MAGAZINE OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

# Airman

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MARCH-APRIL 2010

## Ghostwalkers
### Unique Security Forces

U.S. AIR FORCE CELEBRATES

# month of the Military Child

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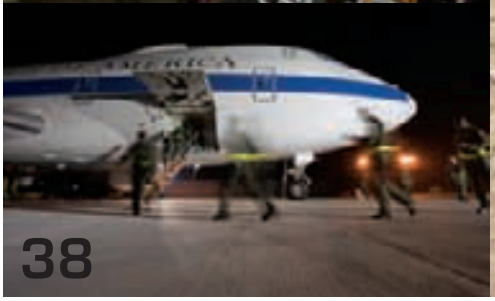
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## Features



## Departments




### On the Cover

Airman First Class Airman First Class Melissa Gonzalez is a ghost-walker. As a member of the 822nd Security Forces Squadron, she and her fellow SFS members are trained and ready to go wherever they are called and secure that location in a hurry.

*photo support by Bennie J. Davis III*
*illustration and design by G. Patrick Harris*

# 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.


## STAYING CONNECTED

I retired in the Florida Panhandle near Eglin Air Force Base and Hurlburt Field, Fla., in 1995. I was able to keep up with what was going on through the base papers and the Airman magazines I could pick up at the local Civil Air Patrol squadron. This summer, I took a job with the Forest Service in Tennessee, and while it's nice to be back in uniform (forest green!), I miss my USAF connections! Thanks, Airman, for keeping me connected.

***Dale K. Robinson***
*Reprinted from the Airman magazine fan page on facebook*

## MORE THAN A THOUSAND

I am a former U.S. Naval officer, newly working for the DOD in California. I discovered a magazine rack here with your magazine.

I compliment your photographers. Your photographs are outstanding!

To this former professional photographer, the impact in so many of them is impressive.

In the September-October 2009 issue, so many photos said much more than the proverbial "thousand words." The shots on page 29, 30/31, 39, the tiny cockpit shot on page 46... how did they get both the inside and outside exposed and in focus? Also pages 53, 54, 56 - what a great portrait, and of course the "Final Frame."

I look forward to future issues as they arrive here.

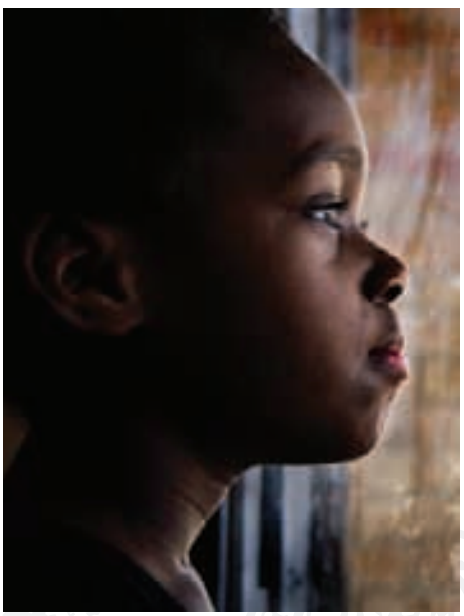
*Sincerely,*
***Daniel Kuttner***
*TV Operations*
*DMA-DMC Riverside, Ca.*

## INSPIRATION TO OTHERS

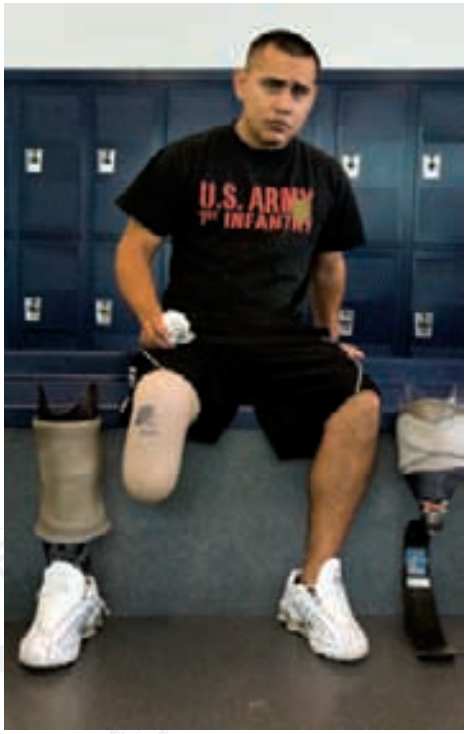
I love the story you did on Carol Malumba. [November-December 2009] She and her family went through many challenges, struggles, and finally victory in battling sickle cell. Capt. Lucky Malumba, Abdullah Mulumba, and her hero Mark have shown such courageous and admirable qualities that we all strive to possess. Your story gives inspiration to those who continue to fight sickle cell and other diseases. I was amazed by the strength Carol had in her to stay positive throughout her treatment. Carol's ability to still put a smile on her face after all she has been through helps me to remember, not to take things for granted.

Thank you for sharing this story of an amazing family.

***Senior Airman Jennifer Concepcion***
*Lackland AFB, Texas*



## PROMISE FULFILLED




This is a great article ["A Promise Kept" November-December 2009] that does a fantastic job of highlighting the importance and achievements of the Aeromedical Evacuation MEDEVAC Mission. The MEDEVAC mission is a testament and but one example of the U.S. militarys dedication to its Soldiers Airmen Sailors and Marines.

As a C-17 pilot and officer, recently on Air Mobility Command's Staff, I have seen firsthand the extent, both in the strategic planning level and the execution phases of the tactical level, to which the Air Force goes to ensure that U.S. wounded warriors receive the time-critical care they need and deserve.

Air Mobility Command has continued to improve its procedures and incorporate lessons learned to develop a very successful mission. Since Vietnam and the first Gulf War, survival rates have increased from 75 percent to above 90 percent with transit time being cut from 10 days down to three days.

