

Their Favorite Year

1993 was a golden year for the 'Golden Dozen'

Senior Master Sgt. Jerry Lewis and wife, Tech. Sgt. Sherrie Lewis, met when they were selected as part of 1993's 12 Outstanding Airmen of the Year. They married a couple years later and are stationed together in the 15th Civil Engineer Squadron at Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii. Both said their tenures as Airmen of the year was memorable, but their marriage tops the list of memories. "Nothing compares to meeting and marrying Sherrie," Senior Master Sgt. Lewis said.

by Michael Dey



by Tech. Sgt. Mark Kinkade

By all accounts, 1993 was a banner year for 12 Airmen. It began with a banquet in their honor where senior Air Force leaders, important civilians and a host of high-level dignitaries toasted and named them the 12 Outstanding Airmen of the Year.

It ended with hugs, handshakes and friendships forged for the rest of their careers. It was a year that changed their lives.

"Being Airmen of the Year changes you," said Maj. Dwight Lisle. In 1993, he was a senior airman medical equipment technician who didn't know the outstanding Airmen program existed when his supervisor sent him to meet a base-level recognition board.

"You get a perspective on the Air Force a lot of your peers don't get to see," he said. "But I think the most significant thing was the common bond we [the Airmen of the year] shared. We were brought together for the award, and it was the thing we had in common."

Every year, the Air Force recognizes 12 enlisted people for their professionalism, community service and self-improvement efforts. The Airmen are nominated through base-level, then command-level, recognition programs like Airmen of the quarter boards.

After selection, the "Golden Dozen" serve as traveling ambassadors and role models for Airmen to emulate. They speak at Airmen leadership school graduations, attend recognition events and serve on the Air Force Enlisted Council as advocates for improvements to enlisted quality of life programs.

After a year of service, the Airmen typically go back to their career fields and continue their Air Force lives. Some groups stay in touch. Others don't. It depends on how well they "gel."

"We were lucky," said Capt. Jeffrey Woffinden, a staff sergeant in 1993 when he was selected. "We weren't the '12 outstanding egos of the year.' Every one of us thought it was an honor to be selected, and

we gelled around that idea. We were very focused on our responsibilities as representatives of the Air Force's 'ideal Airmen.' ”

The group was most effective as part of the enlisted issues council, said Chief Master Sgt. Michael Wysong, now an Air Force Reserve Command loadmaster superintendent at McGuire Air Force Base, N.J.

“We really focused on improving the lives of our fellow Airmen,” he said. “Each of us felt immense

by Master Sgt. Scott Wagers



Maj. Dwight Lisle, 344th Recruiting Squadron site commander, discusses mathematics with a University of Texas at Arlington engineering student who is considering an Air Force career. Since he was selected as one of the outstanding Airmen, the major finished his degree, earned a commission and is headed to Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio where he will be a hospital administrator.

responsibility to make sure our leaders in the military and the government knew what Airmen needed in their lives. We focused on issues like pay and quality of life, and we were very determined to make a difference.”

The four council meetings were the only times the Airmen were together as a group, but the friendships they formed took root. When they got together, they shared stories of life representing the Air Force, and the challenges they faced. Those stories became the glue that held them together.

“One thing we had in common was how the Airmen in the field perceived us,” said Major Lisle, now a recruiting service site commander in Arlington, Texas. “Most people were very positive about it, and wanted to hear what we had to say. But some weren't so positive. There were people who assumed we were all a bunch of prima donnas. That's not always easy to take, and we all experienced it.”

For then-Staff Sgt. Jerry Lewis and then-Senior Airman Sherrie French, the connection was deeper. After their tenure was over, the two were assigned to Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., where they began dating. They married a couple years later and are now assigned to Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii.

Today, Senior Master Sgt. Lewis and Tech. Sgt. Lewis both put the Airman of the year honor high on their list of career highlights. It also gets credit for not only bringing the two of them together, but for also helping their careers.

“I honestly don't think I would have achieved as much as I have had it not been for being an OAY,” she said. “It opened a lot of doors for us.”

After their tenure as Airmen of the year, the 12 went their separate ways. Captain Woffinden and

Catching up with the 'Golden Dozen'

A chief master sergeant who flew in the Vietnam War. A pararescue specialist who participated in rescues in Somalia during the “Black Hawk Down” incident. Two Airmen who traded stripes for bars and became officers. The 1993 Outstanding Airmen of the Year were a collection of people from around the Air Force representing a diverse selection of careers, successes and attitudes. Their selection as Airmen of the year was a highlight on what would prove to be stellar careers.

Airman magazine followed up with some of what

Chief Master Sgt. Michael Wysong called the “Golden Dozen” to see how their careers turned out.

Chief Master Sgt. James Carter — Unknown.

Chief Master Sgt. Catherine Danzy — Retired.

Chief Master Sgt. Scott Fales — Retired after a career as a pararescueman, participating in such events as the rescue attempts in Somalia and Operation Desert Storm.

Tech. Sgt. Deleonard Fincher — Military equal opportunity specialist, Naval Air Station Fort Worth Joint Reserve Base Carswell Field, Texas.

