

+ MAKING THE CUT: INTENSE COURSE PREPARES AIRMEN FOR ARMY RANGER SCHOOL



MAGAZINE OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

Airman

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MARCH-APRIL 2011



keriswar

Combat photographer puts herself on the other side of the lens in her fight against cancer

March 2011 NATIONAL WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH



Katherine Stinson, shown with a Curtiss JN-4D "Jenny" airplane, was the fourth woman in the United States to obtain a pilot's license, which she earned in 1912, at the age of 21. She took her flying lessons from famous aviator Max Lille, who initially refused to teach her because she was female. But she persuaded him to give her a trial lesson and was so good that she flew alone after only four hours of instruction.

10

HONOR FLIGHT

"Everywhere you went, you had strangers shaking your hands and saying thank you for serving."

14

BATTLE HARDENED, SADDLE SORE

"We just knew we wanted to start a rodeo association military people could be a part of."

20

KERI'S WAR

"It's not that hard for me to open up and show that side of everything because it's not about my body right now."

28

ANY GIVEN SUNDAY

"They are two separate worlds, but it's amazing to me how much they complement each other every day."

32

BRIDGING THE GAP

"We give the students the tools they need and then it's up to them to take what they learn and use it in their home country."

36

MAKING THE CUT

"Everyone wants that tab, but it just doesn't happen that way."

40

SUPPORTING THE JOINT FIGHT

Photographers share their views from Joint Forcible Entry Exercise 10-6.

FEATURES

10 HONOR FLIGHT

Washington trip gives veterans a chance to pay their respects and receive appreciation.

14 BATTLE HARDENED, SADDLE SORE

Rodeo association allows military people to get in touch with their inner cowboy or cowgirl.

20 KERI'S WAR

A combat photographer puts herself on the other side of the lens as she fights cancer.

28 ANY GIVEN SUNDAY

Andrews lieutenant spends her free time as a Washington Redskins cheerleader.

32 BRIDGING THE GAP

International school at Lackland Air Force Base brings military people and cultures together.

36 MAKING THE CUT

Intense course prepares Airmen for Army Ranger school.

40 SUPPORTING THE JOINT FIGHT

Photographers share their views from Joint Forcible Entry Exercise 10-6.

DEPARTMENTS

2 AIRMAIL

4 AROUND THE AIR FORCE

46 HERITAGE

48 NOTEBOOK

On the Cover

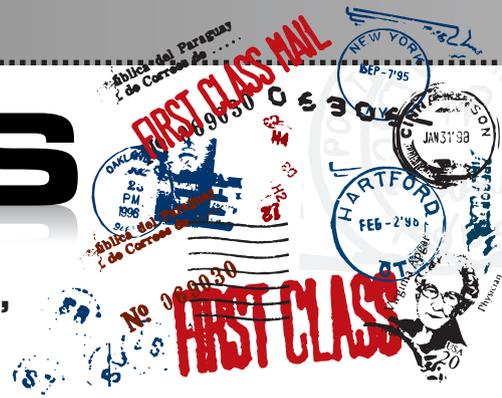
Master Sgt. Keri Whitehead, 1st Combat Camera Squadron, Joint Base Charleston, N.C., documents her fight against cancer on www.keriswar.org.

photo support by Master Sgt. Jeremy Lock
design by Luke Borland



COMMENTS

Got something to say about Airman? Write us at airman@dma.mil or visit www.AIRMANonline.af.mil, to share views with fellow readers.



ARMY (AIR CORPS) STRONG

I was reading your excellent article on Chuck Yeager when I saw, "Pioneers in Blue' features Airmen from the Army Air Corps in World War I through the present." I'd say it was a bit of a historical gaffe given that the Army Air Corps did not exist until 1926. This was a "Heritage" article and while otherwise very interesting, missed a significant aspect of America's Air Force history.

Col. Steve Teske
USAF Retired



Editor's note: Members of the U.S. Army Air Service served in World War I. The Air Service was renamed the Army Air Corps in 1926. So, technically, the Army did have an aviation division before 1926, but it was not called the Army Air Corps until that time.

THE AIRMAN STANDARD

Why does Airman magazine continue to use non-standard abbreviations for Air Force ranks as opposed to the official rank abbreviations? Specifically, the magazine continues to abbreviate with period punctuation marks, which is something the U.S. Air Force does not do. For example, Airman magazine abbreviates the rank of lieutenant colonel as "lt. col." instead of "lt col" as is both proper and unique to our service. This has been the USAF standard since before I was commissioned in 1994. Shouldn't Airman, as the official magazine of the USAF, comply?

Lt. Col. Robert C. Hume

Editor's note: Air Force publications, including Airman magazine, follow Associated Press Stylebook guidelines on grammar, punctuation and usage. The AP stylebook is considered the newspaper and magazine industry standard.

MR. MASTER SGT. (RET.)

In the November-December issue, the first item in the Comments section is "The Best Of Jake." You refer to the artist as "Mr. Schuffert." Surely you meant Master Sgt. Schuffert. I don't believe the Air Force policy to address retired members by their rank, stated so emphatically by Gen. Fogleman when he was chief of staff, has been rescinded.

Col. Wayne Pittman
USAF Retired

Editor's note: All who honorably retire from the military are entitled to retain their rank as a title. Often, however, a civilian courtesy title is used for a retired member unless the individual has indicated a preference otherwise.

X FACTOR

Your article on Charles E. Yeager perpetuates the myth that Yeager made his famous Oct. 14, 1947, supersonic flight in an airplane called the X-1 — as does Yeager's own automobile license plate.

On that date, the Air Force had never had a plane called the X-1. Yeager made his flight in the Bell XS-1 rocket plane. The XS-1 was re-designated X-1 months later.

Your article also gives Yeager's rank incorrectly. Having been elevated on the retired list, he is a retired major general, not a retired brigadier general.

Your article also misstates the type of aircraft in which British test pilot Geoffrey De Havilland was killed. The aircraft was a De Havilland D.H.108, not a Gloster Meteor.

Bob Dorr



Editor's note: The author of the article on Brig. Gen. (retired) Charles E. Yeager chose to refer to the plane by its re-designated title, X-1. We acknowledge that 'Bell' should have been included in the title.

While then-President George W. Bush did recommend General Yeager for a promotion to major general, Congress has not yet confirmed the action. In the Air Force, Congressional confirmation is required for official promotion to ranks of brigadier general and above.

Geoffrey de Havilland Jr. was indeed flying a De Havilland DH-108 when he was killed. We regret the error.

CIVILIAN CAMOUFLAGE

First, I'd like to thank you for putting together a great periodical. I encourage all the Airmen in the squadron to read your stories.

I did want to bring up something I noticed in your November-December 2010 edition of *Airman* magazine, under the Profile section (pg. 34). You have a photo of Medical Technician Master Sgt. Jenny Carney. Not sure if *Airman* magazine photographers are aware of the AF Dress & Personal Appearance instruction, but Sergeant Carney is in uniform, yet is wearing her hair in a ponytail which extends below her collar. According to the AFI, hair will not extend below on any side of an invisible line drawn parallel to the ground at the bottom edge of the shirt collar regardless of length. She's also wearing dangling earrings, which according to the AF instruction should be small spherical, conservative round diamond, gold, pearl, or silver earrings, which should be worn with any uniform combination and worn as a set. If member has multiple holes only one set of earrings will be worn in the lower earlobe. When members wear civilian clothes for duty they will conform to AFI requirements.

You have a large audience, to include junior Airmen. When they see a photo of a SNCO or any AF member, for that matter, in *Airman* magazine, they assume a staff member has verified that members photographed are in compliance with AF instructions. Which, in turn will lead them to believe that since Sergeant Carney is wearing her hair in that fashion and earrings of that style it is authorized for all. As AF members, it's our responsibility to enforce standards. I do this every day and expect all my fellow SNCOs and NCOs to do the same, but we need your help as well. Thank you for all you do.

I do enjoy reading every issue and always look forward to the next. Keep up the great work.

Senior Master Sgt. Gerald R. Price Mars
451st Intelligence Squadron first sergeant
RAF Menwith Hill, UK

Editor's note: We regret any confusion this photo may have caused. Master Sgt. Jenny Carney is a member of the Reserve, and is wearing camouflage-like scrubs, not an actual military uniform. She wears these scrubs at her civilian job to indicate her involvement with the Air Force. As she is at a civilian job and not in uniform, she is not subject to AFI regulations.



PLANNER PLANS

I received a copy of the Chuck Yeager *Airman* magazine and it came with an *Airman* calendar. First, I want to say that your magazine is the best magazine on Air Force updates and stories. I enjoyed it while I was on active duty and still do in my retirement. I am currently working at Randolph Air Force Base as a civilian and when I saw the calendar I was surprised, the calendar was good and comes in handy at the office and home. The only thing that would make the calendar as great as the magazine would be to add the Julian date to the dates of the calendar. In the section [where] I work, we deal with Julian dates on a daily basis and while our work areas are small, your calendar fits in just right. I was wondering if you would consider adding the Julian dates on future calendars. Again thanks for the great product and service you provide to all of the Air Force family.

Robert Rivera

Editor's note: We appreciate the positive feedback and are happy you like the calendar. At this time, we have no plans to add Julian dates, but will consider it for future editions.

Airman

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photo by Staff Sgt. Brian Ferguson





Air Force Staff Sgt. Kevin

Flenour uses a fallen tree to cross over a canal during a dismantled mission to Khwazi village, Afghanistan. Members of Provincial Reconstruction Team Zabul visited the village to survey a site for a future well project. PRT Zabul includes Air Force, Army, Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development and U.S. Department of Agriculture personnel, who work with the government of Afghanistan to improve governance, stability and development throughout the province.