***Jason Ginn***
*Command and General Staff College U.S. Army Combined Arms Center Fort Leavenworth Kansas*

## TO THE AIRMEN

Bryan Glynn aerial porters and aircraft maintainers are the backbone of todays air force and our nations defense...we would be a third world power without their support to our nations air mobility mission.

***Bryan Glynn***
*Reprinted from the Airman magazine fan page on facebook*

As an old Aerial Porter, it's great to see the young professionals out there getting the mission accomplished. It would be nice if the main-stream media would show some great footage such as this. As this young Airman said, our military does more than just fight wars.

***Tom Gilmore***
*Reprinted from the Airman magazine fan page on facebook*

# Photo Contest


Lt. Col. Jim Powell, an Air National Guard navigator with the 109th Air Wing, based in Scotia, N.Y., enjoyed his copy of Airman magazine at South Pole Station during a mission supporting OPERATION DEEP FREEZE. Colonel Powell wins the most recent fan photo contest on the Airman fan page on Facebook. Fans are asked to send in a photo of themselves reading Airman in their work or off-duty environment. All Airman fans are eligible to enter. Full details and rules are posted on the Airman fan page at www.facebook.com/Airmanmagazine. If there is enough support, Airman will run the best fan photo here in the Airmail section of each issue. Both the photographer and the subject will receive credit. Check our Facebook page under fan photos for the second place photo by Ernie Hickman.


# Airman

**Official magazine of the U.S. Air Force**
**March-April 2010, Volume LIV, Number 2**

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### DESIGN STAFF

| | |
|---|---|
| Design Director | **G. Patrick Harris** |
| Deputy Design Director | **Luke Borland** |
| Production Manager | **Andrew Yacenda** |

### CONTRIBUTORS

| | |
|---|---|
| Copy Editor | **Steve Richards** |
| Copy Editor | **Janie Santos** |
| Contributing Writer | **Staff Sgt. Jessica Switzer** |

### PHOTOJOURNALISM

| | |
|---|---|
| Chief, Photo | **Master Sgt. Jack Braden** |
| Photojournalist | **Lance Cheung** |
| Photojournalist | **Staff Sgt. Bennie Davis** |
| Photojournalist | **Staff Sgt. Desiree Palacios** |

### ABOUT AIRMAN

**Airman** is published bimonthly by the Defense Media Activity for the Secretary of the Air Force Office of Public Affairs. As the official magazine of the U.S. Air Force, it is a medium of information for Air Force personnel. Readers may submit articles, photographs and artwork. Suggestions and criticisms are welcome. All pictures are U.S. Air Force photos unless otherwise identified. The opinions of contributors are not necessarily those of the Air Force.

### EDITORIAL OFFICE

**Airman**, DMA-San Antonio, 203 Norton St.,
San Antonio, TX 78226-1848
Telephone 210-925-7757; DSN 945-7757,
fax 210-925-7219; DSN 945-7219
E-mail: airman@dma.mil

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# Frontline Duty

## AROUND THE AIR FORCE IN PICTURES

From around the Air Force images come into the Airman magazine office that tell the stories of Airmen on the job and off. Each issue captures as many views of life in the Air Force as possible. Those images that make it into the pages of Front Line Duty are the best of those we receive.

Sometimes the images are chosen because they tug at the heart of our staff members, make us smile or simply because they are very high in cool factor – literally. For each one, we hope you recognize that the image represents a slice of life in today's Air Force. Maybe you'll see someone you know or a familiar scene that brings back a fond memory of your own service. Either way, it is our hope that you enjoy each image.

The photographers at Airman capture some of these but most are from Airmen in the field. There is no prerequisite to be a professional photographer; the only requirement is a great image. We welcome your comments and hope you'll send us photos for consideration in future issues. Send your feedback to airman@dma.mil

— Airman Staff

**CHECK AND RECHECK** Senior Airman Reginald Camp inspects the inlet and exhaust of a C-17 Globemaster III engine on the flightline at Charleston Air Force Base, S.C. Maintenance tasks include daily aircraft launch and recovery, pre- and post-flight inspections on aircraft and their engines. Airman Camp is a jet propulsion specialist with 437th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron.

photo by JAMES BOWMAN

**FIGHTER FUEL** An Air Force F-15E Strike Eagle aircraft is refueled by a KC-10A Extender aircraft from the 908th Expeditionary Air Refueling Squadron over Afghanistan. The F-15E is able to fly air-to-ground missions when boots on the ground need fire power from above.

photo by STAFF SGT. MICHAEL B. KELLER


**ALL FIRED UP** Firefighters at Fairchild Air Force Base, Wash., wait to train in base housing units set for demolition. The Fairchild fire department set sections of these units on fire to help prepare for real-world emergencies.

photo by SENIOR AIRMAN JOSHUA K. CHAPMAN

**TINY TENDERS** A newborn patient at the Level 2 area of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Wilford Hall Medical Center, San Antonio. The NICU is for babies that are born prematurely or who require specialized neonatal care.

photo by STAFF SGT. BENNIE J. DAVIS III

**CAMERA READY** Ron Deagle, 9th Maintenance Squadron, Beale AFB, Calif., tests the installation of an Optical Bar Camera in the fuselage of a U2. The OBC is being tested after its recent use in Southwest Asia.

photo by STAFF SGT AARON C. OELRICH

**RANK AND FILE** A line of C-130 Hercules taxis during a Mobility Air Forces Exercise at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev. Approximately 40 C-17 Globemaster IIIs and C-130s from Air Force bases around the U. S. flew about 400 Soldiers from Fort Bragg, N.C., for air delivery to the Nevada Test and Training Range.

photo by AIRMAN 1ST CLASS STEPHANIE RUBI

**FLARE PLAY** An F-15E Strike Eagle drops a flare during the demolition of the "Taliban Hotel," a safehouse in Afghanistan's Khost Province. An explosive ordnance disposal team deployed from Fort Lewis, Wash., partnered with Soldiers from the 4th Brigade Combat Team, and Afghan national security forces to level the structure.