Senior Master Sgt. Jerry Lewis — Chief, heavy repair (civil engineers), Hickam AFB, Hawaii. The Airman of the year selection placed second as a career highlight, after being

Major Lisle eventually went to officer training school and earned their commissions. Chief Wysong stayed at McGuire and plans to retire in a couple years. The Lewis' built a family. A couple have retired.

The captain became the group's unofficial “social director,” using e-mail to keep in touch and keep communication going. They share updates in their lives, occasionally discuss issues, swap ideas and generally check in with each other to see what's happened since 1993.

“Every now and then, I'll see an e-mail from someone in the group, or a message to everyone,” Chief Wysong said. “It's kind of like meeting up with old school buddies. You get to find out what's happened to everyone.”

Chief Master Sgt. Trenda Voegtle, a master sergeant in 1993, said the selection helped her move forward in her career, but she puts it in perspective.

“My selection allowed for many growth opportunities and contributed to my future success and first-time up selections for senior master sergeant and chief master sergeant. But it wasn't the only reason,” she said. “I think it's important for current and future 12 OAYs to know they can't rely on this one award for all future successes.”

Not everyone from the group stays in touch. Some simply went about their lives and careers, and the rest of the group doesn't know what happened to them. Major Lisle said the group doesn't begrudge those who faded away.

“We were close when it counted,” he said. “Everyone has a life to lead, and sometimes it takes a path away from friends or associates. That's just the way things work out.”

Captain Woffinden said he kept in contact with the

part of a winning Readiness Challenge team early in his career.

Tech. Sgt. Sherrie Lewis — Superintendent, liquid fuels branch, Hickam AFB, Hawaii.

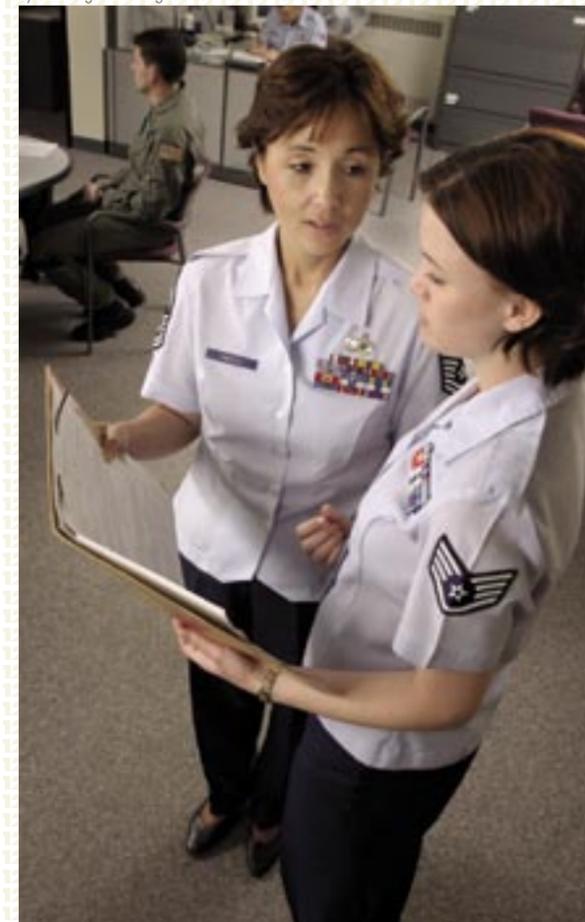
Maj. Dwight Lisle — 344th Recruiting Squadron site commander, Arlington, Texas (moving to Brooke Army Medical Center, San Antonio, this month, where he'll be a hospital administrator for the facility and working for his former mentor from his outstanding Airman year).

Chief Master Sgt. James Scott — Unknown.

Master Sgt. David Sosa — First sergeant, 48th Component Maintenance Squadron, RAF Lakenheath, England.

Chief Master Sgt. Trenda Voegtle — Super-

by Master Sgt. Scott Wagers



Chief Master Sgt. Trenda Voegtle reviews a file with Staff Sgt. Rachel Burris in the 92nd Support Group military personnel flight at Fairchild Air Force Base, Wash. Chief Voegtle's selection as an outstanding Airman of the year helped pave the way for her career success, but she warns today's Airmen selected for the honor to not “rely on this one award for all future successes.”

group because they are living reminders of a highlight of his career.

“That was a special time,” the captain said. “I know I won't forget the people. We kind of grew up together in the Air Force. They are truly outstanding, not just in terms of what they achieved, but who they are. I'm fortunate to know them.” ☺

tendent, 92nd Mission Support Group/Military Personnel Flight, Fairchild AFB, Wash.

Capt. Jeffrey Woffinden — Commander, information systems flight, Beale AFB, Calif.

Chief Master Sgt. Michael Wysong — C-141 loadmaster superintendent, McGuire AFB, N.J. In the 1990s, Chief Wysong was part of an all-Air Force Reserve Command Vietnam veteran crew that flew to Hanoi, Vietnam, aboard a C-141 Starlifter to repatriate the remains of two Air Force pilots declared missing at the end of the Vietnam War. He ranks that trip as the highlight of his career, with being named Airman of the Year a close second.