1. Staff Sgt. Jamie Case, a crew chief with the 23rd Aircraft Maintenance Squadron from Moody Air Force Base, Ga., conducts pre-flight checks on a targeting pod attached to an A-10 Thunderbolt II during the Green Flag-West 11-2 exercise at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev. Green Flag-West provides a realistic air-land integration training environment for forces preparing to support worldwide combat operations.

photo by Tech. Sgt. Michael R. Holzworth



1

2. The wing commander's F-15E Strike Eagle assigned to the 389th Fighter Squadron sits on the flightline at sunset. The low-altitude navigation and targeting infrared for night, or LANTIRN, system allows the F-15E Strike Eagle to fly at low altitudes, at night and in any weather conditions, to attack ground targets with a variety of precision-guided and unguided weapons.

photo by Senior Airman Debbie Lockhart



2

3. Senior forward Tom Fow slams home two points as the U.S. Air Force Academy Falcons defeated North Carolina Central 73-56 at Clune Arena in Colorado Springs, Colo. Fow had 10 points and three rebounds against the Eagles.

photo by Mike Kaplan



3

4. Airmen from Royal Air Force Mildenhall, England, and RAF Marham, England, help a teammate cross a set of ropes at the low-ropes course during Leader, Ethos and Air Power Training Day at Royal Air Force Marham, England. This activity required leadership and mental and physical strength of participants to get all team members to the finishing point.

photo by Senior Airman Tabitha Lee



4

5. Airmen from the 36th Airlift Squadron, Yokota Air Base, Japan, push a box of humanitarian assistance goods from a C-130 Hercules during Operation Christmas Drop. The operation includes delivering supplies to the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, Yap, Palau, Chuuk and Pohnpei.

photo by Staff Sgt. Raymond Hoy



5



Senior Airman David Watson, 822nd Base Defense Squadron fire team member, takes a moment to say goodbye to his 3-month-old son, Mikah Watson. This is Airman Watson's second deployment to Southwest Asia.

1. Airman 1st Class Scott Silvester, 2nd Logistic Readiness Squadron vehicle and equipment maintenance apprentice, performs an overall inspection of a Hyster forklift at Barksdale Air Force Base, La. An overall inspection consists of fluid, hose, corrosion and visual checks. The 2nd LRS vehicle maintenance facility is responsible for more than 800 of Barksdale's government vehicles.

photo by Senior Airman LaShanette V. Garrett



2. Air Force Capt. Ryan Weld talks with villagers during a wroowali mission to Bakorzai village, Afghanistan. Wroowali, or brotherhood, missions are designed to bring the Afghan people closer to their government. Captain Weld is the intelligence officer for Provincial Reconstruction Team Zabul.

3. Senior Airman Mabel Aguirre, a 455th Expeditionary Medical Operations Squadron medical technician soothes Ajamal Hazrat, a one-year-old patient at the Craig Joint Theater Hospital located on Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. Members of the Hazrat family were injured after the propane tank used to heat their home exploded.

photo by Staff Sgt. Brian Ferguson



photo by Senior Airman Shelia DeVera





1. Staff Sgt. Charles Wills, 380th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, shines a flashlight into the tail section of a U-2 Dragon Lady at an undisclosed location in Southwest Asia. The U-2 is a high altitude reconnaissance aircraft that reaches altitudes above 70,000 feet.



2. A 442nd Fighter Wing A-10 Thunderbolt II pilot sits on the ramp in the cockpit of his A-10 while crew chiefs perform a hot pit refuel for his aircraft at Whiteman Air Force Base, Mo. Hot pit refueling is a procedure usually performed in a combat situation to rapidly refuel aircraft while their engines are running, resulting in a speedy refuel to thrust pilots right back into the fight. The 442nd Air Reserve technicians practice this procedure to keep their skills sharp.

3. Airman 1st Class Thomas Hearnton, 75th Security Forces Squadron, washes off Oleoresin Capsicum spray from his face at Hill, Air Force Base, Utah. OC spray is a non-lethal spray, similar to mace or pepper spray, used to temporarily incapacitate individuals. All SFS Airmen receive the OC training when they first arrive at their squadron.

4. Staff Sgt. Sang Lee, an aircrew flight equipment specialist assigned to the U.S. Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron Thunderbirds, wipes down a display helmet in the flight equipment room at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev. The aircrew flight equipment section is the focal point for all inspection, maintenance, packing and adjustment of the Thunderbirds flight gear.



HONOR ★ FLIGHT

WORLD WAR II VETERANS VISIT THEIR MONUMENT, REFLECT ON SERVICE

STORY BY RANDY ROUGHTON ✪ PHOTOS BY TECH. SGT. BENNIE J. DAVIS III

As three Air Force veterans stared at the Field of Stars at the National World War II Memorial, their thoughts took them to different places.

Jack Hood's memory focused on a fistfight and friendship that developed before the foe-turned-friend died in a Bougainville Island foxhole in the South Pacific.

James Kirk's mind took him back to the Black March and hundreds of American POWs who died along the way during one of Germany's worst winters on record.

Rodolfo Guerrero reflected on his 30 combat missions as a B-24 turret gunner and radio operator.

All three World War II veterans shared their understanding of the sacrifice symbolized by the 4,048 stars, with each star representing 100 Americans killed during the war, and appreciation for the opportunity to visit war memorials in Washington, D.C.

They were among 30 veterans in a second group taken to the nation's

capital by Alamo Honor Flight in San Antonio. The nonprofit organization provides World War II veterans the opportunity to visit the nation's war memorials for free, in appreciation for their service. A first group toured the memorials in August on the 65th anniversary of the end of World War II. A third trip is planned for late April, said Alamo Honor Flight president Tracy Huff.

"It's impressive, it really is," Mr. Hood said of the memorial. "I really did want to see it. For anyone who was in World War II, it's amazing. You hearken back to the guys you knew, not just the ones who were killed, but all of the guys who are dead now."

The World War II memorial was the highlight of the three veterans' day in Washington, but the group also visited the Lincoln, Air Force, Navy, Iwo Jima, Korean War and Vietnam Veterans memorials. They concluded the day with a trip to Arlington National Cemetery, where they witnessed the changing of the guard ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknowns.

They also enjoyed moments of gratitude at the memorials from citizens who recognized them as veterans and wanted to thank them. One veteran at the World War II Memorial felt a small tug on his jacket sleeve and looked down into 7-year-old Emily Liszewski's eyes.

"Thank you," the girl said before she returned to the spot where she and her father, John, were holding a sign in support of the veterans visiting the memorial.

"[People] have been clapping for us all over the place," Mr. Hood said. "They've been nice everywhere. I feel guilty because I haven't been the greatest guy in the world and I'm still here, and the good guys are gone."

Mr. Hood, now 87, was particularly impressed by the memorial's field of gold stars. When an American service member left home to join the war, the family often displayed a flag with a blue star on a white field in their window. If their service member was killed, they'd replace the blue star with a gold one.

During the war, Mr. Hood, who later served in the Air Force from



1949 to 1966, was a Marine in the 3rd Defense Battalion, which fought at Guadalcanal and Bougainville in 1942 and 1943. He saw many fellow Marines killed in the Solomon Islands, but as he looked at the gold stars with fellow veteran Edward Bice, he recalled one face in particular.

"This corporal and I got into a fight one time," Mr. Hood said. "I forgot what it was about. I was on guard duty at the time and wasn't paying attention, and he was giving me hell. I said, 'If you didn't have those two stripes on, I'd kick your ass.' He said, 'Don't let that stop you,' and we were fighting. Neither of us could knock the other one down, but we were too stupid to quit fighting. He couldn't beat me, but he could've put me on report. But he didn't.

"We became pretty good friends, but he got killed about a year later in Bougainville. He was in a fox-hole, and a damn bomb hits him. I knew other guys who got killed, but he was the only one I had a fight with, and that's who I thought of when I came here. He never had a chance."

Mr. Kirk, 86, already had visited many sites in Washington like the Lincoln Memorial and Arlington Cemetery, but wanted to see the World War II Memorial. He was surprised by its size and location.

I THOUGHT IT WAS REALLY SOMETHING THAT SHOWS WHAT THEY THOUGHT OF OUR GREAT GENERATION TO DESERVE A PLACE THERE.

— James Kirk

"I didn't realize it was placed so prominently between the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial," Mr. Kirk said. "I thought it was really something that shows what they thought of our great generation to deserve a place there. I don't know where I thought it was; I just didn't think it was there. It was quite a grand moment for me."

During the war, Mr. Kirk was assigned to the 2nd Bomb Group in Foggia, Italy, where his B-17 Flying Fortress aircrew flew missions over oil fields in Romania. They were flying into Poland on their 29th mission when the B-17 was shot down on the way back over Budapest, Hungary. The crew bailed out, but a group of Hungarians rounded them up in a little farmhouse.

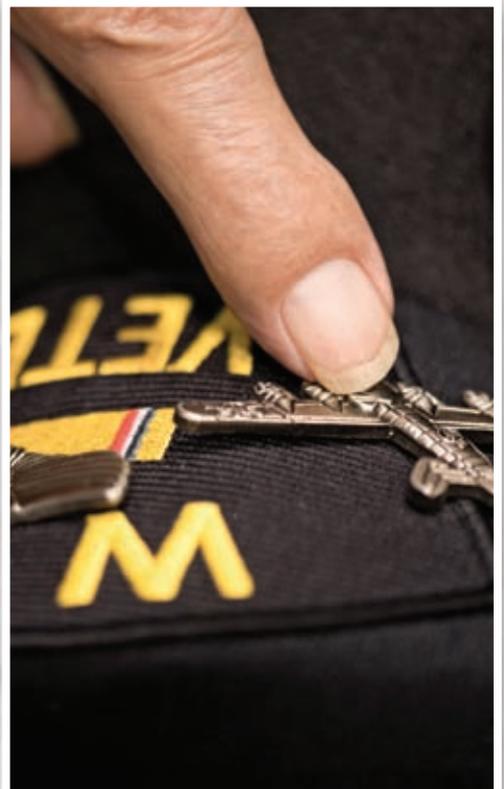
"They told us, 'For you, the war is over,' and we believed them," Mr. Kirk said.

The Hungarians took Mr. Kirk's crew to Budapest's state prison, and a month later they were on their way to a German POW camp in boxcars.

On Feb. 1, 1945, Mr. Kirk and the other POWs were forced to set out on what became known as "The March" or "The Black March." As the Russian army approached from the east, the Germans moved many of their POWs westward between January and April 1945. The POWs endured not only one of Germany's most brutal winters, but also dysentery, lice and starvation.

The march lasted nearly three months, with the Germans forcing the group of POWs to march about

Rodolfo Guerrero, 87, outside the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va. Mr. Guerrero was drafted into the Army Air Corps in 1943, and served as a B-24 upper turret gunner and radio operator with the 475th Bomb Squadron in the 8th Air Force at Norwich, Norfolk, England. He received the Air Medal five times for his 30 combat missions and the Distinguished Flying Cross for the bombing of Berlin.