photo by STAFF SGT. STEPHEN J. OTERO

**GAS CHECK** U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Andrew Deck, 340th Expeditionary Air Refueling Squadron boom operator, conducts a KC-135 Stratotanker preflight check in Southwest Asia. The 340th EARS Airmen fly a variety of missions providing aerial refueling for U.S. and Coalition aircraft throughout the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in support of operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

photo by STAFF SGT. ROBERT BARNEY

**COOL CARRIAGE** McChord pilots fly a C-17 Globemaster III over icy waters of the southern Pacific Ocean on an Operation Deep Freeze mission. Through Operation Deep Freeze, the Defense Department provides logistical support to research activities in Antarctica.

photo by STAFF SGT. ROBERT TINGLE

**TALL TEAMWORK** Weapons load crew members from the 28th Maintenance Squadron perform maintenance on a B-1B Lancer's bomb bay at Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D. The B-1B holds almost 50 world records for speed, payload, range and time of climb in its class.

photo by AIRMAN 1ST CLASS JOSHUA J. SEYBERT

**FULL THROTTLE** Master Sgt. Dan Bloomquist sets the throttles of the E-4B as part of his preflight duties aboard the National Airborne Operations Center based at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb. Sergeant Bloomquist is a flight engineer with the 55th Wing. The aircraft and its crew members are on constant alert, in case ground centers of command and control are destroyed.

photo by LANCE CHEUNG

**FLIGHT TO SAFETY** Evacuees board a C-130 Hercules bound for Homestead Air Reserve Base, Fla., from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, This evacuation flight was part of Operation Unified Response after a devastating 7.0 magnitude earthquake.

photo by STAFF SGT. PAUL VILLANUEVA II

**RAPID RELIEF** A magnitude 7.0 earthquake struck Haiti on January 12 at 4:53 p.m. EST. March Air Reserve Base, Calif., quickly became a staging area for relief workers and search and rescue teams to assemble supplies, personnel and equipment before boarding a C-17 Globemaster III leaving for Port-au-Prince, Haiti. The aircraft is assigned to the 60th Air Wing, Travis Air Force Base, Calif., and arrived in Haiti about 48 hours after the disaster.

photo by MSGT ROY SANTANA

**TOUCHDOWN PASS** Air Force Combat Controllers from the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron, Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Fla., land at a delivery zone in Mirebalais, Haiti, where humanitarian aid was air delivered and distributed by United Nations members.

photo by TECH. SGT. JAMES L. HARPER JR.

**HUMANITARIAN LOAD** Airmen from the 621st Contingency Response Wing, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., offload a C-17 Globemaster III from Charleston Air Force Base, S.C., at the Port-au-Prince airport in Haiti. The aircraft carried relief supplies after a magnitude 7.0 earthquake killed thousands and displaced millions of people.

photo by STAFF SGT. JOSHUA L. DEMOTTS

BY STAFF SGT. MATTHEW BATES ✪ PHOTOS BY STAFF SGT. DESIREE N. PALACIOS

# A WALK TO REMEMBER

## AIRMEN WALK MORE THAN 800 MILES TO HONOR THEIR FALLEN TEAMMATES

"THESE BOOTS WERE MADE FOR WALKING" "THAT THOUGHT IS THE UNDERSTATEMENT OF THE YEAR" FLAGS WERE WAVED BACKS WERE CLAPPED TEARS WERE SHED

Twelve Airmen completed the last leg of a memorial rucksack march through Ft. Walton Beach, Fla. to Hurlburt Air Force Base to honor 12 fallen special tactics teammates killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. The march began at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, covered 824 miles and captured the hearts of people all along the route.

# LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT

"These boots were made for walking," Staff Sgt. David White smiled as the famous lyrics flickered through his mind.

"That thought is the understatement of the year," he said.

But, funny as it was, his boots actually were made for walking; which was good, because it turned out he was doing a lot of that lately.

And a lot meant nearly 200 miles.

His body was reminding him of this fact with every step, every painful, aching step.

He didn't even recognize his feet any more. He knew they were his, but they looked like they belonged to someone else. Blisters were forming on top of blisters, creating a miniature mountain range right there on his feet.

There were no tourists on this mountain range, though. The only visitors here were pain and occasional numbness.

But, he kept going. He kept putting one foot in front of the other, tuning out the voices telling him to stop, telling him he was being stupid, and telling him it just wasn't worth it.

Because, thing was, it was worth it. And no amount of pain or weariness could tell him otherwise.

This walk, this long, seemingly endless walk, wasn't for him.

This walk was for Tim.

### FORWARD, MARCH

His first steps took place 10 days prior, in the early morning hours of Oct. 6. Sergeant White and 11 other special tactics Airmen stepped off together from the home of the Combat Control Selection Course at Lackland Air Force Base's Medina Annex in San Antonio.

Their target was more than 800 miles away: Hurlburt Field, in the heart of the Florida panhandle.

This walk was not for the record books and it wasn't a test of physical endurance. This walk was a journey of the spirit.

The men were walking to honor their friend, Staff Sgt. Tim Davis, a combat controller who was killed in Afghanistan in February 2009, and 12 other special tactics Airmen who were killed in either Iraq or Afghanistan since operations began there.

During the walk, each man wore a 50-pound rucksack strapped to his back and carried a memorial baton with the name of one of the fallen Airmen engraved on it.

"We wanted to show that in Air Force special operations, you are never forgotten," said Master Sgt. Ken Huhman, a member of the 342nd Training Support Squadron at Lackland and one of the event's organizers.

The route was chosen not for its distance, but for its symbolism.

"All special tactics Airmen begin their training at Lackland and end it at Hurlburt," said Staff Sgt. Jesse Schrader, one of the memorial marchers from the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron at Hurlburt Field. "It just seemed fitting to walk that route."

