

AFSA

MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2015

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



UNITING AIRMEN

A look back at the 2015
International Convention

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EARNING PRAISE
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Daniel Yeomans,
CMSgt., USAF Retired
AFSA International
President

THANKS FOR A GREAT CONFERENCE

I would like to extend a warm thank you to all our fabulous members. In particular, a huge thank you goes out to all who joined us for our recently completed Professional Airmen's Conference held from Aug. 22–26 in San Antonio. We accomplished the business of our Association and had a wonderful time doing it.

I simply don't have the space to say thank you to everyone who contributed to the success of this year's PAC. However, I would be remiss if I did not mention a few.

First of all, a very special thanks to our Secretary of the Air Force, Deborah Lee James, for honoring us with her words and presence. During her presentation, she mentioned a number of challenges impacting our Air Force due to sequestration budget mandates, and shared how AFSA can support her goals to ensure we have enough Airmen, the right equipment and adequate training needed to fight and win. Madame Secretary, AFSA stands with you in the fight!

Thank you to our Air Force Chief of Staff, Gen. Mark Welsh, for his insight, as well. General Welsh provided a simple—yet challenging—formula for our Air Force's future success: to have "the right people who are well-educated and well-equipped." During PAC, I am proud to say our membership passed a viable Legislative Platform and key resolutions that I believe will help Gen. Welsh and our Air Force achieve this formula for success.

I want to extend a huge thank you to CMSAF James Cody for being part of our PAC and sharing his perspective. In addition, thanks go out to the Enlisted Board of Directors who attended. Our membership enjoyed spending time with great leaders who are guiding our enlisted force.

Thank you as well to our former Chief Master Sergeants of the Air Force who continue to support our Air Force. You are the gift that keeps giving. What a marvelous opportunity it was for our young Airmen and seasoned Veterans alike to meet and greet each one of you—and continue to learn from you. You are the pioneers who paved the way—and each of you continues to build on your impressive legacy every day.

Last but not least, I want to extend a big thank you to our HQ AFSA staff and membership. Our staff worked long and hard to create a special experience for all who attended. Please provide your feedback—it is valued. Our goal is to continually improve the PAC experience for all who attend—and we need your help to do it! My greatest thank you goes to our AFSA members. You are the glue that holds AFSA together. You provide our legislative vector, membership thrust, fraternal friendship and communications continuity that keep us relevant. Without you, we cease to be. A heartfelt thanks to all who made the effort to come to San Antonio, and to those who were with us in spirit.

Many of the decisions we made at the PAC were not easy. We have challenges recruiting and retaining—but growth is essential. We continue to evolve in the communications arena as we battle to eliminate the bugs we encountered when we upgraded our database. We must continue to remain relevant in the eyes of a changing Air Force and diverse membership. We continue to advocate for fair pay, retirement, health care and education. However, we also need to focus on quality-of-life issues impacted by reduced troop strength, inadequate modernization and the fiscal realities that affect overall readiness. We have our work cut out for us before we meet again in San Antonio in 2016; however, I am confident we will prevail. We have strong Chapter Presidents who form our foundation and great members who are there for AFSA when we need you the most. We *will* prevail!

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 dyeomans@hqafsa.org.

We must continue to remain relevant in the eyes of a changing Air Force and diverse membership.

Daniel C. Yeomans

GENERAL OFFICES

5211 Auth Road
Suitland, MD 20746
Telephone: (301) 899-3500 or
(800) 638-0594
Fax: (301) 899-8136
Web: www.hqafsa.org
Email: staff@hqafsa.org

PUBLISHER

Robert L. Frank

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Darla J. Torres

ADVERTISING SALES

Contact AFSAComm@hqafsa.org for
advertising information.

KEY STAFF

CEO: Robert L. Frank*
COO: Mark C. Stevenson
Director, Acct & Finance:
Juanita S. Weems
Director, Comm: Darla J. Torres
Director, Member & Field: Keith A. Reed
Director, Mil & Govt: Morgan D. Brown*
Director, Supt Ops: Melvin L. Boston
*Registered lobbyist

AFSA MAILING ADDRESS

AFSA
Post Office Box 50
Temple Hills, MD 20757

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MEMBERSHIP

One year/\$25, two years/\$44, three years/\$64, life membership/call AFSA 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*.

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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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AFSA Headquarters:
(301) 899-3500 or (800) 638-0594

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On the Cover: Recording artist Neal McCoy thrills the AFSA crowd with a variety of songs, old and new, country and pop, at the 2015 International Convention.

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THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

AFSA members recently provided feedback upon learning that Senate lawmakers are considering legislation that would allow some Veterans to use their Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefit to start or buy a business. (Read about this issue on page 6.) Members also weighed in on the ongoing discussions in Congress concerning curbing military pay raises, and in particular, reducing benefits like BAH via the FY16 NDAA. Comments on both topics follow.

A BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY?

"This is great! It should help a lot of struggling Veterans who want to feel needed but aren't interested in attending college. It's about time we start thinking about total force commitment."

—C.V.

"This is awesome. I own a small-business travel agency and have my degree. This would help so much to franchise."

—I.K.

"Seems like a misuse of the benefit to me. It's an 'educational benefit,' so these monies should go towards actual learning."

—D.B.

PAY CHECKED BY CONGRESS

"Let's have Congress take a few hits and leave the military alone!"

—B.S.

"Each military member is serving in his or her own right. Just because two military members decide to get married they shouldn't be penalized because of it. I know there are a lot of service members who marry civilians, but if their spouses would like BAH, then maybe they should enlist."

—T.S.

"[Overseas Housing Allowance] could probably be cut, from what I've seen in Japan. They should take the money they cut from OHA and put it into BAH; that way military members can actually use it."

—B.C.

"Someone in the same rank performing the same task should get paid the same. If you decide to marry and have kids, that's how you chose to spend your money. Pay the single guy the same rate as the married guy."

—K.T.

“ I just can't even voice my displeasure at reading what they want to do to an already-underpaid service member. It's like saying you don't deserve to save money so if you try we will take some of it away from you. ”

—R.H.

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.

DID YOU KNOW?

AFSA Headquarters regularly receives questions and requests for information, much of which can be obtained on the Association's website: www.hqafsa.org. Below are two of the most frequently asked questions, and answers for each.

Question: How can I obtain a copy of the 2015–16 Legislative Platform?

Answer: You can download it from the AFSA website, under the “Legislative” tab, or by going directly to www.hqafsa.org/legislative. Once there, click on “Download the 2015–2016 Legislative Platform here.”

Question: How can I obtain AFSA logos, and what are the rules for proper usage?

Answer: You can download the AFSA crest and wings logos on the AFSA website under the “Chapter Toolbox” tab, or by going directly to www.hqafsa.org/chapter-toolbox. (Also available for download on this page are AFSA videos, postcards, wallpapers and more.) The AFSA logos are trademarked and must be used consistently and appropriately to protect AFSA's brand. For more details on usage do's and don'ts, click on “Learn about the AFSA Trade-mark, Logo and Branding Guidelines here.”



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GI BILL MEANS BUSINESS PILOT PROGRAM ALLOWS SOME RECIPIENTS TO START OR BUY A COMPANY

Shortly before members of Congress headed home for their month-long summer recess, companion bills were introduced that would establish a three-year pilot program to allow up to 250 GI Bill users to start new businesses or purchase existing businesses or franchises. This legislation would open doors to new possibilities since the Post-9/11 GI Bill can now only be used for educational purposes.

The legislation, the Veterans Entrepreneurial Transition (VET) Act of 2015, would allow eligible Veterans to use their GI Bill benefits as collateral for business loans. On the Senate side, Senators Jerry Moran (R-KS) and Jon Tester (D-MT) jointly introduced S. 1870. Their bill has already moved from

the Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee to the full Senate floor. On the House side, Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE) introduced H.R. 3248, and that bill has been referred to the House Committee on Small Business.

