaps these men of God were blessing the plane’s bombs—the chaplains were always quick to quip, “I bless the men and the plane but not the airplane’s cargo or mission purpose.”

For those of us old enough to remember the 1960’s classic *The Longest Day*, which depicts the epic 1944 D-Day invasion, we remember the paratrooper chaplain repeatedly diving into a pond in the pitch-black night, trying to retrieve the communion/mass kit (a small suitcase) that he dropped while landing. Scenes such as this one likely did occur in wartime France, and thanks in part to the friendship and counseling that chaplains provided to aircrews and ground forces, D-Day was a success. But the next seven weeks were a slow and epic slugfest between the Allies and the Germans—one that would test chaplains as well as service members.

The Allied advance into enemy-occupied territory in France barely averaged over a mile a day in the first

Chaplain Sgt. Rabbi Stein, left, and Sgt. Albert Herchick of the famed 509th Bomb Group, right, greet each other on Tinian Island. (Herchick collection, AMM)



few weeks after D-Day, and the Allies didn’t truly break the near-stalemate until late July 1944.

AAF chaplain Father James Martin of Maryland gave the AAF plenty of credit for that turning point in the war. “In places along the road, whole German convoys of trucks and tanks lay burning, thanks to our planes,” he recalled. “The convoys were crushed along the roadside and have been ditched.”

Of course, Europe wasn’t the only place where chaplains served the AAF men in the war. The Pacific theater saw its share of priests serving in air units, as well. Father George Zabelka of Michigan served as the chaplain for the now-famous 509th Bomb Group on Tinian Island. On the morning of Aug. 6, 1945, in the early morning hours, Zabelka gave a blessing to the *Enola Gay* and her crew. That crew included five enlisted men: Tech. Sgt. Bob Caron, Tech. Sgt. Wyatt Duzenberry, Sgt. Joe Stiborik, Sgt. Robert Shumard, and Private Richard H. Nelson.

Like many on Tinian, Zabelka had heard rumors of a “gimmick bomb” and assumed that it was only different from other bombs in terms of its size and power—which is both true and a gross understatement. Zabelka, like millions of others around the world, soon learned that this weapon was far from a gimmick, as the destructive power of the atomic bomb dropped by the *Enola Gay* that August day helped bring Japan to her knees and end the war.

As is often the case with chaplains in war, men of the cloth embedded with U.S. servicemen in WWII had their own opinions on the methods with which the war was waged and won. The Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic blasts killed over 100,000 Japanese civilians in just seconds. Such a huge loss of life surely had to be debated by the AAF chaplains. Nearly 40 years after the war, in 1983, dozens of AAF priests from the war were surveyed as to whether they thought using the atomic bomb was the “right” choice; 65 percent said “yes.” While this moral dilemma was a huge one for the priests who blessed all those boys who went up into the skies aboard AAF bombers during WWII, two decades later a new and different type of war would bring other kinds of moral dilemmas for chaplains, as well as ground troops and Airmen.

THE VIETNAM ERA

While WWII had been fought to stop tyranny and free millions from oppression, the Vietnam War was fought to stop the potential spread of the “red plague” of Soviet Communism. From the get-go, this largely guerilla-style war was nothing like the global conflict 20 years prior. Particularly in the Pacific Theater of WWII, servicemen rarely saw cities, but in Vietnam most of the air bases were stationed in, near, or around large urban areas in the Southeast Asian country. As a result, Airmen were more tempted by access to alcohol, drugs, and even prostitution than their WWII predecessors—which in turn created a new

problem for USAF chaplains of that era. But that certainly wasn't the only challenge for chaplains in the Vietnam War.

The Vietcong (VC) and their North Vietnamese allies often wore no uniforms and were thus hard to distinguish from civilians at times. The resulting unintended collateral casualties of, as well as the overt atrocities against, Vietnamese civilians were often committed far from the airbases where USAF chaplains were usually stationed, so the USAF priests, ministers, and rabbis were slightly removed from many of the moral quandaries faced by their Infantry-travelling Army brethren. But it's safe to say that USAF chaplains did at least witness the harsh interrogations of supposed and actual VC.

Often in war, and especially in Vietnam, chaplains had to straddle a very blurred line between their dedication to faith and their dedication to duty as a member of the Air Force, Army, or Marines. Catholic priests are well known for their "confessional privilege," which protects communicants and

SOURCES CONSULTED:

- *Battlefield Chaplains*, by Father Donald F. Crosby, University of Kansas Press, 1994
- *Patton's Panthers*, by Charles W. Sasser, Pocket Books, 2004
- "Faith under Fire," *Vietnam Magazine*, by Jacqueline E. Whitt, December 2014

the details they confess. The Peers Commission, which investigated the famed and horrific Army atrocity at My Lai, felt differently in that case, and they court-martialed two chaplains (Carl Creswell and Francis Lewis) for not disclosing what they knew about the civilian killings.

Investigations of troops and units involved at My Lai also cited



a "lack of chaplains," implying that not enough moral guidance and counseling was offered to the men and units stationed there.

THE MORAL DILEMMA OF WAR

It is likely that many of the chaplains themselves would not have disagreed with this assessment. In a post-war survey of USAF chaplains, the majority reported that being "present among the men," was the single most important aspect of their duties. Enlisted men echoed this sentiment, stating that simply having the chaplains "around" was very important to them, too. The chaplains in that survey also stated that counseling the men through prayer or simply talking to them, as well as visiting the wounded, were among their other "key duties" in Vietnam.

Sermons from the pulpit of a chaplain in Vietnam often dealt with topics such as "serving your country and government" as well as "you can still be a Christian if you kill." For many, the inherent moral dilemma of war seems heavier and more burdensome

when reading the words of Vietnam chaplains as opposed to their WWII counterparts. Vietnam was a longer war and, by most measures, an uglier war with more atrocities and more deceptive/guerilla combat than WWII. Women and children were killed from close-combat assaults far more regularly in Vietnam than they were in either WWII Theater. Seeing horrific things, or at least hearing troops talk about them, had to weigh on the moral consciences of the men of God who served as military chaplains in Vietnam.

Father Cherry, a Vietnam War chaplain, recalled his hopeful but naive thoughts before entering the combat zone: "I have not landed yet. It seems so simple right now. I fly aboard an Air Force plane. I land there, and I do my job."

If only it had been that easy.

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