Even walking was chosen for its significance.

"Tim loved to ruck," Sergeant Schrader said. "So, we thought, what better way to honor him than by walking, doing something he loved."

In its planning stages, the memorial walk was meant to be a low-key, behind-the-scenes event. It was just a group of buddies wanting to honor another.

But by trip's end, the men would conquer more than miles; they would enter the hearts and minds of a nation.

### LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT

The plan was simple. The 12 men split into six teams of two and walked

# FORWARD MARCH

The special tactics Airmen performed most of the march in relay teams that walked around the clock. They joined together at the end of the trip in a show of solidarity for their fallen teammates.

from Texas to Florida using a relay system. While one team marched, the other five would rest. After 15 or 20 miles, another team would take over for the one marching, and so on, until they reached Hurlburt Field.

This way, during the 11-day journey, a team was always walking, no matter the time, the weather or the temperature.

For the first five and last five miles, the 12 men would walk together as a team, starting and ending as one.

"It was important that we started and ended together," Sergeant White said. "It signified our bond and the teamwork it takes to do something like this."

But even after they split up, the teams were never really alone. A small convoy of military police, support and medical personnel were always right alongside the men as they marched.

And so, before dawn on Oct. 6, the men stepped off as one and began the long journey ahead of them shrouded in darkness.

The darkness didn't hide them for long, though. Once people started hearing about the special forces Airmen who were walking from Texas to Florida, interest grew from a small smattering to a full-fledged frenzy.

In towns large and small, people lined the streets and shouted words of encouragement. School kids and veterans, mothers and businessmen, teenagers and factory workers all came out to catch a glimpse of these men, to witness and, in effect, become part of their journey.

Flags were waved.

Backs were clapped.

Tears were shed.

"I never imagined so many people would support us," Sergeant White said. "It's just been overwhelming."

The media took interest, too. Local and national television crews, photographers and journalists recorded the team's progress as they marched.

"At first it seemed surreal," Sergeant Schrader said. "But then we were like, this is awesome. By doing this march we were saying, 'Hey, we haven't forgotten about our guys who died over there,' and now, because of the attention, neither will all the people who know about what we did."

The outpouring of support helped the marchers, too.

"When you're tired, having people cheer you on and give you water and encouragement, it just makes it that much easier to keep going," Sergeant Schrader said.

## AT EASE

And keep going they did. Until, on the afternoon of Oct. 16, the 12 men reached their destination.

But they didn't reach it alone. Several family members of the fallen special tactics Airmen walked the last few miles to Hurlburt Field with the team.

It was a gesture of unity, support and appreciation.

For these family members, this walk was symbolic of a journey they had been taking for years, a journey through pain and despair that led to hope.

"I feel very honored," said Sally Sheldon, Sergeant Davis' mother. "I'm very proud of all these young men and what they've done."

What they did was nothing short of a miracle. They walked for 11 days, through five states and more than 800 miles, all to honor their friends and teammates who didn't come home.

"It feels good to be done, but it just brings home all the harder why we were doing this in the first place," Sergeant Schrader said.

Still, though bruised, battered and tired, the men couldn't help but laugh and smile. They'd accomplished what they set out to do, what at one time seemed impossible.

And they'd done it for Tim.

So, yes, these boots were made for walking.

And that's just what they did.

# IT FEELS GOOD TO BE DONE, BUT IT JUST BRINGS HOME ALL THE HARDER WHY WE WERE DOING THIS IN THE FIRST PLACE

Staff Sgts. Jesse Schrader and David White, both from the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Fla., walk a stretch of road in Navarre, Fla. The Airmen were met in many of the towns they walked through by local citizens waving flags and cheering them on in a show of support the Airmen said was a welcome suprise.

As the 12 Airmen completed the last leg of thier more than 800-mile memorial ruck sack march through Ft. Walton Beach, Fl. into Hurlburt Air Force Base, they were joined by media members, more special tactics Airmen and some of the family members of the fallen that they marched to honor.


Laila Farahi, left, an Afghan National Army soldier and nurse, helps 1st Lt. Nicole Pries with an Afghan patient. Ms. Farahi, during a two-week mentorship program, worked alongside U.S. doctors and nurses to hone her medical skills and get firsthand experience with trauma-based care. Lieutenant Pries is deployed from David Grant Medical Center at Travis Air Force Base, Calif.

# OUT OF OLD CUSTOMS, THE FUTURE GROWS

## AIRMEN AT THE CRAIG JOINT THEATER HOSPITAL HELP BUILD AFGHAN NURSING FOUNDATION

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TECH. SGT. JOHN JUNG, 455TH AIR EXPEDITIONARY WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Airmen at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, aren't doing it the easy way. They are doing medicine in a battle zone. This kind of medicine will last past the time it takes to recover from any injury. Rather than simply treating and releasing the wounded, or just giving away bandages and over-the-counter pain relievers, these Airmen focus on providing the education to build a solid foundation for the nurses of Afghanistan.

Working hand-in-hand in a mentorship program for Afghan nurses are 1st. Lts. Nicole Pries and Stefanie Duurvoort, both clinical nurses from David Grant Medical Center at Travis Air Force Base, Calif. They hope to pass on something that can't be found in a classroom.

> "Nursing is not just from textbooks. It takes compassion, excellent patient care and a heart for whoever you're treating, even if they don't like you." — 1st. Lts. Nicole Pries

"Nursing is not just from textbooks," said Lieutenant Pries. The San Antonio native works as an intensive-care ward nurse at the Craig Joint Theater Hospital. "It takes compassion, excellent patient care and a heart for whoever you're treating, even if they don't like you."

Whether they are liked or spat at, the two Air Force nurses want to do more than treat-and-release medicine.