The VET Act has been endorsed by the Small Business Administration (SBA), which would oversee this pilot (test) project in conjunction with the Department of Veterans Affairs. Although all details are not yet available, this much is known: If passed, the legislation would amend the Small Business Act and eligible Vets would have to apply for the program, present a business plan to be approved by the SBA and participate in an approved business training program. It is not clear as of press time what a “qualifying business” would be. All parties have said they will work during the August recess to build support and co-sponsorship. The bills will have to pass in their respective full chambers, be put into conference if any differences arise, and be signed into law by President Obama.

NDAA HITS FLOCK OF TROUBLE COULD DESIGNATING A BIRD AS ENDANGERED ALSO ENDANGER DOD'S BUDGET?

The greater sage grouse is being considered for addition to the endangered species list. What the heck does that have to do with the Department of Defense's annual budget? Everything, according to many House Republicans in the Western United States. If the greater sage grouse is allowed to make the list, its habitat could impact many of DoD's training ranges by limiting activities and possibly shutting down some sections.

This concern is the origin of a provision in the House version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that prevents the Department of the Interior from designating the bird as endangered for a full 10 years. House Democrats have argued it has no place in the NDAA, but more importantly, since the NDAA has already passed in the House and the Senate's version has no such provision, it must be addressed in conference where differences between the bills are resolved.

While the greater sage grouse issue will have its turn, the major conference issues of concern appear to stem from changes to the personnel retirement system. While both Chambers agreed to many of the suggestions offered by the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization



The bird in question: *Centrocercus urophasianus*, or the greater sage grouse.

Commission (MCRMC) in its final report earlier this year, the chief sticking point is how to pay for some initial costs before savings can be realized. The Senate bill addresses this cost upfront, while the House bill doesn't; thus the impasse. Another subtle but significant difference in the bills is Matching TSP; the House says up to 6 percent, while the Senate says 5 percent.

Earlier this summer we reported that Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman (and conference member) John McCain (R-AZ) was hopeful the conference would be done in time for both chambers to approve and send the resulting single bill to President Obama for signature into law. At the time, multiple sources indicated this wouldn't happen, and unfortunately, they were correct.

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, Scott Porter and Jim Lokovic write each issue's compilation.



EDUCATING ON THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

AFSA employee Jim Lokovic addresses senior noncommissioned officers from both the USAF First Sergeant Academy as well as the USAF Senior NCO Academy at an AFSA-sponsored luncheon on Maxwell-Gunter AFB, Ala. Topics covered included current events on Capitol Hill and developments within the Pentagon. AFSA regularly provides informative briefings like this one to help educate military and AFSA members on the legislative process and the important role they play as citizens.

APPROPRIATIONS BILLS STALLED A CONTINUING RESOLUTION FOR FY2016 SEEMS LIKELY AS A RESULT

Similar to the stalled progress of the NDAA, prospects are dimming for lawmakers to complete the 12 annual appropriations bills before October ends. House Speaker John Boehner acknowledged Congress probably won't get its spending bills finalized in time for the start of the new fiscal year, which would force the House to pass a short-term, stopgap measure (i.e., a Continuing Resolution, or CR) to prevent a government shutdown. Twelve of the annual funding bills have cleared committees in the House, but only seven have made it through the full chamber.

Unfortunately, the Senate's versions haven't fared quite as well. The 12 initial drafts cleared their respective committees, but the first attempt to bring one to the chamber floor died quickly when the Democrats filibustered the measure.

Since that time there have been no further attempts to bring another funding bill before a Chamber that remains at odds over government funding in general.

To put the funding timeline in perspective, when Congress reconvened on Sept. 8, there were only 10 working days scheduled until the end of Fiscal Year 2015 on Sept. 30. Under ideal circumstances, a conference report getting signed into law would take no less than five days just because of House process rules. But considering that the Senate recessed with all 12 funding bills yet to clear the Senate floor, coupled with the fact that the House only cleared seven of 12 from the House floor—and throw in a little early-onset election fever and a wild-card social issue “distractor”—and you can see why we're headed into FY16 under a CR.

AGENT ORANGE EXPOSED VA HONORS CLAIMS OF RESERVE C-123 CREWS EXPOSED TO DEFOLIANT RESIDUE AFTER WAR

In March of this year, AFSA CEO Rob Frank testified before a joint House-Senate Veterans Affairs Committees hearing. In his testimony, Frank highlighted Reserve Airmen who, in the years following the Vietnam War, flew C-123 Provider military cargo aircraft used during the war to drop the defoliant Agent Orange. He pointed out how these Airmen were exposed to that defoliant through residue left in the aircraft.

In total, it is estimated that more than 2,000 Reserve crew members, flight nurses and maintenance workers were

exposed between 1969 and 1986 in missions using these former “spray birds.” Frank urged the VA to award claims and provide appropriate health care for these warriors.

Following findings by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine’s Institute of Medicine that there was a clear connection between these C-123s and Agent Orange exposure, the VA agreed to provide care and compensation for those who were exposed through repeated contact with contaminated C-123s. This summer, the VA began honoring those claims.

Reserve C-123 Veterans who want to file a claim can call the C-123 hotline at 1-800-749-8387, or contact their local VA medical center’s environmental health coordinator for an Agent Orange Registry Exam. Those who may be eligible are strongly encouraged to file a claim through the normal VA claims process. For further questions, call the VA at 1-800-827-1000.



FACE TO FACE

Meeting with elected officials can be a great way to showcase a project, express your community’s needs and get their insight into different projects or issues. AFSA CEO Rob Frank recently had the opportunity to meet with his representative in the House—have you considered doing the same? We encourage all members to meet with their elected officials and or their staffs during one of the upcoming District Work Periods.

YOU HAVE SPOKEN AFSA SETS BASIC LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR YEAR AHEAD

On Aug. 25, during the annual AFSA Professional Airmen’s Conference, the AFSA membership approved the basic legislative blueprint to be followed by our Headquarters lobbying team in the coming year. AFSA is unique in that our members drive our legislative agenda. Each year, we ask all members through their divisions and chapters to designate priority targets, centering on quality-of-life benefit programs that are of particularly “high value.” Based on your input, each March your International Executive Council discusses and tentatively approves a draft Legislative Platform to be carried to our August conference for debate and ratification. That has happened, and AFSA members have now spoken.

Just a few of the specific targets that you, our membership, deemed priorities are improved access to health care; resisting further TRICARE fee increases; and authorizing pre-tax payment of health, dental and long-term care premiums.

Also included in the agenda are efforts to protect the annual cost-of-living adjustment for military retirees and Veterans, expanding concurrent receipt legislation to military retirees at all disability levels, and repealing or modifying current military divorce laws. Among other key priorities expressed, you made it clear that you want:

- military survivors to be able to receive Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuities and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation without offset, and that those receiving SBP should be allowed to remarry after age 55 without losing their entitlement;
- our legislative team to keep fighting for military pay comparability, to protect allowances such as the basic allowance for housing, to protect core programs such as commissaries and exchanges and to allow military members to transfer their annual leave to other members;
- members of the Guard and Reserve to be considered Veterans, and that their earliest retirement age should be reduced from 60 to 55, and that solid tuition assistance

programs should be established for all Selected Reserve members, including Dual Status Technicians;

- our team to make sure the Post-9/11 GI Bill does not fall prey to budget-cutters, and that the Tuition Assistance Program should continue in full force, and that the \$250 per-hour TA cap should be eliminated entirely; and
- POWs and MIAs from all past and future military actions to never be forgotten—supporting a sacred commitment to all who serve—and that AFSA should continue the battle to ensure that the vote of military members, including those voting absentee, is always counted.