(from left) World War II veterans with the Alamo Honor Flight tour watch the Changing of the Guard ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery. The nonprofit organization transported the veterans to Washington, D.C., to visit their memorials.

Rodolfo Guerrero, indicates where his position was on the aircraft when he served as a B-24 turret gunner and radio operator.

James Kirk, a U.S. Air Force and World War II veteran, makes his first visit to the Air Force Memorial during the Honor Flight tour. Mr. Kirk was assigned to the 2nd Bomb Group in Foggia, Italy, where his B-17 Flying Fortress aircrew flew missions over oil fields in Romania before being shot down and captured in Hungary.

30 miles per day, zigzagging between the American and Russian armies, all through southern Germany. Mr. Kirk's group finally was "liberated" by the Russians, who took them to Rizen, Germany, where they were held another month.

"A whole bunch of us just decided that was enough, so we jumped out of a window and walked west," Mr. Kirk said.

They eventually swam across a river with the U.S. Army waiting on the other side and were taken to Camp Lucky Strike, one of several tent camps that were built on the French coast near Le Havre. Mr. Kirk weighed 96 pounds when he arrived.

As the veterans toured the war memorials more than six decades after World War II, Mr. Guerrero, 87, wore a blue World War II Veteran cap with B-24 Liberator and 8th Air Force pins.

In 1943, he was drafted into the Army Air Corps and missed the pilot test by a couple of points, so he served as a B-24 upper turret gunner and radio operator with the 475th Bomb Squadron in the 8th Air Force at Norwich, Norfolk, England. He received the Air Medal five times for his 30 combat missions and the Distinguished Flying Cross for the bombing of Berlin. He flew twice on D-Day and also played a part in Gen. George Patton's Third Army's

600-mile march across France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia.

"When Patton was racing across with his army and was short of gas, they took us off bombing, and we were hauling gas into Lyons, France," Mr. Guerrero said.

EVERYWHERE YOU WENT, YOU HAD STRANGERS SHAKING YOUR HANDS AND SAYING THANK YOU FOR SERVING.

— Rodolfo Guerrero

From the moment the veterans appeared in the San Antonio International Airport for their flight, they encountered people who wanted to express their gratitude.

Lt. Col. Matt Humes of Air Education and Training Headquarters at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas, arranges for active-duty service members to meet with the veterans and even spend about an hour talking to them and listening to their stories. The veterans love talking to their current-day counterparts in uniform, Mr. Huff said.

He organized Alamo Honor Flight after he realized through searching

the Internet that there wasn't a hub of the National Honor Flight network in San Antonio, where there are more than 14,000 World War II veterans. The nonprofit's main objective is to provide veterans with an opportunity to visit the nation's war memorials, but it didn't take long for Mr. Huff and the Alamo Honor Flight board to see another benefit of their efforts. The flights give current Airmen, Marines, Sailors and Soldiers, as well as regular citizens, the chance to say thank you.

"Everywhere you went, you had strangers shaking your hands and saying thank you for serving," Mr. Guerrero said. "They had people from the different bases there, clapping their hands and giving us an ovation. It brought tears to my eyes because it was so impressive that people appreciate what we did after all this time."

Perhaps one of the most moving moments came when the veterans returned to the San Antonio airport. A woman spontaneously began singing "God Bless America," and was eventually joined by many others in the concourse.

"[Veterans] in wheelchairs came out first and were staging to move out, and a couple of them started to get emotional when she started singing," Mr. Huff said. "We've seen things like that happen everywhere." 🕊





BATTLE HARDENED, SADDLE SORE

RODEO ASSOCIATION ALLOWS MILITARY
PEOPLE TO GET IN TOUCH WITH THEIR
INNER COWBOY, COWGIRL

STORY BY TECH. SGT. MATTHEW BATES ✦ PHOTOS BY MASTER SGT. JACK BRADEN



Perched atop his horse, the same thought keeps running through Master Sgt. Devin Fisher's mind: "Get that steer." He tightens his grip on the reins and takes an anxious position in the saddle. He's bent forward, knees tight against the horse's body, eyes straight ahead.

The horse is ready, too. Sergeant Fisher can feel the animal's heart pounding in anticipation.

Here, he's a far cry from his everyday life as a technical school flight engineer instructor with the 344th Training Squadron at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. But he loves the feeling of being in the saddle, his adrenaline pumping and the texture of the rope curled neatly in his right hand.

Then, next to him, the gate to a chute opens and a brown and white steer tears into the arena. Sergeant Fisher spurs his horse into pursuit and, in a flurry of dust and motion, charges after the steer.

Beside him, Master Sgt. Travis Beck, Sergeant Fisher's partner, is also pursuing the steer, a rope swirling high above his head. Sergeant Fisher heads for the back of the galloping steer, and Sergeant Beck toward its head. In one fluid motion, Sergeant Beck tosses his rope and snags the steer around its horns.

"All right," Sergeant Fisher tells himself. "Now I just need to rope those hind legs."

Concentrating, Sergeant Fisher watches the steer's stride, trying to time his toss perfectly. He needs to throw his rope when the steer's back legs are in the air.

"Get that steer ... get that steer ... get that steer."



Ira McKillip from Whitman, Neb., secures his boot prior to the bull riding competition on the second day of the rodeo.

With this thought playing over and over in his mind, Sergeant Fisher picks his opportunity and lets the rope fly.

The competition is steer roping, and it's just one of many events at the Professional Armed Forces Rodeo Association's 2010 World Finals in Glen Rose, Texas. As interesting as the roping, riding and wrestling competitions taking place, is the fact that every competitor is either part of or associated with the military. It's a place where stripes are traded for plaid and where combat boots and camouflage hats are replaced with those of cowboys.

"PAFRA is a military rodeo association that allows anyone who serves, has served or is a dependent of a military member to compete against each other," said Lt. Col. Val Baker, a member of the Air Force intelligence community who also serves as PAFRA secretary and is a competitive participant in the organization.

The association works like this: PAFRA members participate in local rodeos throughout the year, where they earn points that are used to rank them against their fellow PAFRA competitors. The top participants in each category compete against each other at the PAFRA World Finals to see who will take home the prized trophies: large belt buckles that announce the wearer as world champion of his or her respective event.

These events range from team roping to steer wrestling and from barrel racing to bull riding.

"We've got some great competitors in every category, both male and female," Colonel Baker said. "So the world finals really bring some good rodeo folks together."

And they come from all over. One couple drove all the way from Alaska, some from the Northeast and many from the Northwest. One contingent made the trip from Europe and one Soldier even participated while on his two weeks of rest and relaxation after serving in Iraq.

"There's just a special draw to rodeo," Colonel Baker said.

This is exactly why the association was started: To give military people all over the world somewhere they could do something they love, compete against other military people who also love it, and have fun while doing so.

"It's not about rank or what branch of service you're in, or any of that," said J.B. Burns, a retired Air Force master sergeant and first PAFRA president. "It's about competitive rodeo for military people and their families. And we're just so proud of where this organization is and how it keeps growing and expanding."

Sergeant Burns knows what he's talking about, too. As one of the original founding members of the organization, he remembers just how

different things were in the beginning.

Like many great inventions, PAFRA started as a conversation between Sergeant Burns and three military friends. The idea quickly evolved, and in 2000, the four men decided to stop talking and take action.

"Getting the thing up and going was hard," Sergeant Burns said. "We didn't really know what we were doing. We just knew we wanted to start a rodeo association military people could be a part of."

This meant finding sponsors, organizing events and locating a venue, all while balancing their day-to-day jobs in the military.

"I can remember being up all night sometimes," said Rob Schilaikis, a retired master sergeant and the first PAFRA treasurer. "We had to create a rulebook, and because there are a lot of things unique about the military, this made making the thing a lot more difficult."

There were other unique circumstances to consider, too. Many military people either can't afford things like horses and equipment or travel too much to even think about owning them. The association's creators took this into consideration and tailored the rodeo around the people competing in it.

One way they did this was by creating an event called shoot dogging, which is a variation of steer wrestling, a rodeo staple. In steer

Officials, competitors and spectators at the Professional Armed Forces Rodeo World Finals stand as the honor guard from Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Fort Worth in Fort Worth, Texas, presented the colors during opening ceremonies.

(opposite) Greg Phillips, from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., struggles to hang onto his steer during the steer wrestling competition's second round.







(above) Rob Frassanito, from Cave Creek, Ariz., successfully ropes a calf during the calf roping competition.

Tech. Sgt. Devin Fisher, Professional Armed Forces Rodeo Association Rookie of the Year.

photo by Tech. Sgt. Bennie J. Davis III



wrestling, competitors earn points by launching themselves off a horse and tackling a steer as quickly as possible.

“Obviously, you need a horse to compete,” Sergeant Burns said. “But we have a lot of guys who don’t have a horse.”

Enter shoot dogging. In this event, competitors are placed in a chute with a steer and when the door opens, it’s simply a matter of how quick the competitor can wrestle the steer to the ground – no horse required.

“We put a lot of effort into this association,” Sergeant Schilaikis said. “We really tried to make sure it would be accessible to anyone who wanted to be a part of it, whether they owned a bunch of horses or none.”

The men’s perseverance and hard work paid off, and in 2000, PAFRA held its first world finals competition at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M.

“It was amazing,” Sergeant Schilaikis said. “The base came out, the local community came out. It was just a great night and I remember thinking, ‘Man, we just might be onto something here.’”

Then, as fast as the association had blossomed, it came to a screeching halt, due to the events on Sept. 11.

“When that happened, PAFRA was the last thing on our minds,” said Steve Supachana, a retired master sergeant and third founding member of PAFRA.

So, the men traded in their cowboy duds for camouflage and headed off to war, not knowing if or when PAFRA might make a comeback.



“Was it hard? Yes,” Sergeant Burns said. “But our first commitment was to the Air Force, and our nation called so we answered.”

The men didn’t have to wait too long to discover PAFRA’s fate. In 2002, the association was back up and running again and the world finals were held in Bandera, Texas. The competition has been held every year since.

The locations may change, but the competitors’ dedication remains



unswerving. The majority of the competitors are on permissive TDY and all of them pay their own way to and from the event.

“PAFRA has survived deployments, high operations tempos and man-

“Before, we would always have a mixture of military and civilian competitors,” Colonel Baker said. “So this is really exciting and shows the word is getting out and more and more people are joining PAFRA.”