"We care about the people of Afghanistan," said Lieutenant Duurvoort, an intensive-care ward nurse from Niceville, Fla. "We've taken care of many Afghans here at the CJTH, but we want to give the nursing students in the mentorship class the knowledge and skills necessary to provide excellent nursing care when we are no longer here."

The mentorship program is the final step in a year-long, trauma-based training program designed to produce trained nurses for Afghanistan's military. The program is the result of collaborative efforts between U.S. military medical agencies and Afghan National Security Forces. Upon graduation, students have training equivalent to licensed professional or licensed vocational nurses.

After graduating, the nurses return to Kabul's Afghan Military National Hospital and are then sent throughout the country to lead ANA medical care and serve as mentors to their peers.

Malika Faqiri and Laila Farahi are both Afghan National Army soldiers. They are new graduate nurses and were the first women to attend the special two-week mentorship program. They worked alongside U.S. doctors and nurses to hone their medical skills.

"The nursing students were always eager to jump right in and help with all the medical procedures, even if they were quite different from how they were taught to perform the same task before they came here," said Lieutenant Duurvoort. "As they watched us, and became more comfortable with western medical care, you could see their confidence growing just through their body language and how they interacted with their patients."

1st Lt. Nicole Pries, left, prepares an antibacterial ointment for the face of a young Afghan boy, as 1st Lt. Stefanie Duurvoort changes his bandages and dressings. Both worked closely with Afghan National Army nurses during a mentoring program offered at Craig Joint Theater Hospital.

"Western medical care and procedures are very different from what we are used to," Faqiri and Farahi agreed.

Getting Faqiri and Farahi to the CJTH to learn trauma care was no easy task, said Najla Momand, who acts as the translator and a nursing instructor. Long-held cultural traditions were an additional barrier for these two women.

"Afghan culture does not allow women to leave their home village unaccompanied by a close male relative," she said. "I was luckily able to broker a deal with the village elders to let them come here to learn because of my good working relationship with the village in the past."

Cultural and personal boundaries were tested during the two-week mentorship program. Sometimes the women weren't allowed to come to the hospital and other times, their presence made all the difference.

"We treat anyone who is brought in due to combat," said Lieutenant Pries. "Sometimes it's a local villager and sometimes it's an enemy fighter."

In the intensive care ward, children occupy most of the beds. Many were victims of improvised explosive devices. Other patients might include those who plant those devices or fight against the ANA and coalition forces.

"The ANA nurses were a really big help," said Lieutenant Pries. "There is a huge cultural barrier between the Afghan patients and us. It's frustrating not speaking their language but still having to get across to them what we need to do to take care of them. However, once the ANA nurses come in, they have a cultural bond with them, they know how to talk to them and they make a human connection."

Those human connections made the difference in at least two patients from both sides of the spectrum.

"One was a little girl being treated for wounds she received when fighting broke out in her village," said Momand. "While the doctors and nurses were able to heal her external injuries, she barely ate or drank anything for several days. It was not until Malika sang her a lullaby one day that she opened her eyes, sat up and smiled. The next day she started eating and was expected to make a full recovery."

On the other side was an enemy fighter.

Faquiri's husband was killed by the Taliban years ago, but she did not hesitate to help the enemy fighter. The man stopped thrashing around and spitting at the doctors and nurses administering to him when she spoke to him in his own language. She was compassionate and caring despite the fact that he was the enemy, according to the CJTH hospital staff. She stated she wasn't afraid of the enemy and was proud of her role.

"Malika wore the ANA title like a badge of honor," said Momand. "She's very proud to be in the Afghan army."

Someday, Faquiri and Fahari might be listed in Afghan military history journals. Maybe nurses in Afghanistan's future will make great salaries. Until those days come, the two women will continue to pave the way and to work because it matters to them.

"The students in the program are so dedicated to their chosen calling," said Lt. Col. Vivian Harris, the chief nurse at CJTH. "Some children may want to become nurses because it could lead to a lucrative career path in the United States, but that is not the case in Afghanistan. You don't get rich as a nurse in Afghanistan. It's all about caring about human life."

The goal of the program is to spread the skills from nurse to nurse. That is exactly what Farahi plans to do.

"I'm very excited to have learned new nursing skills and look forward to using these skills," Farahi said. "My hope is to take back the medical knowledge I have learned to my people. I hope to make a difference for Afghanistan by teaching anyone who will allow me to do so."

While the new nurses are fulfilling their own dreams, the mentorship program helps fill a critical shortage in Afghanistan.

"The nursing mentorship program is an answer to a nursing shortage that is happening within Afghan National Security Forces," said Colonel Harris, a Dallas native who's deployed from Wilford Hall Medical Center at Lackland AFB, Texas. "The total focus is on nursing and the goal is to produce nurses that are able to take care of patients wherever they are working."

While the newest nurses in the nation begin to share their knowledge, those who set them in motion know they've made a difference that will last longer than any treatment administered at the hospital.

"I'm very honored that I'm here at this time," said U.S. Army Capt. Mark Ebeling, director of the mentorship program. "I think we've taught them well and impressed upon the students what a monumental responsibility they have in front of them; the responsibility of training others and forging the future of Afghan nursing and health care."

Above: Laila Farahi, left, and Malika Faqiri, right, two Afghan National Army soldiers, were the first women to participate in the mentorship program. Lieutenant Pries, center, worked closely both Ms. Farahi and Mrs. Faqiri during the Craig Joint Theater Hospital program.

Left: Najla Momand, an Army civilian, who serves as a translator and nursing instructor, left, watches as Malika Faqiri, center, an Afghan National Army soldier and nurse, checks with 1st Lt. Stefanie Duurvoort to make sure that she has the correct type of blood for a patient. Mrs. Faqiri attended the two-week mentorship program at the Craig Joint Theater Hospital to work alongside U.S. doctors and nurses to hone her medical skills and get firsthand experience with trauma-based care. Lieutenant Duurvoort is a nurse deployed from David Grant Medical Center at Travis Air Force Base, Calif.