During the Legislative Forum at this year's PAC, you, our membership, also encouraged our Headquarters Team to respond during the upcoming year to targets of opportunity above and beyond those listed in our Legislative Platform that are consistent with our charter.

You can view the entire 2015–2016 Legislative Platform at www.hqafsa.org/legislative.



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THE POWER OF 1 YOUR ACTIONS COULD SAVE A LIFE

One small act can make a difference in the life of a Veteran in crisis.

Every year, organizations across the country recognize September as Suicide Prevention Month. This year, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), local and national organizations, and individuals across the country joined in supporting The Power of 1 to show how one act can encourage Veterans, service members and their loved ones to seek confidential crisis support from the Veterans Crisis Line.

Whether it's something as simple as striking up a conversation with a Veteran, or encouraging those on your social networks to support Veterans in your area, every little bit counts. Your actions could save a life.

The Veterans Crisis Line is a free, confidential crisis resource that Veterans and their families and friends can access any day, any time by phone, chat or text. Trained responders—some of them Veterans themselves—are ready to listen, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

VA counts on grassroots networks and community organizations to spread the word that support is just a call, click or text away—because we're all in this together, and one small act shows you care.



IDENTIFYING SIGNS OF CRISIS

Sometimes, a crisis may involve thoughts of suicide. The following signs require immediate attention:

- Thinking about hurting or killing yourself
- Looking for ways to take your own life
- Talking about death, dying or suicide
- Self-destructive behavior such as drug abuse, weapons, etc.

If you notice any of these in a Veteran or Service member you know, connect him or her with the Veterans Crisis Line's free, anytime resources:

Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1

Chat online at www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/chat

Text to 838255

LEGISLATIVE AWARENESS WEEK ANNUAL EVENT FOCUSES ON ADVOCACY AND EDUCATION

Every year, AFSA's International Legislative Committee designates one week, usually in October, for the Association to refocus on and/or educate folks about issues tied to legislation. This year, AFSA's **Legislative Awareness Week (LAW)** was Oct. 4–10. Considering there are more than 130 AFSA Chapters across multiple continents, it's impossible to dictate exactly what each Division, Chapter or individual should do to promote awareness. That said, here are some suggestions for our readers to consider, not only during that week, but year-round:

Terminology Education. What exactly is a Continuing Resolution and how does it relate to me? When a bill of interest "dies in committee" can it be resurrected? What is the difference between Defense Authorizations and Defense Appropriations? These are just three subject-matter areas that AFSA members

and others affiliated with military or Veterans should know about. Chapters may consider hosting a luncheon, or a series of them, with a knowledgeable guest speaker providing explanations. If you understand the dialect of legislation, you stand a better chance of understanding its intent.

Local Government. It's no secret that the Legislative Branch (Congress) has experienced a dismal approval rating in recent years. It may be tied to the fact that it only passes a few hundred bills out of the thousands initiated. Meanwhile, at the state level, over 40,000 pieces of legislation pass each year on average. What do these laws mean to you as a resident versus someone who will PCS to another state? Are there city ordinances that give military or Veterans a break on local taxes? So many rocks to overturn, so little time. The point being, local legislative efforts in many ways impacts people more directly than the federal level; so a little awareness and effort here could save you a ticket or get you a discount.

For updates on more Legislative Awareness Week events and how you can participate, visit www.hqafsa.org.

“You can’t understand what it means to be in an Airman’s shoes until you start walking those miles,” CMSAF James Cody told attendees during the AFSA PAC Professional Development Forum.



UNITING AIRMEN

A LOOK BACK AT AFSA'S 2015 INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION AND PROFESSIONAL AIRMEN'S CONFERENCE

AFSA's annual International Convention and Professional Airmen's Conference was held in San Antonio, Aug. 22–26. The conference theme was “Uniting Airmen”—something AFSA has been doing since its inception in 1961.

The annual Convention provides AFSA delegates with the forum to conduct business meetings, while the Professional Airmen's Conference helps develop Airmen through a variety of events. Attendees this year heard from Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh and Chief Master

Sgt. of the Air Force James Cody. In addition, representatives from the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Labor provided valuable updates in their respective areas. The always-popular former Chief Master Sergeants of the Air Force also held a panel discussion, as did the Command Chiefs from the Major Commands.

For those who were not able to attend, what follows is a recap in photos of the convention and conference. And for those in attendance, we hope this feature provides a fond reminder of your time with us and your fellow AFSA members in San Antonio.



Excited to open for PAC registrations, your HQ Team was ready, willing and able to help direct attendees.



This year's theme, Uniting Airmen, inspired sports fans to don apparel in celebration of their hometown teams. Division 3 hit a home run with their custom shirts.



PAC guests enjoyed the AFSA Give Back Live Concert featuring country music recording artists Neal McCoy (right) and Deanna Carter (above), and comedian Dick Hardwick (not pictured).

MORE 2015 PAC RESOURCES

The 2015 AFSA Professional Airmen's Conference and International Convention was a great success—and luckily, key materials from the event are still available online. So whether you're an attendee looking for something specific from the conference or weren't able to attend but want to see what you missed, we've got you covered:

- Award Winners: On the AFSA Website, click on "About Us," and then "AFSA Winners 2015 PAC," or go directly to www.hqafsa.org/award-winners-2015-pac.
- More Photos: Additional photos from all 2015 PAC events are posted and available for download. Go to Flickr.com and search for "AFSA PAC 2015," or go directly to www.flickr.com/photos/afsapac2015/albums/72157654875196173 or www.flickr.com/photos/afsapac2015
- Videos: Videos of some of the more popular workshops and presentations from 2015 PAC, as well as footage from a few of the conference's social events, are available to stream at www.vimeopro.com/virtualevents/afsa-aug-2015.





First-time AFSA Conference attendees are warmly welcomed during special first-timers' training and events.



Secretary of the Air Force, The Honorable Deborah Lee James speaks about the success of today's Air Force and the challenges of its future. Secretary James also presented awards at PAC's Honors Banquet.



"Never forget where we came from, never forget how we got here. It happened because of the legacy of all of the CMSAFs," James M. McCoy, CMSAF#6, stressed during PAC's "A Legacy of Success with the Former CMSAFs" event.



Air Force Chief of Staff General Mark Welsh III addresses Airmen and discusses the importance of leadership during AFSA PAC 2015.



CMSAF#5 Bob Gaylor shares a personal tribute to his close friend "Bubba," better known as CMSAF#9 James Binnicker.

SAVE THE DATE

It's never too early to register and plan for next year's AFSA International Convention and Professional Airmen's Conference, which will be held at the Grand Hyatt in San Antonio, Aug. 20–24, 2016. So mark your calendars, encourage fellow AFSA members to join, and we'll see you in San Antonio.

Visit www.hqafsa.org for up-to-date details on 2016 PAC and all AFSA news and events.



HIGH-FLYING PATRIOTISM

THE HONOR FLIGHT NETWORK, AFSA'S 2015 AMERICANISM AWARD WINNER, FLIES VETS TO OUR NATION'S CAPITAL TO VISIT MEMORIALS IN THEIR HONOR

By Molly Blake

A few times a month, something magical happens at the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. Big, shiny buses lumber up the adjacent streets and park as close as they can to the oval-shaped pool and 56 granite columns. And then when the doors open with a hiss and the first passenger carefully, gingerly steps off the bus and onto the hallowed grounds, the memorial comes alive.

Diane Gresse has seen it happen time and again. While shielding their eyes from the sun, the gaggle of unsuspecting tourists who've been reading plaques, taking selfies and trying to absorb a bit of history will suddenly go silent.

"And then someone will start clapping," says Gresse, the executive director of Honor Flight. "And suddenly people are walking up and shaking the Veterans' hands and saying 'thank you for your service.'"