The rope lands on the ground and Sergeant Fisher pulls up on it with a quick tug and ...

Nothing.

No tension, no reverse pull, no legs tucked neatly inside the loop.

Just empty air.

A groan echoes from the

Art Todd from
Screven, La., loses his grip during the bull riding competition's second round.

**WE'RE JUST SO PROUD OF
WHERE THIS ORGANIZATION
IS AND HOW IT KEEPS
GROWING AND EXPANDING.**

— J.B. Burns

power shortages,” Sergeant Schilaikis said. “It just goes to show how important this association, and rodeo, are to those involved.”

The association is growing, too. This year, PAFRA's 10th, marked the first time the world finals competition was made up exclusively of military people and their dependents.

However, there is still room for more. The association is open to any member of the military, whether active duty, Reserve, Guard, retired or a family member.

“Basically, if you're a card-carrying member of the armed forces, then you can join,” Colonel Baker said. “And we want you to.”



crowd as Sergeant Fisher curls the rope into his hand, shaking his head in disbelief.

“Missed that steer, missed that steer, missed that steer.”

This thought begins to echo in his mind, but he shakes it off and a new one enters that makes him smile.

“This sure beats sitting at a desk in a cubicle somewhere.”

For more information, visit PAFRA's website at www.pafra2000.com. 



I AM AN AMERICAN AIRMAN.
I AM A WARRIOR.
I HAVE ANSWERED MY NATION'S CALL.

I AM AN AMERICAN AIRMAN.
MY MISSION IS TO FLY, FIGHT, AND WIN.
I AM FAITHFUL TO A PROUD HERITAGE,
A TRADITION OF HONOR,
AND A LEGACY OF VALOR.

I AM AN AMERICAN AIRMAN.
GUARDIAN OF FREEDOM AND JUSTICE,
MY NATION'S SWORD AND SHIELD,
ITS SENTRY AND AVENGER.
I DEFEND MY COUNTRY WITH MY LIFE.

I AM AN AMERICAN AIRMAN.
WINGMAN, LEADER, WARRIOR.
I WILL NEVER LEAVE AN AIRMAN BEHIND,
I WILL NEVER FALTER,
AND I WILL NOT FAIL.

keri's war

COMBAT PHOTOGRAPHER
PUTS HERSELF ON THE
OTHER SIDE OF THE LENS
IN HER FIGHT AGAINST
CANCER

STORY BY RANDY ROUGHTON
PHOTOS BY MASTER SGT. JEREMY T. LOCK



Shortly before
beginning her
chemotherapy
treatments, Master
Sgt. Keri Whitehead
poses in her Ladson,
S.C. home.





Master Sgt. Keri Whitehead's daughter doesn't understand cancer. The 4-year-old doesn't yet grasp the battle her mom is facing. Cassidy has one question that bothers her:

"Mommy, what happened to your hair?"

Sergeant Whitehead tells her daughter she's sick, but eventually will get better, and her hair will grow back. She even showed Cassidy her scars, but wanted something enduring to show her little girl when she's old enough to understand, something hopeful like one of the lighthouses that decorate the living room in Sergeant Whitehead's Charleston, S.C., home, and ironically, the walls of her chemotherapy office. The sergeant wanted it to be something that could be a beacon for her daughter if she encounters a storm like the one her mother's facing now.

The combat photographer and 14-year Air Force veteran found the answer in "Keri's War," a series of images and interviews that document her cancer fight from diagnosis through reconstructive surgery. Master Sgt. J.T. Lock, a fellow combat photographer and four-time Department of Defense Military Photographer of the Year, asked her if he could document her story after she asked him to take family photos of her and Cassidy. While aware the project would require some sensitive photos, the decision wasn't difficult for Sergeant Whitehead, who is the noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the 1st Combat Camera Squadron's combat photography training element at Joint Base Charleston, S.C.

"It was an easy decision because not only would we be able to get the word out there, but it would be a documentation, something I could show Cassidy when she's older, that she could actually be able to relate to because she's not going to remember," Sergeant Whitehead said. "She'll

(above) Dr. Mark Fiedler (far right), general surgeon on staff at Trident Health System, explains mastectomy procedures to Master Sgt. Keri Whitehead.

(opposite page, top) Cassidy Whitehead, 4, touches the bandage covering her mom's "boo-boo," as her grandma, Leasa Tubbs, watches.

Kelly Ginett, a family friend, shaves Sergeant Whitehead's head. Rather than watch her hair fall out during chemotherapy, Sergeant Whitehead opted to shave her head and donate the hair to Locks of Love.

remember that I didn't have any hair, but she's not going to remember any of the details, and this is a way I can give that back to her.

"My philosophy is we can't do what we do and believe in what we do and not see that somebody would ask that question."

The project's first installment, "Diagnosis," launched on Oct. 1, 2010, introducing readers to Sergeant Whitehead's story just in time for Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The website, www.keriswar.org, received more than 315,000 hits in the first 22 days.

Part two focused on her chemotherapy and part three showed her day-to-day life. The next installments will feature Sergeant Whitehead spending Thanksgiving with her family and undergoing radiation therapy and reconstructive surgery, which is planned for late spring or early summer.

Sergeants Whitehead and Lock plan to wrap up the series with a video diary to allow Sergeant Whitehead to talk about her experience and thank the people who have helped her, especially the many friends in her squadron.

Sergeant Lock takes the photos and interviews Sergeant Whitehead and sends the images and recordings to Tech. Sgt. Jake Bailey and Staff Sgt. Joshua DeMotts at the Syracuse University Newhouse School of Public Communications for editing.

"Although the story is about me, it's our story," Sergeant Whitehead said. "This would not have gone where it's gone without the three of them."

"I think one of the biggest things Keri and I looked at was trusting in all of us," Sergeant Lock said. "I have to trust in Keri; Keri has to trust in me, and we have to trust in Jake. We don't get to see it until 7 o'clock in the



morning when he launches it. So I'm on pins and needles and scared to death, but I think that's one of the things that makes the story a success."

Sergeant Whitehead made the decision to produce the story in installments, rather than in one story, to help people relate to the situation and feel they were going through the experience with her. The idea to name it "Keri's War" was Sergeant Bailey's.

"It is a war you're waging with your own body," Sergeant Whitehead said. "Your first battle will be your surgery if you have that first. I call that the opening ceremonies. Then, you have your chemo or radiation. Each of these is a tiny, little battle you have to overcome to win the war.

"Generally, the only people who get to see the behind-the-scenes J.T. has been able to see are a significant other or spouse," Sergeant Whitehead said. "You're not able to see the scars because most people sick with chemo tend to withdraw within themselves and don't want other people to see that.

"It's not that hard for me to open up and show that side of everything because it's not about my body right now. Now, it's kind of like this science project the doctors are working on. Once the reconstruction is done, then we go back to being behind closed doors."

Although her father, Earl Murray, died of cancer in 2007 and her twin sister, Tech. Sgt. Teri Vinson, was diagnosed with melanoma a decade earlier, Sergeant Whitehead's life was going as planned until the last weekend of February 2010. She'd just returned from her first deployment as a combat photographer and had barely unpacked after moving into a new home when she felt pain on the outer side of her right breast, accompanied by a significant-sized lump.



**YOU JUST HAVE TO DO WHAT YOU
HAVE TO DO TO SURVIVE, WHETHER
IT'S BEING SICK OR BEING IN A
DEPLOYED ENVIRONMENT.**

— Master Sgt. Keri Whitehead

Sergeant

Whitehead reacts to the taste as a nurse performs a saline flush on her chemo infusion port prior to her first chemo treatment.



Everything soon changed, especially after hearing the words from her radiologist: “I see a biopsy in your future.” She soon talked with her sister, who’s now assigned to Barksdale Air Force Base, La., and her best friend in the squadron, Tech. Sgt. Prentice Colter.

Once her surgeon, Dr. Mark Fiedler, assembled her medical team, Sergeant Whitehead began her war on cancer. Dr. Fiedler performed a lumpectomy, which removed more than 35 percent of her right breast, followed by a mastectomy. The doctor removed five lymph nodes, three of which were cancerous, but each of another six that were removed were cancer-free. Sergeant Whitehead began her six-month chemo schedule in May 2010 and followed that with radiation in December.

Her mother, Leasa Tubbs, stayed with her in the beginning, but left between her first two chemo rounds because

(top) Sergeant Whitehead, sick and unable to get off the bathroom floor, recuperates as her dog, Scamp, keeps her company.

Sergeant Whitehead shaves her head in preparation for a night out on the town with family and friends.

the sergeant had plenty of support from her squadron, from her commander, Lt. Col. Aaron Burgstein, to friends like Sergeant Colter and her roommate and friend, Tech. Sgt. Chrissy Best, noncommissioned officer-in-charge of Photo at Joint Base Charleston Public Affairs.

While much of how Sergeant Whitehead handled her sickness came from her own determination, she also believes she benefitted from her Air Force career.

“I’d like to think the military has set me up for success from learning that sometimes you have to embrace ‘the suck,’ as we like to call it,” she said. “Then you have to come out the other side. You just have to do what you have to do to survive, whether it’s being sick or being in a deployed environment. Whatever is in you is going to decide how you handle something like this.”

Master Sgt. Keri Whitehead tries on wigs at a local Charleston, S.C. boutique in preparation of her chemotherapy and hair loss.



Even with the sickness and side effects from the treatment and medications, Sergeant Whitehead purposefully continued her work and physical fitness. Her longest distance before her diagnosis was a 10-kilometer run, but she ran 8 1/2 miles twice before and after one of her chemo treatments. She would run the New Cooper River Bridge, also known as the Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge, a 2 1/2-mile stretch that connects the cities of Charleston and Mount Pleasant on U.S. 17.

Sergeant Whitehead ran across and back over the bridge, a distance of 5 1/2 miles, and then ran further on another trip, a distance of almost 8 miles. Her goal is to run across the bridge and back twice, but had to put it on hold once the weather turned cold.

“The more physically fit you are, and the more things you can continue to do that you did [prior] to your diagnosis, the better you’re able to handle the side effects,” Sergeant Whitehead said. “I think anything you can continue to do that you did before you got sick is to your advantage because that’s going to make you feel normal.”