# AIR FORCE NURSE TRAINER

## 1st Lt. Stefanie C. Duurvoort

photo by Tech. Sgt. John Jung

"Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle."

**HOME UNIT/BASE:**
TRAVIS AFB, CA

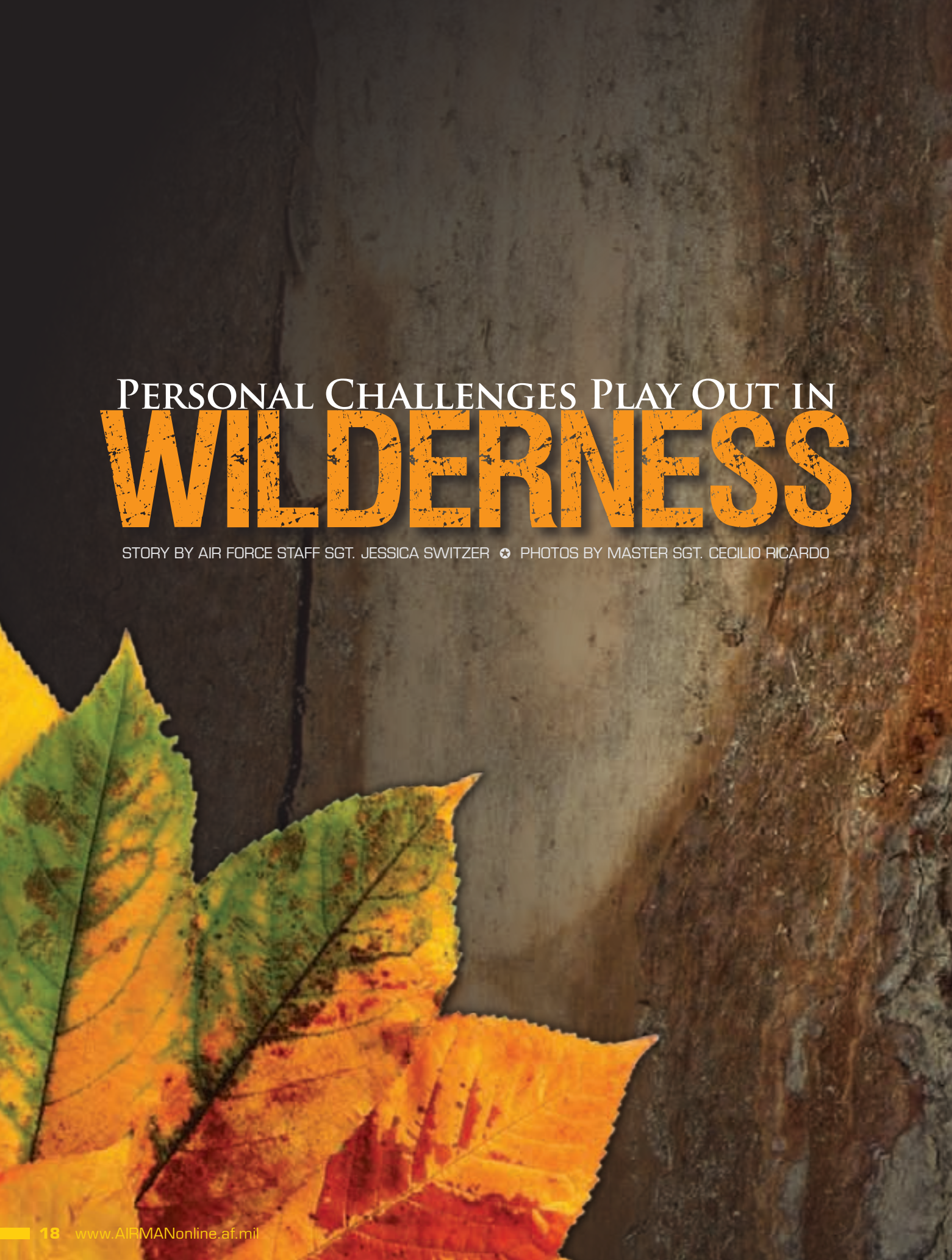
**HOMETOWN:**
NICEVILLE, FLA.

**JOINED AIR FORCE:**
JULY 2006

**PRIMARY AFSC:**
46N3, CLINICAL NURSE

# Personal Challenges Play Out in WILDERNESS

STORY BY AIR FORCE STAFF SGT. JESSICA SWITZER ✪ PHOTOS BY MASTER SGT. CECILIO RICARDO




From top: A Wilderness Challenge team and its river guide negotiate a section of river. The white water rafting portions took teams through several sections of rough rapids; Bikers make their way up a long, steep hill on the 13-mile mountain bike course. If a bike broke down beyond repair, the team could either forfeit the competition or carry the bike to the end of the course; A runner passes a line of white water raft guides at the end of the eight-kilometer run. The guides lined up to help encourage competitors to give one last push to the end of the run.

Capt. John Brochard, a communications and information officer with the 7th Intelligence Squadron, Ft. Meade, Md., straps on a helmet for the duckie race.

A biker negotiates a downhill, hairpin turn on the muddy 13-mile mountain bike course. The weather was rainy and the trails were wet and potentially dangerous. Several teams had to stop for maintenance during the race.

Wilderness Challenge is described as a ruthless test of endurance, teamwork and skill. The trails are treacherous and failure can cause the weak of heart to give up at a moment's notice.

Last year a Coast Guard team won the competition. This year, nine Air Force teams traveled to Fayetteville, a small town in rural West Virginia, in October, to see if they had what it takes to win in events that challenge each competitor to run, hike and raft over a 30-mile course."Wilderness Challenge just sounded like the perfect blend of adventure, competition, team building and kick-your-butt challenge," said 1st Lt. Seth Ostlund, an Air Force Research Laboratory bioelectronics chemist from Wright Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio. "So, I just had to sign up."