"Even the teenagers," adds John Eckhart, an 85-year-old retired Air Force colonel and Korean War Veteran. "That was really gratifying."

Eckhart is one of 138,817 Veterans in the last 10-plus years who have been flown to Washington, D.C., to visit the big three war memorials—the WWII Memorial, the Korean War Memorial and the Vietnam War Memorial Wall—thanks to Honor Flight, a nonprofit organization dedicated to thanking WWII survivors and other Veterans for their service by providing an opportunity for them to see and reflect at these memorials in person. That Honor Flight has provided this experience to so many is all the more impressive given the group's humble beginnings in a small VA clinic in Springfield, Ohio.



A U.S. Veteran returns home to a hero's welcome after an Honor Flight trip to Washington, D.C.



A group of WWII Veterans salutes in honor of fallen servicemen during an Honor Flight trip to the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C.

A PLAN TAKES FLIGHT

It was late 2004 and the WWII Memorial had just been unveiled to much fanfare—mostly because it took six decades for the nation to honor the 405,399 Americans who lost their lives and the more than 16 million Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen and families who served during the conflict. But there was almost immediate cause for concern, too, as the few million men and women still alive who served in WWII were dying at a daunting rate of more than 1,000 a day.

Earl Morse, a physician's assistant and retired Air Force captain, began asking his patients, many of whom were part of the Greatest Generation, if they planned to see their memorial. Their time in the war was so profound, and yet rare was the Veteran who planned to travel to D.C. anytime soon. Age was a factor. So were transportation, cost and logistics. Morse got to thinking. Why not recruit his pilot buddies and fly a few local deserving Veterans to D.C.? With that plan, Honor Flight was born, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Today, Southwest Airlines is a sponsor, as is Snap-On Tools. Honor Flight works with 132 regional hubs in 43 states along with battalions of intrepid volunteers who handle the flights; passage to and from airports and the parade of wheelchairs, walkers, canes and oxygen tanks; as well as the guardians, spouses, and daughters and sons who travel with the Veterans.

ONE LAST ADVENTURE

Skip Cohen, a Florida-based author and photographer, is one such proud son of a WWII Veteran.



Friends and family of U.S. Veterans eagerly await their arrival home from an Honor Flight trip. The nonprofit organization provides Veterans with trips to Washington, D.C., to view the war memorials built in their honor.

“There’s nothing a 92-year-old really needs,” says Cohen. He was struggling to come up with a birthday present for his dad, when a friend mentioned Honor Flight. The idea piqued Cohen’s curiosity. He knew his dad’s health was deteriorating and precious time with his father was ever narrowing.

“I enjoy being with my dad,” Cohen says. “The Honor Flight gave us a chance for one last adventure.”

No stranger to adventure, the elder Cohen agreed right away.

Ralph Cohen enlisted in the Army Air Corps in July 1942 with dreams of flying. An ear problem dashed his aviation hopes, so he went to radio school instead and spent time in New Guinea, Samara in the Philippines and eventually Atsugi Air Base in Tokyo. Like so many others, the war had a lasting impact on Cohen, so his time at the WWII memorial was emotional.

“I was tremendously proud, happy and sorry all at the same time,” he recalls. “It was a flash back to so many memories, both good and bad.”

Gresse notes that most Honor Flight Vets have similar reactions, as many emotions bubble up to the surface during their visits. For some, these moments of discovery or mysterious reprieve instead take place at the solemn black Vietnam Memorial Wall, the ghostly Korean War Memorial and its surrounding sweep of grasses, the hallowed Tomb of the Unknown or one of the other spots around the capital that the groups visit.

While the experience tends to elicit mixed emotions, “so many find peace,” Gresse stresses.

With that goal in mind, a visit to the memorials wasn’t the only present Skip Cohen arranged for his father during their Honor Flight trip. Skip had his own son, an Army lieutenant colonel, join them and surprise his grandfather at dinner. He arrived in full uniform. It was a moment Skip called “incredible.”



Before departing on an Honor Flight trip to our nation’s capital, a Veteran proudly displays the letter he received from a child in his hometown thanking him for his service.

SHARED, YET PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

As Tom Webb attests, words like that—incredible, memorable, extraordinary—are common sentiments among the Honor Flight participants. Like his father and brother before him, Webb joined the Air Force in March 1973 as “an old man.” At just 21, Webb served as a psychological counselor during the Vietnam War for four years and then returned home to finish college. Afterwards he spent much of his career working as a health care administrator in Williamstown, Mass., a small town in the far northwest corner of the state. It’s home to Williams College and a population of roughly 8,000. Today, Webb serves as an Honor Guard for the American Legion Post 152. He has two sons and a lovely wife named Sam, who accompanied him on his May 2015 Honor Flight.

For Webb, who had been to D.C. before and even to a few of the memorials, the experience was still moving. “I’ve never been with a group like this,” he notes. “For so many, it was a different tour of duty.”

Eckhart is equally as humble about his service. “Goodness gracious, the people who were in combat, they really deserve the praise,” he says. Despite Eckhart’s initial skepticism about the benefits of such a trip, the octogenarian gave his Honor Flight experience perhaps the highest compliment a Texan can: “It was better than two rodeos.”

Louis DeLuca, 93, similarly raves about his April 2015 Honor Flight. During WWII, DeLuca flew on stripped down B-25s and P-47s as a crew member with the 86th Fighter Bomber Group. He served two and a half years in hot spots like Africa, the Mediterranean Theater, France and Germany, “moving when the lines moved,” he says.

DeLuca’s daughter, Louise, attended the Honor Flight as a guardian. In addition to the WWII Memorial, their group leader also arranged for the buses to stop by The Women In Military Service For America Memorial so Louise could see a picture of her mother, Angeline Blazquez DeLuca, in uniform. It sounds more like a page torn from a movie script, but it’s true. Louis and Angeline, who died in 2013 and served during the war as a stenographer, met while they both were stationed in El Paso, Texas. They were married for 67 years.

“I’m sure glad we did that,” Louise said.

TANGIBLE REMINDERS

Just 1 percent of the population serves in the military today. It’s a tiny sliver of society that leaves many with, at best, a tangential connection to the armed services and an even wispier insight into our nation’s dramatic military history and the sacrifices that our Veterans, and their families, have made.

And while it’s axiomatic that seeing and touching the powerful memorials makes a difference in those history lessons, not even the most fastidious research by a high school kid can replace the feeling, the vibration that builds when a bus pulls up and history, literally, steps out.

It’s a bit sad to think that WWII Veterans, and soon Korean and Vietnam War Vets, will disappear like a shadow retreating over the shallow reflecting pool. But thankfully, there will always be guys like DeLuca, Cohen and Webb who will volunteer, who will always, implausibly, laud the service of others first, and whose selfless actions will inspire our forebears to build a memorial—something so lovely and so beautiful to visit—to remember their sacrifice.

Eckhart sums it up thusly: “We’ve got a pretty fantastic country.”

Visit www.honorflight.org for more information and to locate a hub in your area.



A group of Honor Flight participants and supporters pose in front of the Marine Corps War Memorial in Arlington, Va. The memorial depicts the flag-raising scene from Iwo Jima in WWII, but it honors all U.S. Marines who have given their lives.

AFSA'S AMERICANISM AWARD

Honor Flight was the recipient of the 2014 Americanism Award at the Air Force Sergeants Association Professional Airmen’s Conference. Diane Gresse, executive director of Honor Flight, and her team were incredibly humbled and appreciative of the recognition. She credits the hub leaders and volunteers with making the Honor Flights so special for so many Veterans and guardians.

There are currently fewer than one million WWII Veterans still living, but “time is of the essence, too, with regards to our Korean War and Vietnam Vets,” says Gresse. “We want all Veterans to know that we have not forgotten about them.”