Throughout her entire ordeal, Sergeant Whitehead has taken charge of her situation whenever she could. When she learned her hair would fall out during chemo treatment, she didn’t wait for it to happen. She invited friends for a head-shaving party, as depicted in Sergeant Lock’s photos in the second installment of “Keri’s War.”

Even though she was fitted for a wig, she soon realized it didn’t seem necessary. Instead, she wears a bandana and never seems to miss her hair or the wig. “I rock the bandana,” she’ll tell you.

“When it comes to the wig, I would try it on, but it just wasn’t me,” Sergeant Whitehead said. “I’m OK with the bandana. It works well for me and I like it. With the wig, it just felt like I was putting false information out there.

“I’m sick, but I’m not embarrassed by that fact. I’m not embarrassed by the fact that I have no hair. My hair doesn’t define me. Hair is just hair; it will grow back. If it were a hand or a foot, I’d have a problem with that because I need my hands and my feet. But I can live without the hair. I can’t live without the chemo or the radiation,” she said.

“I want my ability to not let the cancer define me to define me. To me, the cancer is like having a really bad cold that’s going to take a really long time to heal. It’s a blip on my radar. It’s going to be a really sucky year or two, and then I’m going to get on with my life.”

Sergeant Whitehead completed her radiation treatments, which were daily for five and a half weeks, in mid-January. Sergeant Lock told her the only problem she seemed to have with all she had endured in the past 10 months was when she was told she couldn’t wear deodorant for six weeks.

“Well, that and the permanent marker they insisted on using to make the alignment marks,” Sergeant Whitehead said. “Most people I talk to get little, tiny tattoos. Me, I get black, purple and two different shades of blue, and it’s not so small. Oh well, I guess there are worse things.”

She’s confident she’s beaten the breast cancer, but knows with her family history, there are no guarantees that she’ll never have to fight for her life again. But she’s not worrying about that now. Her hair is slowly starting to grow back, although certainly not quickly enough for Cassidy.

One day, Sergeant Whitehead hopes Cassidy can see “Keri’s War” and view her mother as an example — to use her fight with cancer as inspiration to overcome any challenges she meets in her own life. Sergeant Whitehead hopes “Keri’s War” can be Cassidy’s own personal light-house for whatever rough seas she might face. ♀



Sergeant Whitehead walks with Chief Master Sgt. Robert Cole Jr. after completing her annual Air Force physical training test. Sgt. Whitehead opted to take her PT test in an effort to stay physically fit while undergoing her cancer treatment.

Sergeant Whitehead chats with her 4-year-old daughter, Cassidy.

BREAST CANCER STATISTICS



★ According to the American Cancer Society, breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths of women, exceeded only by lung cancer. Currently, there are more than 2.5 million breast cancer survivors in the United States, including women still being treated and those who have completed treatment.

★ There are approximately 64,000 women in our active-duty Air Force and 449,000 immediate family members. The National Cancer Institute estimates that nearly 80 female active-duty service members and hundreds of women within Air Force families will receive breast cancer diagnoses in 2011.



ANY GIVEN SUNDAY

ANDREWS LIEUTENANT FINDS WAY TO SPEND FREE TIME AS A WASHINGTON REDSKINS CHEERLEADER

STORY BY RANDY ROUGHTON ✪ PHOTOS BY TECH. SGT. BENNIE J. DAVIS III

An Andrews Air Force Base, Md., first lieutenant spends much of her time in two uniforms: her Airman Battle Uniform and the burgundy and gold of the Washington Redskins cheerleaders. While 1st Lt. Sheriden Martinez tries to keep her Air Force job and cheerleading separate, they sometimes inevitably mesh. Fortunately for the 11th Comptroller Squadron finance officer and second-year National Football League cheerleader, she also learns lessons in each job that apply in both worlds.

"They are two separate worlds, but it's amazing to me how much they complement each other every day," Lieutenant Martinez said. "I take leadership lessons from the Redskins — from people like our director/choreographer and captains, our team leaders — and apply them to certain situations at work. Then, I'll take work lessons like fitness, leadership skills, being a good follower in certain situations and having your life organized, and apply them to cheerleading. You wouldn't think they'd complement

each other very well because they are so different."

Lieutenant Martinez began cheering in high school and continued through her U.S. Air Force Academy career. She didn't plan on continuing as an NFL cheerleader until she moved to the Washington, D.C., area. The Utah native, who grew up following the Seattle Seahawks, tried out for the Washington Redskins cheerleading squad because she had a lot of free time and wanted to meet people in the area.

"I didn't know what to do with my free time," Lieutenant Martinez said. "I was an academy grad; we didn't have free time. I didn't know what to do with myself, just watching TV and walking my dog. It was just something to do. I didn't really think I would make it, though. I tried out with 300 to 400 other girls and it's a weekend process just to narrow it down to the final round of girls. There are probably 50 to 60 in the final group, and that's a week-long process of narrowing it down to a big show at the end that's open to the public. It's a pretty long and intense process."

The transition from collegiate cheering to the NFL wasn't difficult for Lieutenant Martinez because she also has a background in dance. Professional football cheerleading is much more focused on dancing than at the high school and collegiate level.

The main differences, however, have been getting accustomed to seeing NFL stars like New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady on the sidelines and cheering for a team of professional players. At the academy, she was friends with many Falcon football players.

On game day, Lieutenant Martinez and her fellow cheerleaders arrive at FedEx Field in Landover, Md., about five hours before kickoff. They have an hour-long practice before fans get to their seats, followed by an appearance at VIP tailgating events. They have a little time to relax before their pregame routine on the middle of the field. There are four short dances performed during the game, as well as an occasional halftime show. About 10 cheerleaders also volunteer to appear with fans after the game on club level.

1st Lt. Sheriden Martinez at FedEx Field before a Washington Redskins game. Lieutenant Martinez is a finance officer and second-year National Football League cheerleader.



(above) Lieutenant Martinez (far right), then a cadet cheerleader at the U.S. Air Force Academy, performs during a basketball game. Lieutenant Martinez began cheering in high school and has continued all the way to the NFL.

Lieutenant Martinez works out with her squadron during physical training at the Andrews Tactical Fitness Center.

“It’s fun when [the Redskins] win, not so much fun when they lose,” she said. “Especially with the way the Redskins’ seasons have gone lately, we get a lot of credit for being out there in bad weather, during bad games. The fans are always so appreciative of us being out there and staying positive. Their feedback really does help to keep a smile on your face when the game’s not going so well.

“The Redskins are also always really good about giving tickets away, especially to military people, so there are always people from Andrews out there and from all over the military community. I think the Redskins not doing so well gives people the opportunity to go who might not otherwise, because the ticket prices are so high. Management does a good job of keeping the stands full.”

But game day is only part of the Redskins cheerleaders’ responsibilities. They also make numerous charity and sponsor appearances, in addition to practice and game performances. The lieutenant participated in a black-tie “Fight Night” charity event in Washington and represented the Redskins at Super Bowl XLV in Dallas in February.





Lieutenant Martinez also was among the cheerleaders who visited the 101st Airborne Division on a two-week tour of Kuwait and Afghanistan last fall. She considers the tour, along with appearances at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, among the most rewarding experiences of her two years as a Redskins cheerleader.

"I really think the trip to Kuwait and Afghanistan was life-changing for all 11 of us who went," Lieutenant Martinez said. "Just to be at the [forward operating bases] with the Army and seeing what they go through day to day, such as the route clearance and [improvised explosive device] guys out on the road going 15 mph for weeks at a time, was just astonishing. To meet them face to face and hear them say thank you and tell you that you made their deployment was just crazy to me because I'm so appreciative of what they do.

"I've never deployed, so it's very humbling as a military member to hear their stories and what they've been through, yet they're all so positive."

Just as Lieutenant Martinez uses her leadership abilities in the finance office and on the FedEx Field sideline, her commitment to fitness also serves her well in both arenas. She is her squadron's unit fitness monitor

and has no trouble keeping in shape between the Redskins cheerleaders' high-energy practices two nights a week and her squadron and individual physical training workouts at the

THEY ARE TWO SEPARATE WORLDS, BUT IT'S AMAZING TO ME HOW MUCH THEY COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER EVERY DAY.

— 1st Lt. Sheriden Martinez

fitness center on base.

"It's always good to be a fitness role model, especially with the new PT standards," she said. "One of the biggest things you hear from people who have gotten back from deployment is to make sure you're in shape because you never know when you're going to have to exert yourself to the fullest.

"[Being a cheerleader] definitely makes it easier. The two complement each other very well. PT on base helps with cheerleading, and cheerleading helps here."

Lieutenant Martinez isn't certain if she's going to try out for a third year of cheerleading because it might not

be compatible with her upcoming Air Force duties. She's expecting a permanent change of station assignment soon and will qualify to fill a captain's slot for deployment.

While she doesn't go out of her way to let people on base know what she's been doing on many of her autumn Sunday afternoons, the lieutenant is proud of her two years cheering for the Redskins, and how it has helped her enjoy her time in the Washington area.

"Being a female in the military, there aren't too many girls, especially other officers who you get to meet and hang out with," she said. "It takes time to find them around base and become friends with them. So diving right into about 40 other best girl friends was probably the best part. Being with most of them for two years now has made my D.C. experience amazing.

"I've learned to really balance the two — how after a hard day at work, to go to practice, be positive and leave everything from the day at the door," she said. "Or vice-versa. At work, I can't be thinking about something that has to do with cheerleading. I try to leave the other side behind while I do the job I have to do. It's just a matter of focusing on the task at hand." ♀

Lieutenant Martinez performs with "The First Ladies of Football," the Washington Redskins Cheerleaders, at the end of a quarter. The Redskins Cheerleaders is the longest running cheerleading team in the NFL. The team was founded in 1962 and originally called the Redskinettes.

Students earn an Inter-American Air Forces Academy badge after they complete the Noncommissioned Officer Academy in Spanish at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. Tech. Sgt. George Nikolakakos shows off his wings. He is a linguist based in Monterey, Calif., and one of the first U.S. Airmen to graduate from the school.





BRIDGING THE GAP

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL AT
LACKLAND AIR FORCE BASE
BRINGS MILITARY PEOPLE,
CULTURES TOGETHER

STORY BY TECH. SGT. MATTHEW BATES
PHOTOS BY STAFF SGT. DESIREE N. PALACIOS



(above) Students at the Inter-American Air Forces Academy at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, are inspected during open ranks by Master Sgt. Ben Miranda. Sergeant Miranda is a certified academy instructor assigned to the 12th Air Force.