He heard about the competition through his girlfriend last year, but was unable to get enough people together for his own team. This year he found three other Airmen willing to compete with him in the Ninth Annual Wilderness Challenge.

"I couldn't get a team together on such short notice so we tried again this year," said Lieutenant Ostlund. "I had a bunch of people who said they would do it, but when push came to shove, I had a lot of people drop off the list. It worked out though; we've got a pretty sweet team."

The Navy's Mid-Atlantic Region Morale, Welfare and Recreation is the agency sponsoring the event. Competing in prior years may give competitors an edge, but Wilderness Challenge is a little different each year. Distances and routes for the five events: the mountain run, whitewater raft race, mountain bike race, mountain hike race and "duckie" race change. Teams have only a general idea of what to practice. Some trained together before arriving and others chose their own training regimens.

"I pretty much stuck to my unit's normal PT routine," said Capt. John Brochard, a communications and information officer with the 7th Intelligence Squadron at Fort Meade, Md. "I added in some extra emphasis on cardio and worked out with the cross-fit machine a little more to get ready for some of the distances we would be covering. Our biggest hurdle was just finding the time to get together and train as a team."

"I focused on running this year because endurance is a big part of doing well at this type of event," said 1st Lt. Eileen Shannon, a scientist with the AFRL at Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla. "I competed last year because a coworker needed a female for his team. I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I had so much fun last year I had to come back."

The first day was filled with teams registering, renting equipment, briefings and looking over parts of the courses they would be traveling over the next two days. Repeat competitors knew what they were getting into and had trained on the sections they had issues with in previous years.

The first two events, an eight-kilometer run and a whitewater raft course, were each timed individually. Time between events allowed competitors to rest and change after their run through the woods.

"I liked it," said 1st Lt. Jennifer Mayer, an education officer with AFROTC Detachment 330 at the University of Maryland in College Park, Md. "It was a good number of events and good distances for all. I know the whitewater rafting was a good time and the biking was a little crazy with the weather, but I think that had it not been so muddy out there, the bike would have been probably my favorite event."

The last day of competition was a grueling test of endurance and the bonds formed within each team. Once the clock started at the beginning of the 13-mile mountain bike race, it didn't stop until each team had made it through the "duckie" course

A wilderness challenge team wearing goalie masks races past a checkpoint on the eight-kilometer run. The team wore the masks on the back of their heads as an easy way of identifying each other and making sure they all passed the checkpoints together.

and past the finish line at the end of a 15-mile hike. The duckie is a combination of a raft, canoe and kayak paddled with double-edge paddles, and the event puts team members in an inflatable two-person kayak through rapids up to Class III. The water starts out calm but quickly turns into rapids with lots of rocks, waves, eddies and narrow passages that could easily unseat an inexperienced kayaker.

The duckies require the two people to work together over the course, helping each other back into the boat if either falls in and coordinating paddle strokes to get the most out of each movement. All of this is after having biked down a treacherous and muddy path in a chilling drizzle.

"I was pretty nervous about the mountain bike," said 1st Lt. Francis Stallings, a research scientist with the AFRL at Wright Patterson AFB. "I had never ridden on a mountain bike on a mountain trail before. Plus the weather didn't help any. It was very wet and muddy. There were a lot of teams and individuals that burned their brakes out before the end of that leg of the race."

Each team and individual had strengths to draw on to make up for events where they weren't as strong.

"Overall, it was good to test your mettle and see how you fared," said Capt. Kurt Ponsor, a helicopter pilot with the

"Wilderness Challenge just sounded like the perfect blend of adventure, competition, team building and kick-your-butt challenge"

— 1st Lt. Seth Ostlund

1st Helicopter Squadron, 316th Wing, Andrews AFB, Md. "Everyone has different strengths and that was interesting to see. Lieutenant Mayer was better on the downhills, and they stunk for me. But I was better on some of the uphills and we did this little zig-zag game each time so we were sticking with each other and helping push each other where it was tough for the other person."

For many competitors, their own minds and bodies were their biggest opponents.

Coast Guard Petty Officer 3rd Class Josh Clark and the rest of his team carry their white water raft across the finish line. Petty Officer Clark wore a false mustache, blue cape and Speedos through most of the competition as a way to raise morale with his team and to encourage other competitors to enjoy themselves.

1st Lt. Jennifer Mayer shows off the coin she received after her team completed the 15-mile hike. Each competitor who finished all of the events during Wilderness Challenge 2009 received a commemorative coin regardless of where their team placed in the overall place standings.

"I completely underestimated how sore I was going to be on day two," said Lieutenant Mayer. "The whole competition was really overwhelming at first. When it first started, you didn't know exactly what to expect. Part of me wanted to pace myself and another part just wanted to get it over with and go as fast as I could. I got even more tired on the hike the further I got into it. As we got to the check points, I just didn't even want to know how far we'd gone or how much further we had left."

Though the challenge was personal when it came to endurance, it was still an exercise in teamwork. The length and technicality of the courses was daunting to many and several had never done some of the things they were being asked to do. Each team was required to pass various checkpoints together, causing the members to come up with innovative approaches to keep the faster movers with their slower teammates. Some tied themselves together with bungee cords and others circled back to the slowest person to make sure they all crossed the finish line together.

"I think [Captain Ponsor] really helped me out," said Lieutenant Mayer, who competed in the challenge for the first time this year. "He was pushing me, and was just someone there I could talk to — keep my mind off things."

Besides motivating each other, team members were also motivated by their place against the other teams.

"Every time we'd see a team we were catching up to, we'd just want to pass them," said Lieutenant Mayer. "It'd kind of give us that extra little adrenaline. We don't want them to re-catch up to us so we kept pushing it."

While the land-based events came as second nature to the Airmen, there were a few who ran into trouble with the rafting and duckie challenges.