Each of the 132 Honor Flight hubs is self-sustaining, raises its own money and operates its own board. Gresse encourages interested volunteers to reach out to a nearby hub team leader or make a donation online.

AFSA AWARD WINNERS

The AFSA Professional Airmen's Conference was held Aug. 22–26 in San Antonio. This annual event brings together AFSA members with Senior Air Force and Congressional leaders for professional development, the sharing of ideas and to conduct the business of AFSA. Another highlight of the event is an awards ceremony, which recognizes specific members and supporters who have accomplished great things in support of Airmen, Veterans, their families and this association. The following pages highlight the 2014 AFSA Award recipients.



WILLIAM H. PITSENBARGER HEROISM AWARD

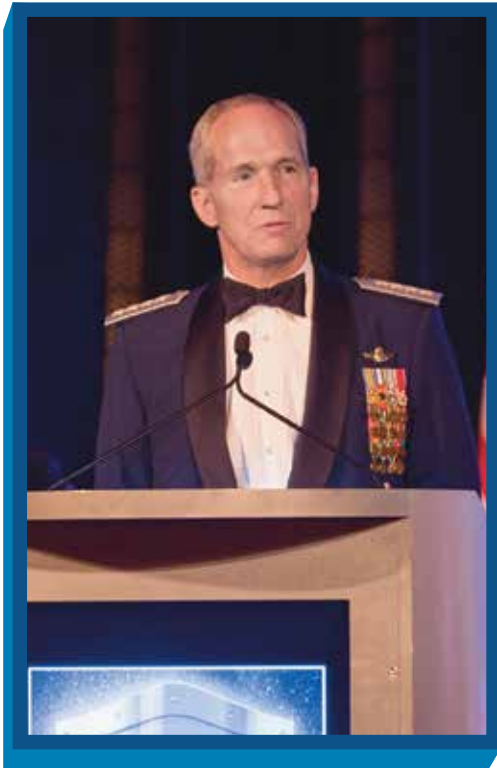
SSgt Gabriel R. Huizar

On May 13, 2014, Staff Sgt. Gabriel R. Huizar distinguished himself as a Pararescueman, 23rd Special Tactics Squadron, 720th Special Tactics Group, 24th Special Operations Wing, Hurlburt Field, Fla. He served as the rescue and trauma specialist for an Army Special Forces team during a high-risk combat mission in Afghanistan. In clearing an enemy-held compound, his team leader was struck down by heavy gunfire. Without hesitation and while exposed, Huizar immediately rendered first aid, saving his seriously wounded comrade. Later, he guided the helicopter into the clearing, enabling the team's evacuation. Sergeant Huizar's intrepidity and devotion to his fellow service members—despite his own mortal danger—are clearly in the highest traditions of the United States Air Force and AFSA's William H. Pitsenbarger Award for Heroism.



Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James presents the William H. Pitsenbarger Award for Heroism to Staff Sgt. Gabriel R. Huizar (center) at the 2015 AFSA Professional Airmen's Conference Aug. 26. She is joined on stage by (left to right) Maj. Gen. Eugene Haase, vice commander of Air Force Special Operations Command; CMSAF James Cody; and retired Chief Master Sgt. Dan Yeomans, AFSA International President.

AFSA INTERNATIONAL AWARDS



2014 AFSA EXCELLENCE IN MILITARY LEADERSHIP AWARD

Gen. Mike Hostage

As the former commander of Air Combat Command (now retired), Gen. Mike Hostage fought to ease the strain of sequestration cuts on his Airmen, ensuring combat readiness for those going to the fight, and personal growth, recuperation and family focus for those not deploying. He engaged Congress on critical resources, enlisted readiness and quality-of-life programs. While always seeking a combat edge, he also relentlessly promoted enlisted development, effective performance evaluations and comprehensive Airman fitness. He guided these efforts by a focus on resiliency, safety and effective wingmanship. His superior military leadership and extraordinary devotion to enlisted Airmen honors our Air Force and is unquestionably deserving of AFSA's 2014 Excellence in Military Leadership Award.



2014 L. MENDEL RIVERS AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

Congressman Beto O'Rourke (D-Texas)

During his entire tenure, Rep. Beto O'Rourke of Texas has tirelessly worked on legislation directly impacting the quality of the lives of enlisted members and their families. He acted to reform the Veterans' health care system, helped craft the Veterans Choice Program, focused heavily on the mental health and suicide prevention of Veterans, and tackled the long wait times for VA disability claims. He also zeroed in on issues that directly support currently serving Airmen and retirees. He fought to make sure tuition assistance continued; he worked to secure in-state tuition rates for those using the GI Bill; and he spoke out to achieve annual cost-of-living adjustments for military retirees. His consistent support of current and past Airmen emphatically warrants the presentation of AFSA's 2014 L. Mendel Rivers Award of Excellence.

AFSA MEMBER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Master Sgt. Steven M. Haro

Master Sgt. Steven M. Haro is the Assistant Chief Controller of Moody's Air Traffic Control Tower for the 23rd Operations Support Squadron at Moody AFB, Ga. During his second term as AFSA Chapter 460 President (Division 2), Haro led 1,129 members, 24 meetings and 76 events, while executing a \$10,000 budget and continuing the chapter excellence standard. Haro oversaw the AFSA POW/MIA Poker Run, which included 124 riders and 50 volunteers and raised \$8,200 for wounded Veterans' home transformations. He initiated wing leadership meetings and briefed chapter activities at wing staff meeting, securing both wing commander and command chief membership. He partnered with Black Crow Media to broadcast community events at four different radio stations, ensuring that 4,000-plus retirees and Active Duty members were informed. He also was selected to help plan for and brief on enlisted issues for the visiting Secretary of the Air Force. Haro is a passionate AFSA rep who conducted 27 briefs to First Term Airmen Centers, NCOs and Senior NCOs. As the guest speaker for the Wing Induction Ceremony, he highlighted the importance of peer mentorship.



AFSA FAMILY MEMBER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Patricia R. Dalzell

Patricia R. Dalzell of Kansas City, Mo., serves as Chapter 804 Secretary (Division 3). Dalzell also chairs the Chapter Newsletter Committee and serves as Newsletter Editor, providing a critical link to Chapter members. She was a member of the Chapter's POW/MIA Remembrance Committee, which is responsible for organizing and implementing the annual public ceremony and helping to ensure that America never forgets its POWs and those MIA. Dalzell assisted in the cutting, packaging and shipping of 450,000 coupons weighing 375 pounds to help families at 21 overseas bases. She coordinated Junior ROTC Color Guard support and served as Chapter liaison to the Senior Military Science Instructor. Her involvement also extends beyond AFSA, as she provided support to the local Salvation Army by leading a donation drive to give comfort and support to the homeless and has participated in "Light the Night" events to raise awareness and funding for Leukemia and Lymphoma research.



AFSA International President Dan Yeomans and Vice President Tim Litherland pose with Patty Dalzell at the International Convention.

CMSGT. RICHARD L. ETCHENBERGER NCO OF THE YEAR AWARD

Tech. Sgt. Raymond C. Dezur

Tech. Sgt. Raymond C. Dezur is a 2A671 Aerospace Propulsion Craftsman for the 436th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Dover AFB, Del. Dezur maintained 18 C-5M aircraft valued at \$4.8 billion, managed 56 people and significantly increased the home station logistics departure rate. He directed a delayed discrepancy program, coordinating repairs of 200 write-ups in four months. He also recovered an aircraft with multiple bird strikes. He earned 27 credits toward a bachelor's degree in professional aeronautics and completed the final six credits for his CCAF Aviation Maintenance Technician degree. He led his squadron's holiday party and volunteered with the Salvation Army. As the AFSA Chapter Plans and Program Trustee, Dezur organized 14 events, two of which garnered stories in the base newspaper. He also built AFSA's Adopt-a-Highway program and was elected Chapter 201 Vice President (Division 1).