(from left) Tech. Sgt. Leonardo Cepero and Tech. Sgt. George Nikolakakos are the first U.S. Airmen to graduate from the Noncommissioned Officer Academy through Inter-American Air Forces Academy at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. Sergeant Cepero is a recruiter based in Puerto Rico. Sergeant Nikolakakos is a linguist based in Monterey, Calif.



The Inter-American Air Forces Academy, located at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, isn't your typical school. Here there are no homecoming kings and queens, no tenured teachers, and classes such as algebra and biology aren't on the course list.

Instead, the school brings together a hodgepodge of military people from all over North, South and Central America and teaches them about leadership, management and each other.

Nowhere is this more evident than in one of the school's courses: the International Noncommissioned Officer Academy.

"The course is designed to professionalize the NCOs and convert them into combat-ready airmen who can lead and manage air force units," said Master Sgt. Ben Miranda, one of the academy's instructors.

But the school isn't just about building leaders. It's also about building partnerships. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz has identified five priorities for the service, the second of which is "partnering with joint and coalition teams."

"That's one of the things we're trying to do here," Sergeant Miranda said. "We're bringing airmen from all these nations together in an academic environment, letting them build relationships and really get to know each other on a personal and professional level."

The course mirrors the Air Force's traditional Noncommissioned Officer Academy in every way except one. INCOA is conducted in Spanish.

"All of the nations that participate are Spanish-speaking ones," Sergeant Miranda said. "So it makes it easier just to conduct the school in that language."

The course is seven and a half weeks long, has between eight and 14 students and is divided into three sections: communications, leadership and profession of arms. Each section is designed to increase the students' abilities to become better leaders at the small-unit level.



Senior Master Sgt. Walter Avila participates in a class exercise at the Inter-American Air Forces Academy on Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

“We give the students the tools they need and then it’s up to them to take what they learn and use it in their home country,” said Tech. Sgt. Christian Castillo, an academy instructor.

And they do. Some even attend the academy so they can return home and teach the information there.

“When I go back, I will establish an NCO academy there,” said Senior Master Sgt. Walter Avila, a member of the Guatemalan air force. “So this is a great opportunity for me and my country.”

For many of the students, who come from places like Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru and Honduras, coming to the academy isn’t just a chance to learn important leadership skills. Most have never been to the United States before, and experiencing the country’s sights and sounds is an opportunity the service members simply can’t pass up.

But more than the knick-knacks and electronics purchased at the base exchange, what the students are most excited to take home are the friendships and bonds made while at the academy.

“No matter where they’re from, the

students typically keep in touch even after they graduate and go home,” Sergeant Castillo said.

In some cases, they talk on the phone, write e-mails, or, thanks to the popularity of social media, even converse on the Internet over sites like Facebook and MySpace.

“I’ve enjoyed the course and being in the U.S.,” Sergeant Avila said. “But our one objective is to learn from each other and graduate together.”

In order to remain successful, INCOA is constantly evolving and the staff tailors the classes to what is relevant. As part of this evolution, the academy recently opened its doors to U.S. Air Force NCOs who are able to speak Spanish.

The goal is to increase teamwork among the nations and allow international students the ability to talk and interact with Airmen on a peer-to-peer level, rather than on an instructor-to-student one.

“Now, instead of us just standing up here and telling them how we do things, the students can look to their left or right, see a U.S. Airman and share each other’s experiences,” Sergeant Miranda said.

Plus, he added, if the course is good enough for the Air Force’s international partners, then it’s good enough for the service’s Airmen.

“I definitely think it adds a certain level of credibility,” said Tech. Sgt. George Nikolakakos, an intelligence specialist and one of the first U.S. Airmen to go through INCOA as a student. “The students from other countries see U.S. instructors up there teaching and see U.S. students in the class and it makes what’s being taught that much easier to buy into.”

During each class, heads nod, notes are taken and dialogue is open and frequent because, said Sergeant Miranda, the principles of leadership are the same no matter who you are, where you’re from or what flag you stand under.

“I will take a lot of great experiences back to Guatemala with me,” Sergeant Avila said. “But one of the best will be having met the people here and sharing their thoughts, ideas and experiences.”

At the end of the day, that’s what INCOA is all about: Building trust, partnerships and bonds between the U.S. Air Force and its coalition partners. 

MAKING THE CUT

INTENSE COURSE PREPARES AIRMEN FOR ARMY RANGER SCHOOL

STORY BY BY TECH. SGT. MATTHEW BATES
PHOTOS BY STAFF SGT. DESIREE N. PALACIOS

Scanning the horizon, 1st Lt. Ralph Johnson takes in his surroundings. Out here in the desert, the land is flat and stretches as far as he can see. Worse yet, there is no real cover to speak of, just the occasional Joshua tree or small T indentation in the ground.

But none of that matters. There is nothing he can do about it and, if his intel is right, the team had been briefed to expect enemy activity in this area. He is the point man, too, meaning he needs to be on his toes. The men behind the lieutenant are counting on him, and he sure doesn't want to be the one to let them down or have to tell someone's family why Johnny didn't come home.

Nope, not on his watch.

Then, ahead, something catches his eye. Instinctively he raises his right hand and signals the squad to stop. As one, the men behind him stop in their tracks and take to a knee.

Squinting against the bright sun,

the lieutenant scans the area ahead, his pulse quickening, his senses on high alert.

There. Peering around the corner of a makeshift building 100 yards ahead is the unmistakable silhouette of a man wearing Middle Eastern garb.

"Contact," the lieutenant whispers into his radio. "We have one, I repeat one, possible hostile at 100 yards. Over."

"Roger. Check it out," comes the response from his platoon leader.

"Roger," he says into the radio. To the three men around him he says, "Alpha, on me."

The lieutenant moves and his squad falls in behind. The men move with cautious speed to a closer position, always keeping the figure in sight.

Out of the corner of his eye, Lieutenant Johnson sees two other squads — one on his left, the other on his right — also moving into better positions.

"That'll be Bravo and Charlie

squads," he thinks. "Good, we've got all the firing angles covered."

"This is Alpha," he whispers into the radio. "Target is still there, should we proceed?"

"Roger," the response crackles over the radio. "Proceed with cau ..."

Brrrrrap, brrrrrap, brrrrrap.

The message is interrupted by the sound of automatic weapons, their reports tearing through the air. The men instinctively hit the ground, their bodies tense, eyes wide.

The lieutenant's radio erupts with chatter.

"Contact."

"Contact!"

"Hostiles on the right ... heavy fire."

"We have one friendly hit, repeat one frie ..."

"Return fire. Take them out!"

Time seems to slow down, every second lasting for what seems like a minute. Then, once the immediate shock wears off, time returns to its regular speed and the lieutenant jumps into action.

"Get that 240 up here," he yells



into the radio. “We need suppressing fire.”

He glances at his squad, sees the determination he wants in their faces and urges them into action.

“Okay, let’s go Alpha. We’ll move to that ditch over there.”

Crouched low, the lieutenant takes off, returning fire in small bursts as he moves. Reaching the ditch he dives in and feels the thuds of his men diving in after him. He glances around and sees Bravo and Charlie squads lying in the open, still pinned down by enemy fire, their squad leaders screaming into their radios.

Then, an awesome sound joins the fray. The unmistakable boom of a 240B heavy machine gun.

Rap, rap, rap.

There’s our suppressing fire, he thinks. Bravo and Charlie squads are already up and moving, the barrels of their weapons spouting white flames and smoke. Lieutenant Johnson orders his men to move and they dash forward, weapons raised to eye level.

The lieutenant sees a man crouched near the building and lets loose a burst from his M-4. The man falls, dead. Around him, others also fall.

The squads keep moving and within seconds the skirmish is over.

“You lost one man here, but if this had been real, you probably would’ve lost a whole heck of a lot more.”

The men all look up at the voice, its owner towering above them on a small pile of dirt and loose rock. His eyes are steel and he points

TO EARN A RANGER TAB, THESE MEN NEED TO PERFORM AT THEIR VERY BEST IN THE WORST OF CONDITIONS.

— Senior Master Sgt. Darryl LeBouef

“Status report?” asks the platoon leader.

“Uh, we have one friendly KIA and three enemy,” responds one of the other squad leaders.

“Crap,” the platoon leader says, looking dejected.

“Crap is right,” booms a voice.

one long finger at the platoon leader.

“Your squads were too separated and it took you forever to get your heavy weapons team into the fight,” he said. “That was pathetic and disappointing.”

The platoon leader says nothing.

Airman 1st Class
Michael Eckert
takes fire during a
Pre-Ranger Course
training exercise at
Creech Air Force
Base, Nev.



(clockwise from left) Airman 1st Class Matt Garner and Senior Airman Pete Vicini clear out their weapons during a Pre-Ranger Course training.

Airmen participate in a pre-ranger training exercise during the two week course, held on Creech Air Force Base, Nev.

Airmen use rocks, army figure toys and pieces of paper to illustrate a Pre-Ranger Course training mission.

There is nothing to say. Excuses are not tolerated and everything this man, their instructor, says is gospel anyway. He's earned the right to yell at them, to ride them and to tell them how it is. He's been there, done that again and again. He doesn't even need to open his mouth for the men to know this. That small tab on his shirt speaks more than he ever could, the small tab that says "Ranger."

This battle wasn't being waged in the Persian Gulf. It was being staged in a piece of desert near Las Vegas, Nev., as part of the Air Force Pre-Ranger Course.

The goal is simple: Bring Airmen from around the Air Force to this barren stretch of land, give them a heavy dose of combat and leadership training and see if they have what it takes to attend the Army's Ranger Training Course at Fort Benning, Ga.

"Not many people know it, but Airmen can attend the ranger course," said Senior Master Sgt. Darryl LeBouef, superintendent of the pre-ranger course. "What we

do here is prepare Airmen for that course and make sure that if they go they'll have a good chance of passing."

The course does this by mimicking a lot of what the Airmen might see at ranger school, training scenarios like water survival, conducting patrols, assembling and disassembling weapons, radio familiarization and

are required to perform this same test.

"We want to make sure when an Airman leaves here and goes on to ranger school, he knows what to expect and knows he can do it," Sergeant LeBouef said.

