

Reality check

I'm stationed at Kadena Air Base, Japan, but presently am assigned to the 732nd Civil Engineer Squadron Detachment 6 (better known as "Ridilla's Gorillas" after our commanding officer) supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom.

At the beginning of the year, I thought the "Fit to Fight" motto was just a long-term goal of the Air Force. I remember saying to myself, "Why do I need to be fit to fight? That's what the Army and Marines are for." But about a month ago, I found out why we really need it.

The engineers from Kadena and a few other bases were tasked to repair and improve the quality of life standards at forward Army posts in the area of responsibility, so we were sent out not as Airmen, but as Army riflemen. For the past month, I've learned to eat, sleep and live Army.

We wake up early in the morning to do physical training. It's not just a couple of sit-ups and back to the tent.

We go on 5-mile road marches in full battle rattle, 3-mile runs and all different types of things. We've learned how to maintain our weapons to the highest degree because our lives depend on it. We train on convoy procedures [see "Convoy Protectors," Page 2] and combat lifesaver skills (like self-aid and buddy care times 10) because we have to know how to care for our brothers and sisters if one of them is wounded.

We've trained to administer intravenous fluids and place nose and mouth breathing devices on each other, and yes, it's painful. We eat meals, ready to eat, and drink warm or sometimes even hot water, if necessary. This isn't a cushy deployment, and in a lot of ways, I'm happy it's not because it has opened my eyes.

The goal of the Army is to teach us to successfully make it outside the wire on our own, and it's providing all the tools we need to do that. I now see the Air Force isn't just sitting behind desks or picking foreign object

debris off the flight line or fixing leaky faucets. We train every day to the fullest extent because we all know our lives depend on it. Carrying your 170-pound buddy a quarter mile in the hot desert sun during litter drills isn't your commander being hard on you, it's training you need to be sure you're capable of doing it.

We're in the middle of the battle just like the Army and the Marines. Therefore, we have to be physically and mentally fit. A 5- to 10-mile road march in full gear and charging up a sand berm to take up a good fighting position isn't perceived as a good workout; we look at it as being fit to fight off the enemy and make it back home to see our families again.

People need to know Airmen are stepping up and helping out our fellow services. We need to be ready to jump on that plane and backup our comrades because we're all on one team. You need to be training your body and mind before leaving because you never know when you're going to get the call.

Take the initiative, and get started today! If nothing else, just know that it's real out here. Don't take the "Fit to Fight" concept for granted.

Senior Airman Corey Dunn
Kadena Air Base, Japan

Teaching tool

I just wanted to thank you so much for the three articles I pulled from your great magazine this past year. There was one article on the F-16s the U.S. government sold to Poland ["Paving a Pathway," December 2003], an editorial in the same issue ["Taking the Extraordinary for Granted"] and another article about a Polish priest who left communist Poland, became an American citizen and is now an Air Force chaplain ["Chaplain Recalls Journey from Communism," February 2004].

I used all three of these articles in April on a three-week trip teaching English as a second language in Bialystok, Poland. I used them for reading comprehension and general information. My students really enjoyed the articles. Thanks so much.

Karren Majors
Tinker Air Force Base, Okla.

The rest of the story

We at the A-10 Thunderbolt II System Program Office at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, would like to shed a little light on the planned "life after death" of aircraft 81-987 featured in the magazine ["Warthog's Finiflight," May 2004].

It's true that 81-987 will never take to the skies on its own power again, but it still has a very important future. The aircraft will be used in a year-long structural fatigue test.

The aircraft will be shipped to Northrop Grumman Corp. in Bethpage, N.Y. The fuselage will be subjected to conditions that simulate hours of flight. Engineers will then perform special inspections to find any critical failure area on the fuselage that could be cause for future required repairs. This information will be analyzed to determine what inspections should be conducted in the future to the remaining A-10s.

Aircraft 81-987's legacy will live on as a pioneer in the engineering world by making the rest of the A-10 fleet better and stronger.

On another note, the author wrote 81-987 was the 987th aircraft to roll off the assembly line in 1981. In fact, this was the 682nd A-10 built out of a total of 713 aircraft. There are currently 356 A-10s flying.

Steven Thomas
Hill Air Force Base, Utah

War stories wanted

Airman magazine is looking for a few good factual war stories, past and present, from its readers. All that's required is a quick synopsis of the event. If you think you have an interesting war story to tell, e-mail a double-spaced summary of the event — no longer than one page — to orville.desjarlais@afnews.af.mil. On the subject line, please write: War Story. People can also mail their stories to Airman magazine, 203 Norton St., San Antonio, Texas 78226-1848, Attn: War Story.

Meet the Staff

Master Sgt. Efrain Gonzalez is an 18-year veteran from McAllen, Texas. The 1998 Department of Defense Military Photography Workshop "Top Shooter" and graduate of the Rochester Institute of Technology Military Photojournalism program, has documented combat operations in Iraq, Bosnia, Albania, Macedonia and Afghanistan. He photographs and writes features while helping the director of photography select and edit photographic content for Airman. If you have photo essay ideas or want to know how to submit a photograph, give him a call at (210) 925-7757 or DSN 945-7757, or drop him an email at efrain.gonzalez@afnews.af.mil.



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■ **Air Force Television News:** 30-minute biweekly television program covering news and policy issues available with closed captioning. Shown on public access cable channels and on the American Forces Radio and Television Service. Also available on Air Force Link at www.af.mil, then follow the "TV" link at the top of the page.

■ **Air Force Print News:** www.af.mil/news — The Air Force news wire service providing Air Force and Department of Defense news and information, with daily updates from around the world.

■ **Airman:** www.af.mil/news/airman — Feature and information magazine. Unit subscriptions: afnsup@afnews.af.mil.



Make it real

Regarding the lead photo for "Eyes on the Skies" on Pages 18 and 19 of the May 2004 issue of Airman, it's visually dramatic but fails to ring true. The person sprinting toward the F-15 isn't dressed in flight gear (no G-suit, survival vest or helmet), nor is any of this gear visible on or near the aircraft. There is no member of the indispensable ground crew present to aid the pilot in "putting on" the aircraft. Loose items like the wastebasket on the floor are safety hazards as the aircraft exhaust can hit them while leaving the hangar. In short, it's just too sterile and contrived. It shouldn't have been hard to do it right.

Hank Caruso
via e-mail

The Best of Jake

"JAKE" SCHOPPER



"It was your idea, sir. You suggested we take time off to participate in sports."