Tech. Sgt. Dezur (center) is congratulated on stage by (left to right) CMSAF #8 Sam Parish, CMSAF #5 Bob Gaylor, CMSAF James Cody and Chief Master Sgt. (Ret.) Dan Yeomans.

AFSA AIRMAN OF YEAR AWARD

Senior Airman Jeffrey R. Hawkins

Senior Airman Jeffrey R. Hawkins is a 2A531B Aerospace Maintenance Apprentice for the 86th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Ramstein AB, Germany, and is a member of AFSA Chapter 1674 (Division 7). Hawkins won his squadron's Knuckle Buster maintenance award. He supported three Combatant Command priorities, delivering 3,200 sorties with 15,800 passengers and 14 million pounds of cargo. He led 12 personnel and was responsible for \$8,000 worth of equipment, earning the Thunderbolt Award. He supported Exercise Combined Resolve II with 4K troops from 13 nations. He earned the "Top Dog" award with the highest tech school score and completed six credits toward his CCAF degree with a 4.0 GPA. Hawkins led an NCOA Junior Airman's panel, briefing 152 Tech Sergeants. He also helped raise \$8,400 for the holiday party; assisted with the annual Operation Angel Tree effort, raising \$15,000 for families for holidays; and briefed AFSA at base functions for more than 300 people. Airman Hawkins also is No. 1 in Division retentions.



Senior Airman Hawkins (center) is joined on stage by (left to right) CMSAF #5 Bob Gaylor, CMSAF #8 Sam Parish, CMSAF James Cody and Chief Master Sgt. (Ret.) Dan Yeomans.



**President's Achievement Award
David Bamburg**

David Bamburg, of AFSA Chapter 951 at Ellsworth AFB, S.D., receives the AFSA President's Achievement Award from Chief Master Sgt. Dan Yeomans, AFSA International President.



**International President's Award
Bruce Blodgett**

Bruce Blodgett, of AFSA Chapter 306 at Charleston, S.C., receives the AFSA International President's Award from Chief Master Sgt. Dan Yeomans, AFSA International President.

AFSA FOUR PILLARS

The Four Pillar Awards recognize those members who have excelled in one of the areas represented by AFSA's four pillars: Legislation, Communications, Membership and Fraternalism. The awardees are selected by the International President with input from the Executive Council.



Four Pillars Achievement Award for Legislation
HQ AFSA's Military and Government Team of Morgan Brown, Scott Porter and Paul Grugin



Four Pillars Achievement Award for Membership
Mr. Rene Arnold



Four Pillars Achievement Award for Communications
TSgt. Chester Hinds



Four Pillars Achievement Award for Fraternalism
Ms. Lisa Byrd

CHIEF MASTER SGT. OF THE AIR FORCE AWARDS



**Active Duty Recruiter
of the Year**
TSgt. Cameron Bruggeman



AFRC Recruiter of the Year
MSgt. Adam Eldard



ANG Recruiter of the Year
TSgt. Virgen Reyes



**ANG Retention Office
Manager of the Year**
MSgt. Steven David



First Sergeant of the Year
MSgt. Marvin Jimerson, Jr.



**Honor Guard Manager
of the Year**
MSgt. Jason Charlemagne



**Honor Guard Member
of the Year**
SrA Samantha Coy



**Military Training Instructor
of the Year**
MSgt. Nicholas Urdiales



**Military Training Leader
of the Year**
TSgt. Titus Serrell

AFSA SCHOLARS

The 2015 AFSA Scholarship Program awarded 12 scholarships totaling \$23,500. AFSA's top scholarship went to Lauren Gawel, who will continue her education at The University of Florida.

\$2,500 FINI SCHOLARSHIP

Lauren Gawel

\$2,500 ABBOTT SCHOLARSHIP

Anthony Visciotti

\$2,500 KLOBUS SCHOLARSHIP

Christina Kidd

\$2,500 STATON SCHOLARSHIP

Alyssa Staton

\$2,000 GARNER SCHOLARSHIP

Alia Pappas

\$2,000 ROUSHER SCHOLARSHIP

Kathleen Hendershott

\$2,000 PAGE SCHOLARSHIP

Taylor Daubert

\$1,500 THE AFSA EXCELLENCE IN MILITARY LEADERSHIP SCHOLARSHIP IHO GENERAL PHILIP BREEDLOVE

Austin Henry

\$1,500 THE AFSA AMERICANISM SCHOLARSHIP IHO WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA

Adam Cole

\$1,500 ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE SCHOLARSHIP

John Cox

\$1,500 ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE SCHOLARSHIP

Jessica Wisniewski

\$1,500 ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE SCHOLARSHIP

Karie Winston

FAMILY FOCUSED SCHOLARSHIP

The Air Force core values of Integrity First, Service Before Self and Excellence in All We Do are lived by spouses in their day-to-day lives, caring for their families and loved ones

as they serve behind the scenes. AFSA is proud to have Columbia Southern Education Group as a supporter for our AFSA Gives Back program through the Family Focused Scholarship.

Jennifer Blazier, San Antonio

AFSA INTERNATIONAL AUXILIARY SCHOLARS

The 2014 AFSA International Auxiliary Scholarship Program awarded four \$1,000 scholarships. Without the support of the gracious donors and sponsors, the AFSA International Auxiliary Grant/Scholarship Fund would be unable to grant the number of grants/scholarships it awards to deserving recipients each year.

\$1,000 ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE SCHOLARSHIP

Nichole Martens

Jacob Guinan

Christine Rende

Amanda Bates

AMF SCHOLARS

The 2015 Airmen Memorial Foundation Scholarship Program awarded 23 scholarships totaling \$33,500. Without the support of the gracious donors and sponsors, the AMF would be unable to grant the number of scholarships it provides to deserving recipients each year.

\$3,000 VETERANS UNITED HOME LOANS ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE SCHOLARSHIP

Natalie Ebreo

\$2,000 RICHARD HOWARD SCHOLARSHIP

Cecelia Pletan

\$2,000 JULENE HOWARD MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Jordan Frotz

\$2,000 SHARON PICCOLI MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Franklin Gum

\$2,000 SGT. JAMES R. SEAL MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Seth Grant

\$2,000 ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE SCHOLARSHIPS

Shannon Corcoran

\$1,500 ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE SCHOLARSHIPS

Danielle Norfleet

Rebecca Wolff

Michael Sheehan

Sarah Bailey

Jacob Baker

Hali McDonald

Brianna Heck

\$1,000 USAA SCHOLARSHIP

Dustin Pletan

Malik Jackson

Bethany Rainwater

Vanessa Hosaka

Kristina Pond

\$1,000 GEICO SCHOLARSHIP

Joshua Smith

Mackenzie Dewaard

Sherman Paul

Madeline Smith

Tayanna Todd

CMSAF SCHOLARSHIPS

The 2015 Chief Master Sergeants of the Air Force Scholarship Program awarded 11 scholarships totaling \$16,000. The top scholarship—The CMSAF Paul W. Airey Memorial Scholarship—went to Angelica R. Rodriguez, who will continue her education at Northern Arizona University.