The school has a 45-percent attrition rate, meaning nearly half of all ranger candidates will not make it

EVERYONE WANTS THAT TAB, BUT IT JUST DOESN'T HAPPEN THAT WAY.

— Staff Sgt. Seth Hunter

knowing how to land navigate during the day and at night.

The training also includes a rigorous physical fitness test.

Airmen hoping to attend ranger school need to be able to run five miles in less than 40 minutes, do 49 push-ups and 59 sit-ups in two minutes and perform six pull-ups. Airmen attending pre-ranger school

through the course. And these candidates are all service members who are experienced and in good physical condition.

"Army Ranger training is considered one of the hardest combat courses on the planet. To earn a ranger tab, these men need to perform at their very best in the worst of conditions," Sergeant



LeBouef said.

The course isn't just about preparing Airmen for Fort Benning, though. At its core, the course is less about patrolling the desert and eating snakes and more about leadership.

"What we really do here is teach Airmen how to be small-unit leaders," said Staff Sgt. Seth Hunter, an instructor. "The course teaches the basics of leading, leading people when they're tired and hungry."

In today's Air Force, these skills are in high demand. More and more, Airmen are finding themselves deployed to environments where they work alongside Soldiers, outside the wire, and even see combat.

"So, this course doesn't just prepare Airmen for ranger school, it also prepares them to be leaders in this modern Air Force," Sergeant LeBouef said.

Which is good, because the chances of making it to ranger school are very slim, even if an Airman passes the pre-ranger course.

"It's not automatic," Sergeant

Hunter said. "Passing here isn't a ticket to Fort Benning. We evaluate each student and choose those who we think will have the best chance at ranger school."

The numbers show just how few are chosen. Since the early 1980s, when the course started, fewer than 220 Airmen have graduated from the Army Ranger Training Course. Still, Airmen who do go are passing at a very high rate.

"Right now, the Air Force has a 90-percent pass rate at ranger school," Sergeant LeBouef said. "And that's due in large part to this course. We're making sure Airmen have the tools they need before they go."

This is good for the students, and something they appreciate, even if it means long days, longer nights and a hectic schedule.

"Oh yeah, you suffer from a lack of food and sleep and all in austere conditions," said Staff Sgt. Evan Barnhart, a pre-ranger student who is a tactical air controller. "But you learn what your body can and

can't do and what you're made of. And, when it's all said and done, you really feel prepared for ranger school."

The school is part toughness, part physicality and all about mental strength. This mixture is necessary to ensure each student is tested, tried and pushed to the limit. While each one wants to earn the title ranger, only a select few can earn it. Less than one percent of the U.S. Army is ranger-qualified.

"It's a pretty exclusive group, and everyone wants that tab," Sergeant Hunter said. "But it just doesn't happen that way."

Lieutenant Johnson is hoping it does. He's made it through the pre-ranger course and will now wait to see if he's recommended to attend the real thing at Fort Benning.

If he goes, he'll do his best to earn that tab. It's not just a piece of cloth, either. It's a symbol of determination, hard work and ability. Wearing that tab, being called "Ranger," means being among the best the U.S. military has to offer. 🦋

(from left) Airman 1st Class Sean Soria pulls Staff Sgt. Evan Barnhart during a pre-ranger school training exercise. Airmen who successfully complete the course can be selected to attend the U.S. Army Ranger School at Ft. Benning, Ga., for official training.

1st Lt. Ralph Johnson takes a knee as he waits for instructions. Lieutenant Johnson is assigned to Moody Air Force Base, Ga.



SUPPORTING THE JOINT FIGHT

JOINT FORCIBLE ENTRY EXERCISE 10-6

Soldiers from the Army's 82nd Airborne Division and Airmen participate in a week-long joint forcible entry exercise at Pope Air Force Base, N.C. JFEX is designed to enhance cohesiveness between the Air Force and Army when executing large-scale heavy equipment and troop movements because there is no room for failure in airborne operations.

This exercise provides crucial preparation for Air Force support in the joint fight. Aerial porters, maintainers, loadmasters, boom operators and command post Airmen refine their individual skills while deploying more than 100,000 pounds of equipment, including eight 14,000-pound pallets of Humvees and other heavy machinery, and more than 1,000 Soldiers, each carrying 100 pounds of equipment.

A JFEX is conducted at Pope AFB six times per year. For Exercise 2010-6, six C-17 Globemaster IIIs from Joint Bases Charleston and Lewis-McChord and eight C-130 Hercules aircraft from Dyess, Little Rock, Pope and Maxwell Air Force Bases participated. JFEX provides both Army and Air Force personnel with the opportunity to build relationships, develop their skills and practice command and control functions.





Master Sgt. Jeremy Lock



Master Sgt. Jeremy Lock



Tech. Sgt. DeNaris Mickle



Staff Sgt. Angella M. Lawrence



Tech. Sgt. Adrian Cadiz



Tech. Sgt. Adrian Cadiz



Tech. Sgt. DeNoris Mickle



Tech. Sgt. Adrian Cadiz



Staff Sgt. Angelita M. Lawrence



Staff Sgt. Angelita M. Lawrence



Tech Sgt. Adrian Cadiz



Tech Sgt. DelNoris Mickle



Staff Sgt. Angelita M. Lawrence



Master Sgt. Jeremy Lock



Master Sgt. Jeremy Lock



Airman 1st Class Alexandra Hoachlander



STORY BY RANDY ROUGHTON ✦ PHOTOS BY STAFF SGT. DESIREE N. PALACIOS

A CENTURY OF MEMORIES

ONE OF NATION'S OLDEST SURVIVING FEMALE AIRMEN LOOKS BACK FONDLY ON THE 'GOOD OLD DAYS'

As 38-year-old Mildred McDowell gazed at a picturesque scene on the Rhine River while stationed in post-war Germany, she wished she could share the experience with her father, who had died 15 years earlier.

"I saw something out on the water and thought, 'Oh, I want to remember this and tell Papa about it when I get back,'" Ms. McDowell said. "All at once, it hit me. I really wished he could've seen me in my Air Force uniform."

Through the years, the woman who might be the nation's oldest surviving female veteran has gradually become used to the number of people in her century of memories shrinking as she aged. Ms. McDowell, who celebrated her 103rd birthday on Feb. 17, has outlived all of her siblings, the people she served with during and after World War II, and even many of the students she taught in Illinois one-room schoolhouses before she enlisted at the age of 35 during the war.

A few years before the United States entered World War I, Thomas J. and Ella Nora McDowell's third daughter saw her first "flying machine." The 8-year-old, who would one day be among the nation's first female Airmen, was herding cows on her family's

farm about two miles from Brownstown, Ill.

"That day, I saw three to five of these flying machines flying way down low, and they scared my cattle and scattered them," she said. "They seemed as big to me then as a B-29 [Superfortress] does to me today, and I was sure they buzzed me on purpose."

"I began to cry, 'My cows are all gone. I'll never see my cows again.' But by that time, the planes were gone, and the cows stopped and began to eat."

Symbols of Ms. McDowell's two careers, in education and in the military, decorate her room in the Vandalia Rehabilitation and Health Care Center in Vandalia, Ill., about an hour north-east of St. Louis. A mirror with a retired U.S. Army decal faces her bed, upon which is a neatly folded red, white and blue towel containing the words, "Freedom Is Not Free." On a nearby bookcase is a figurine with an apple, books and the teacher's

slogan: "To Teach is to Touch a Life Forever." A "Peace on Earth" sign hangs on her door.

During a childhood she calls one of the happiest any child

could have, Ms. McDowell and her siblings attended a country school several miles from their home. She rode a horse or



Mildred McDowell is the Air Force's oldest female World War II veteran at the age of 103. She resides in Vandalia, Ill.



Mildred McDowell keeps an Army sticker on a mirror in her room in Vandalia, Ill. Ms. McDowell enlisted in the Women's Army Corps and later transferred into the Air Force.

mule part of the way and walked the remainder.

"The mule was very, very nervous," she said. "When the wind would whistle through the trees, she couldn't stand it. She broke loose twice. I had to walk [home] and she was standing at the gate, waiting for me to open it for her."

Ms. McDowell taught for 14 years in one-room schoolhouses in several Illinois counties, including Rush School, the one she attended with her brothers and sisters northwest of Vandalia. She still hears from some of her former students, although "they keep dying off," she said. One former pupil wrote an editorial in a local newspaper about how teachers are underpaid.

"I started [teaching for] \$87.50 [per year], and I had to do my own janitorial work," Ms. McDowell said. "I wrote to him and told him I'm being paid when I hear from or receive a letter from one of my pupils. I'm still being paid now."

Ms. McDowell changed careers once she learned the military began accepting women during World War II, because she'd always wanted to travel. After making the decision to enlist in the Women's Army Corps, she had to delay

several months until Nov. 18, 1943, because of a commitment to the school.

"I'd already submitted a contract to teach the next year," she said. "Papa always told us when you sign a contract to keep it, and don't ever go back on it. An oral contract is just as binding as a written one. So since I'd signed the contract, I had to teach the next year."

Women's issues weren't foremost in her mind in 1943. Her biggest motivation was what she calls "a yen for travel." But a letter from her mother prevented her from asking for an overseas assignment during the war.

"When I was in basic [training], I got a letter from my mother after I told her I wanted to go overseas," Ms. McDowell said. "She said, 'Why do you want to go overseas and cross that big ocean?'"

"So I took my application back and said I'll go if they call me, but I won't ask to go overseas."

After training, Ms. McDowell was assigned to Roswell Army Airfield, N.M., and her first job was packing parachutes. But she soon had trouble sleeping because she imagined something going wrong for an Airman on a B-17 Flying

Fortress because of a problem with a parachute she may have packed.

"I didn't like the job because I thought I might make a mistake and would cause an Airman to die from poor parachute packing," she said. "So I asked for another job, and I worked in supply issuing airplane parts to the mechanics working on planes on the line."

Ms. McDowell was honorably discharged after the war in December 1945, but re-enlisted March 18, 1946, and later transferred into the Air Force. This time, she asked to go overseas. She turned down an initial assignment in Japan and was sent to Germany instead, where she worked in the technical order library.

She lived in an old hotel in Wiesbaden, Germany, that hadn't been bombed. The city, located on the northern bank of the Rhine River, is one of the oldest spa towns in Europe. The name literally means "meadow bath."