\$3,000 CMSAF PAUL W. AIREY MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Angelica R. Rodriguez

\$2,500 CMSAF SCHOLARSHIP

Julia M. Segebarth

\$2,000 CMSAF SCHOLARSHIP

John Phillip Hendershott

\$1,500 CMSAF SCHOLARSHIP

Allison Rose Beckmann

\$1,000 CMSAF SCHOLARSHIP

Karlee Stoll

Jennifer Michelle Sissel

Leonia Margaret Hunt

Jennifer Lee Marshall

Dylan Robert Geyer

Mickayla Ruth Molnar

Nathaniel Albert Heithoff

AFSA RECRUITING AND RETENTION AWARDS

SKYHIGHERS

(recruited 100 or more members):

* Denotes Repeat SKYHIGH (from the last two consecutive years)

MEMBER NAME	CHAPTER	RECRUITED						
Forsthoefel, Thomas	F1076	655	Turner, Scott	F1054	107	Flynn, Sarah	F1076	101
Archer, Kevin	F1461	156	*Kienholz, Jamie	F1076	105	Newland, Donna	F1076	101
Sandifer, Joshua	F0615	156	*Gradel, Christopher	F1076	104	Radnor, Steven	F1260	101
*Haro, Steven	F0460	154	Halloway, Steven	F1054	103	Sanchez, Jhoanna	F1076	101
Moore, Michael	F1076	142	Cornell, Jesse	F1076	102	Shoener, David	F1674	101
*Eiland, Letrece	F1054	133	Huntley, Dylan	F1054	102	Sidel, Travis	F0984	101
Greenlief, Alexander	F1076	127	Lansberry, Joshua	F0102	102	Turner, Chasitey	F1054	101
Kazumura, Daniel	F0652	120	Norlock, Natalie	F1076	102	*Wilson, Karla	F1076	101
Gerberick, Jeremy	F1076	116	*Piccoli, Geno	F1260	102	Wilson, John	F0984	101
Lalonde, Katelin	F1054	116	Soutter, Hollie	F0652	102	*Winkler, Robert	F1461	101
Bartlett, Zachary	F0652	113	Vaughn, Chad	F1054	102	Farnum, Lisbeth	F0652	100
Moody, Jeff	F0652	113	*Wiggers, David	F1054	102	*Gallup, Gregory	F1356	100
Reyes, Luis	F1260	111	Allar, Derek	F1054	101	Kanoy, William	F1356	100
Harms-Colby, Adam	F1054	109	Berrier, Jesse	F1257	101	*Moody, Heather	F0652	100
O'Hagan, Johnny	F1252	109	Corbin, Lavanna	F0652	101	Moss, Michelle	F0652	100
Francis, Stephan	F0988	108	*Fernandez, Angela	F1461	101	Moss, Richard	F0652	100
						Dittman, Joe	F0751	100

TWINFLIERS

(recruited/retained a combined total of at least 100 or more members (75/25)):

* Denotes Repeat TwinFLIER (from the last two consecutive years)

MEMBER NAME	CHAPTER	RECRUITS	RETENTIONS	TOTAL
Koster, Steven	F1076	95	25	120
Erickson, Jamie	F1657	30	81	111
Litherland, Timothy	F1669	41	67	108
Blodgett, Bruce	F0554	49	56	105
Ceglar, William	F1674	36	69	105
Koenig, Jeffrey	F0358	68	35	103
Yeomans, Daniel	F1461	73	30	103
Herndon, Kelly	F0533	46	56	102
Crissinger, James	F1075	41	61	102
Crissinger, Sharon	F1075	70	32	102
McCoy, David	F0751	75	26	101

HIGHFLIERS

(retained 100 or more members):

* Denotes Repeat HighFLIER (from the last two consecutive years)

MEMBER NAME	CHAPTER	RETAINED
Gates, Colin	F0479	458
*Kolwitz, Roland	F0851	176
Gallup, Gregory	F1075	101
*Kolwitz, Jean	F0851	107
*Zalesky, Steven	F0872	108
Melenka, Nicholas	F1556	104

The Soviets found the P-47 “jugs” extremely useful on the Eastern Front since they could carry half the bomb load of a B-17 bomber. (USAF photo)



RED AIR RISING

THE FORGOTTEN LEGACY OF THE SOVIET AIR FORCE IN WWII

By Sean M. Miskimins

When people think of the last images of World War II in Europe, they usually think of black-and-white footage of the Red Army storming the German capital of Berlin. That the Soviet infantry receives its due in the annals of WWII history is just, since its role in the conflict was as important as it was memorable. In fact, the deeds of these men were so determined and heroic that the Allies often joked that the Red Army had been “re-created” at least twice by war’s end—meaning that so many Soviet soldiers had given their lives fighting that the infantry ranks needed to be replenished by a younger generation. By the

end of the war, another Allied joke suggested those Soviet soldiers who remained were so young that they didn’t even shave.

When analyzing the Soviet Union’s WWII exploits, it’s also important to look at the role of its Air Force, as well as the British and American Lend-Lease program that contributed to the Soviet’s wartime successes.

Though the British were crying for help from the Americans long before Pearl Harbor, they knew the Soviets needed help even more. The economic system of pre-war Soviet Union meant that while the country had lots of people, it was unprepared in terms of

war materiel. Manufacturing efforts in places like St. Petersburg and Moscow were a century behind the rest of the world by 1940.

In light of this reality, the British and Americans established a Lend-Lease program whereby the two Western powers shared everything from razor blades and food, to tanks and airplanes with their Communist allies in the East. During a period of four years, the Americans alone gave more than 2 million tons of oil and gas to the sons of Lenin. The U.S. also gave an astounding number of planes—more than 14,000—to the Soviets via the Lend-Lease. This included 4,700

P-39 Air Cobras, 2,000 P-40 Warhawks, 1,000 B-25 Mitchells and 200 of the famed P-47 Thunderbolts (also known as “jugs”). The totality of America’s huge wartime contribution to the Soviet Red Air Force is evident in the numbers: By the end of war, one in five Soviet fighters was American-built, as were three in 10 bombers.

These “loaners,” courtesy of Detroit, Seattle and Milwaukee, were worth their weight. Soviet pilots such as Gulaev, Glinka, Bobrov and even Aleksey Smirnov were some of the more than 15 WWII Soviet pilots who achieved “Ace” status flying the Bell P-39. Soviet airmen also performed great deeds with American built P-40s. Boris Safonov tallied 25 aerial kills in his Warhawk by the time he died in combat in the summer of 1942.

Just like their American counterparts, these airmen from the frozen steppe needed reliable ground crews to achieve mission successes in the air. While that need was mostly met between 1943 and 1945, the Red Army’s aerial support on the ground was lacking in the early days of the war—in part due to casualties.

Many Soviet men who put pen to paper after the war described the “frightened” and “negative momentum” that began with the June 22, 1941, German invasion. The German tidal wave rolled up thousands of miles of Soviet territory and decimated Red Army airfields along the way. By lunchtime on the day of that invasion, more than 1,200 Soviet aircraft were destroyed—of those, 528 never even left the ground.

On the other side, the Soviets had managed to knock only 161 of Hitler’s airplanes from the sky that June day. Between Germany’s minimal losses and the success of its strafing and bomb runs the vaunted Luftwaffe had done well that morning. Unfortunately, many a Soviet Air Force mechanic paid the price on the tarmac while attempting to get their planes ready to

take off during those frantic moments of the invasion.

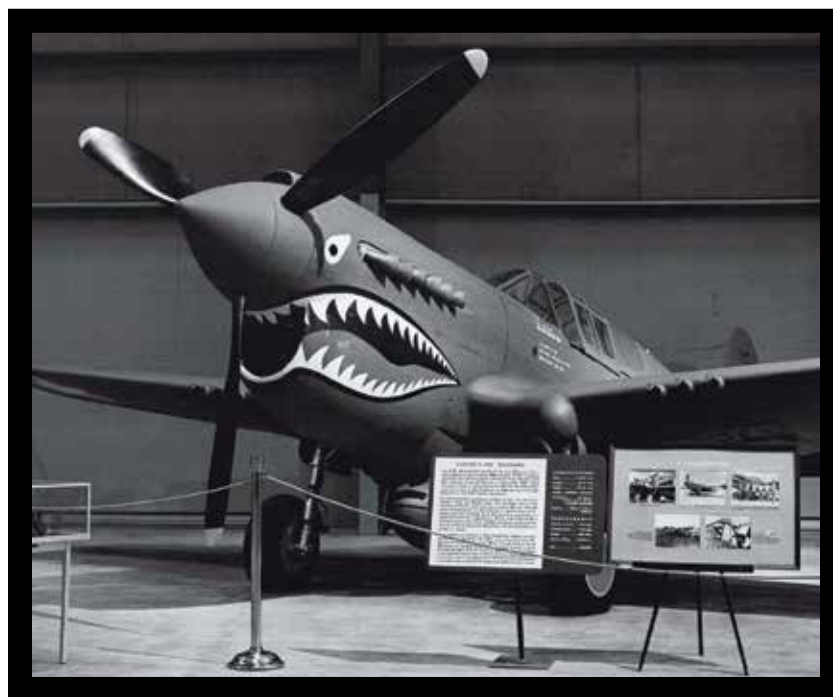
In these early days of the war with Germany, “every man for himself,” was the way to survive. Thus, pilots and enlisted ground crew mechanics were not concerned for the others whereabouts; though, that would be different two years later as the Soviets turned the tide of war.

Quite a few armchair historians talk of Stalingrad as the “turning point” for the war in the east. The determined progression of the Soviets in securing the city on the Volga River, literally building by building, for over a year and a half was indeed effective. What’s more, its production gains in that time — despite the struggle among its troops and residents for basic survival — were a huge aid in the war’s turnaround.

Survival in this case had as much to do with the elements as the conflict itself. Luckily, many Soviet Air Force ground crew members in and around Stalingrad knew how to cope and

even continue to work in frigid arctic temperatures—some of which dipped as low as 30 degrees below zero that winter. These Soviet air mechanics also knew well the dangers of exposed skin out on the tarmac, but their German aircraft mechanic counterparts had to learn the hard way—via frostbite and lost appendages.

“Double duty” was also a way of life for some Red Air Force mechanics near Stalingrad. Some of them took time manning anti-aircraft guns to target the Luftwaffe enemies. But this was the exception and not the rule, as some Soviet units didn’t even average one AA gun per squadron. However, thanks in part to Stalin’s ego—above all, he did not want to lose the city that bore his name—the Soviets built 50 new airfields east of Stalingrad between later 1942 and 1943. They also sent in eight new aircraft maintenance battalions to support planes near the city. Though these efforts were definitely improvements, the 354-sorties-per-day average the



In just one year of flying combat, Soviet pilot Boris Safonov achieved 25 kills in a P-40 Warhawk just like the one shown here with the famed “Chinese-theater markings” (Shark’s teeth). (USAF photo)



Thanks to the Lend-Lease program, which brought AAF aircraft, like this Soviet Yak-18 (left), to the Soviets, the Red Air Force began to thrive late in the war. (Commemorative Air Force Staff Photo—Miskimins)

Soviets had seen in the skies around Stalingrad had already tapered off significantly by the end of 1941. For most of 1942, Stalingrad—from the air, at least—was all but abandoned.

That changed for the better in mid-January 1943, when Stalingrad's defenders spoke of "friendly planes in the skies above Stalingrad" for the first time since December 1941. Even more so than the improved weather, this increase in aerial force was a big factor in the turnaround in Stalingrad.

A technologically backwards nation until 1941, the Soviet Union raced into modernity as the war progressed. The Soviets quickly put their men and women to work, and factories—and whole towns—came alive with production. Chelyabinsk, in the Ural Mountains, was one such town. It began producing tanks and planes with efficiency by 1942. By the time the Germans were surrendering in Stalingrad in February 1943, Chelyabinsk had a new nickname: "Tankograd."

Just as ground troops, pilots and mechanics began working together and trusting each other, civilians also showed dedication to aiding the Soviet cause. An example was a Mr. Bessmertnyi, a beekeeper who ran a lucrative honey business. Bessmertnyi



The U.S. sent 4,700 P-39 Cobras, more than any other type of aircraft, to the Soviets during WWII's Lend-Lease program. The shipping route was often complex—across the Atlantic, into North Africa, then shuttled through Iran and finally up over the Caucasus Mountains and into the hands of Soviet enlisted mechanics for reassembly. (Donald Hansen collection, AMM)

started setting aside his profits in the hopes of purchasing an entire plane to donate to the Soviet Air Force. After several months, he had his 150,000 rubles and bought a Yak-9 fighter, which he donated to the Soviet Air Force. The Red Air Force honored his donation by naming that Yak-9, "Bessmertnyi."

In early spring of 1943, reversals going on all over the Soviet Union helped create a military U-turn for the German military. Despite the fact that America had been in the war for more than a year, the U.S. government was still conducting Lend-Lease

shipments to the USSR. Many of the U.S. warplanes shipped had a long route to get into the hands of the Soviet enlisted mechanics who then serviced them prior to missions. Many AAF planes came in through North African ports only to be shipped over the Caucasus Mountains to the "Ruskies" via Tehran, Iran. The results once the plans were on-site, though, were often much swifter. One such instant Lend-Lease success story came via pilot Alexander Pokryshkin of the 16th Guards Fighter Air Regiment. On the squadron's first mission, on April 9, 1943, Pokryshkin and



Despite the successes of the U.S.-to-Soviet Union Lend-Lease program during WWII, photos like this one, showing Vice President G.H.W. Bush, left, and Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, were rare in the first four decades following the war. (David Valdez photo)

fellow pilot Grigori Rechkalov each downed German Me-109 fighters while flying American-built Bell P-39 Air Cobras.

In the summer of 1943, the Soviets and Germans met at the epic battle of Kursk. The Germans tried employing old methods that had been successful in 1941. Again, just like two summers before, Soviet troops and airmen witnessed dive-bombers screaming in towards their airfields and trenches. This time, though, there were also Red Army pilots and planes, aided by now well-prepared ground mechanics who were able to quickly launch P-47s, P-40s and P-39s to counterattack the Luftwaffe. In the end, the Luftwaffe did not dominate the air combat that day; Kursk was a Soviet victory.

Though the Allied refrain “End the war in ’44, “ was a popular slogan in the fall of that year, things didn’t get done that quickly. However, following

the “scare“ in the early days of Hitler’s “last gasp“ at the Battle of the Bulge, the Soviets, like the Western Allies, had their footing by January and were prepared to begin the drive toward Berlin. Units such as the 13th and 14th Air Army Units now had enough personnel and planes to fly ample attack and bombing missions, and even conduct nearly round-the-clock reconnaissance flights over German lines and airfields. Ground crews consisting of enlisted men and women loaded bombers with payloads totaling more than 900,000 pounds in late February 1945. Enlisted Soviet ground crew members sometimes got to pull double-duty. This time though they weren’t firing “ack ack“ guns at the now dwindling Luftwaffe, but instead were serving as radio operators for Soviet artillery units driving west toward the German capital.

A changed attitude among the Soviet people, both civilian and

military, also helped turn the war around from those dark days of June 1941. Like the U.S. Army Air Forces personnel of the past, as well as the current Air Force enlisted ground crew members, Soviet enlisted air mechanics were vital cogs in the victories and achievements of their country’s Air Force in the war.

Increased manufacturing to support the war effort provided yet another boost in the turnaround of the European Theater’s Eastern Front. Vital supplies from the Lend-Lease program, much of them from America, also aided the Soviet war machine. No doubt, American-built planes were just one of the key factors that helped springboard the Red Army to victory, after a non-stop, two-year journey toward Berlin, at the end of the most horrific war in history.

NOTE: After WWII and the death of Stalin, Stalingrad was renamed Volgograd.

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