"The people were poor," Ms. McDowell said. "They'd lost their homes and their jobs [during the war]. A lot of their families had been killed. We would see little boys, maybe 5 years up to about 8 or 9, out scrounging in garbage barrels.

They wore shorts, no shirts, and you could count their ribs, they were so skinny. It kind of hurt that they had to eat out of garbage."

Even American military members living in post-war Germany had to deal with difficult conditions, especially in 1947 when the Rhine experienced one of its worst dry periods.

"We couldn't take a bath because we had to keep water in the bathtub to flush the toilet," Ms. McDowell said. "One time, I had to go to work without brushing my teeth because there wasn't a drop of water in the place. That night, I scrounged around three or four floors up and found an old water glass. So I kept that glass filled for brushing my teeth. The poor Germans were worse off than we were. You'd see them at the well waiting for every little cup of water."

Ms. McDowell left the military as a WAC corporal in 1949. After she left active duty, Ms. McDowell completed her 20 years in the Reserve. She never married or had children of her own, although she has many surviving nieces, nephews and great-nieces and nephews.

When she looks back on her 103 years so far, she has only a few regrets. She wishes she still had her Women's Air Force uniform for her burial and that her father could've seen her in it. But she also remembers something her mother told her when she asked about pictures in her childhood home. There was a picture of her father with the older children and an individual photo of young Mildred when she was only a few months old. "Why," she wanted to know, "was there not a picture of their father with the rest of the children?"

"Mom said, 'We didn't expect you to live to be a year old,'" Ms. McDowell said. "I think they'd all be really surprised that I'm still here."

STORY BY TECH. SGT. BENNIE DAVIS III • PHOTO BY JEFF ANASTASIO FOR KENS 5 NEWS

HONORED TO REMEMBER

I first visited our nation's capital when I was 13 years old, for a family vacation during the summer of '89. I instantly fell in love with the city.

For me, the most memorable part of our vacation was seeing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. My uncle, William Forrest Davis, has his name on the wall. He was killed in action in 1969, never making it to his 21st birthday.

Like it was yesterday, I remember walking along the memorial, my eyes scanning the names on the wall as the panels grew larger with each step. It was a quiet walk with my family. No one spoke a word around us. We all seemed to feel we were on sacred ground.

I watched in awe as others laid war medals, flags and personal notes along the way. Some knelt in prayer, while others leaned against the wall with their heads down and arms outstretched, touching the names of their long lost comrades, friends and relatives as if they were on the other side of the black stone holding them up.

As we approached panel 17W, line 49, I looked up to see my uncle's name. For me it was like meeting him for the first time.

Our family lost all but six photos of him when his personal items and pictures disappeared in the mail. The only photo we had at home was his Army basic training graduation photo. I was proud of him for serving our country, yet saddened by the fact we never met. My father, a Marine, just stared at his brother's name until his emotions overcame him.

We used pencils to rub my uncle's name from the wall onto a small white sheet of paper. I felt honored knowing that my uncle was remembered and that I could take his name home from the memorial. That day, I realized the importance of the memorials honoring men and women who have sacrificed their lives for our freedoms.

Recently, 21 years after that family trip, I was on another trip to the capital, among two busloads of 30 WWII veterans.

That was the first trip to Washington, D.C., for most of those veterans. For all of them, it marked the first time they saw the memorial honoring them as America's "Greatest Generation."

Alamo Honor Flight, a nonprofit organization, provided the veterans this "tour of honor" from San Antonio to pay tribute to those who gave so much. Airfare, lodging,

meals and the bus tour were all paid for through donations.

When we arrived at our first destination of the day, the National World War II Memorial, our veterans joyfully, yet slowly, made their way to the memorial's Pacific Arch as bystanders cheered and thanked them for their service.

Once we passed into the memorial everyone became silent.

I could see it in their eyes and in their faces; the memories of a distant war and friends and family long gone were flooding their minds as they took in the sights of the memorial.

In an instant, the trip intended to pay tribute to them became more about them paying tribute to those they lost.

I watched as a hardened former Marine, a bulldog of a man, was wheeled in his chair and parked facing the Field of Stars, a part of the memorial that represents more than 400,000 service members lost in WWII.

The man was overwhelmed. The brim of his WWII veteran hat covered his eyes, yet it didn't cover the tears that rolled down his cheeks. For Curtis Summers, this trip meant visiting an old friend and letting go of the regrets he's felt for making it out of the war alive, when most of his unit did not.

For all the veterans it was a time of reflection, and as I made my way through the crowd taking pictures, I was filled with a sense of pride for these men and women and humbled by the moments I was witnessing.

As our time to leave the memorial grew near, the veterans gathered for a group photo. Smiles and laughter now replaced the somber emotions as they shared

stories and joked with each other while I snapped a few shots.

After the pictures, we headed back to the buses to continue our exciting day of visiting each individual service's memorial as well as the Korean War Veterans Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Iwo Jima Memorial before ending the day with a wreath laying and a changing of the guard ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery.

Along the way, I talked with a Marine who was present at the flag raising at Iwo Jima in February 1945, and stood next to Joe Rosenthal as he clicked the shutter on the most iconic military image to date.

I shared coffee and stories with a naval cook who spent the evening of Dec. 6, 1941, at a Honolulu club with his shipmates, before staggering back to the USS Oklahoma in the early morning to only be awakened by the alarms of attack hours later at Pearl Harbor.

These men and women have inspiring stories, rich with our nation's history. According to Veterans Affairs officials, an estimated 1,100 WWII veterans pass away each day. So much history is lost with them. It was an honor for me to share this day alongside these distinguished veterans.

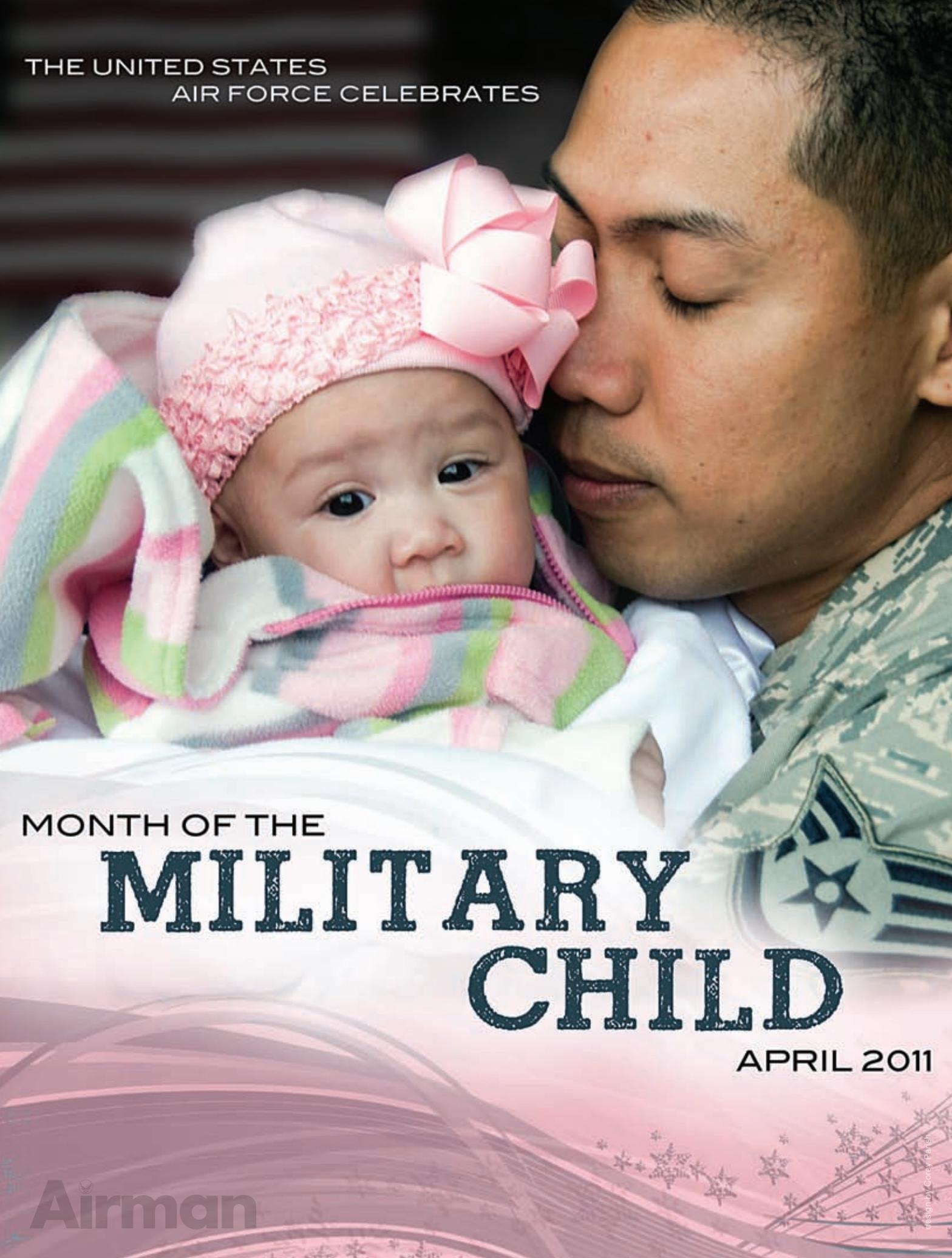
At the end of the day, in what has become a tradition since my first visit to the National Mall, I stopped by to visit William. I now own nearly 20 little white sheets of paper with his name rubbed into each, one for every visit. I've never visited his grave; in fact I don't know where it is. For me, William is in our nation's capital, honored and memorialized as a hero.



Tech. Sgt. Bennie J. Davis III at the U.S. Air Force Memorial, taking photos during an honor flight visit in Washington, D.C. Sergeant Davis is a photojournalist assigned to Airman magazine with the Defense Media Activity in San Antonio.



THE UNITED STATES
AIR FORCE CELEBRATES



MONTH OF THE

MILITARY CHILD

APRIL 2011

Airman

THE FINAL FRAME

SECURITY FORCES SHARPSHOOTER | photo by STEVE THUROW

Senior Airman Dominique Pondant, a sharpshooter with the 902nd Security Forces Squadron at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas, is a graduate of the close precision engagement course where candidates learn camouflage, evasion, orienteering, wilderness survival and target range estimation.

Airman