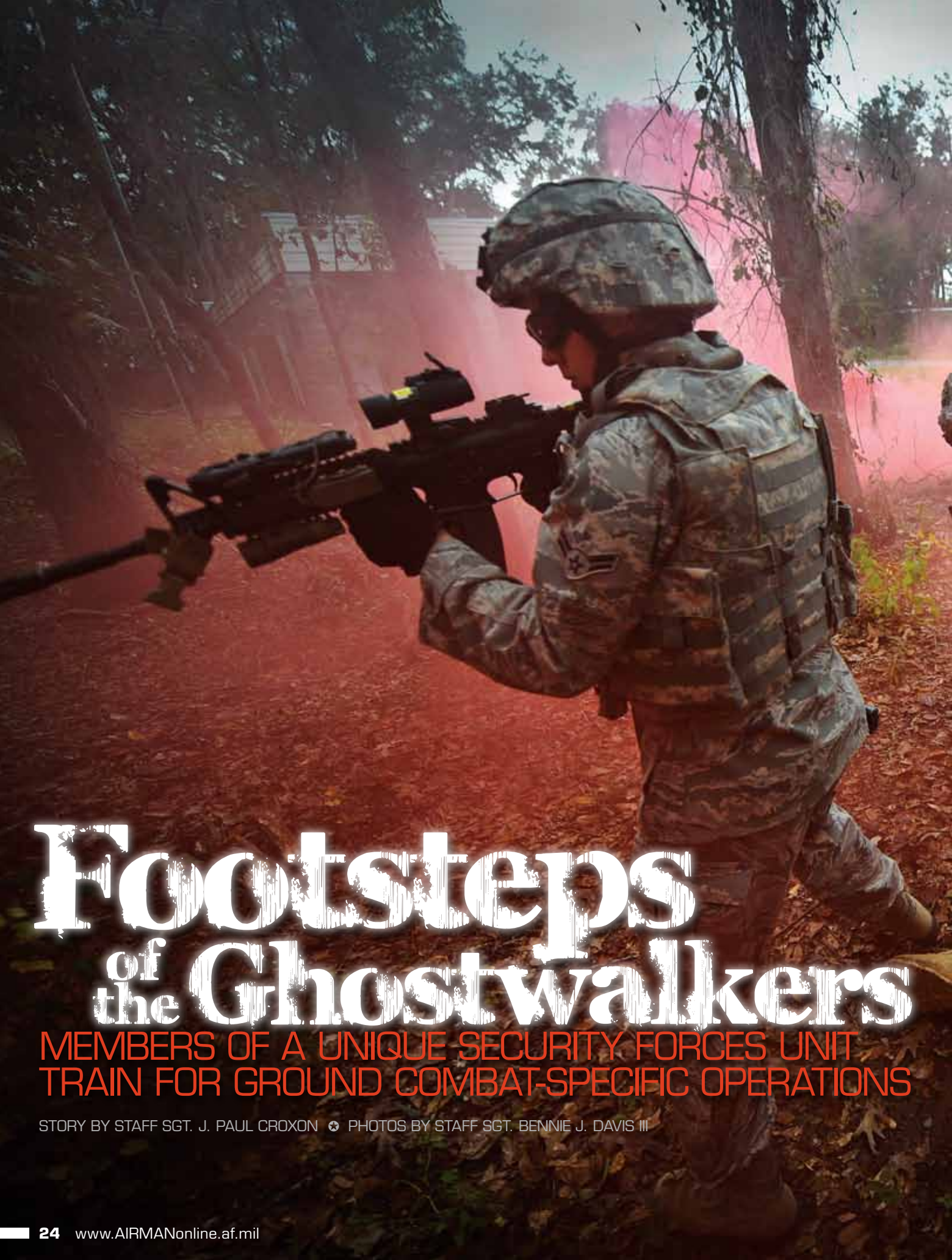
"Running and biking, they come kind of automatically for people in the military because they stay active by nature," said Capt. Joseph Walters another helicopter pilot with the 1st HS. "Anything aquatic though . . . not so much."

It was a cold, wet, miserable two days and then it was over. While none of the Air Force teams took the first place trophy, they put in a respectable showing. The fastest Air Force team came in fourth, 42 minutes behind the third place team.

"It was a tough race," said Col. Mark Hobson, the Installation Acquisition Center provisional director with the Air Force Materiel Command at Wright Patterson AFB, and team leader for the top Air Force team. "We had to run parts of the 15-mile hike to be competitive."

While not everyone took home a trophy, no one went home empty-handed. In the end, each person who crossed the finish line received a Wilderness Challenge coin commemorating the competition and walked away knowing they passed a tough test.

Coast Guard Seaman Patrick G. McGinnis looks back at his teammates during the eight-kilometer run. Seaman McGinnis started the first day's events in a Speedo and donned an orange cape for the second day's events. In addition to meeting the physical challenges, some of the members of several teams went through extreme measures to keep morale high and to remind their teammates to have fun.



# Footsteps of the Ghostwalkers

## MEMBERS OF A UNIQUE SECURITY FORCES UNIT TRAIN FOR GROUND COMBAT-SPECIFIC OPERATIONS

STORY BY STAFF SGT. J. PAUL CROXON ✪ PHOTOS BY STAFF SGT. BENNIE J. DAVIS III

Airmen 1st Class Adrienne Storey, left, and Elizabeth Rendon, right, provide security while Airmen 1st Class Samuel English, top-left, and Robert Fay, top-right, evacuate simulated casualty, Airman 1st Class Todd Coller, to safety during Military Operations on Urban Terrain, or MOUT, training.

Huddled together against a cinder-block building, a stack of 12 Airmen awaits the command to enter. The Airman on point looks around the corner, attempting to determine what the next few minutes hold for those behind her. The stack presses into itself, telling the Airmen by touch that their "six" is protected. Tensing like a viper they strike, funneling into the building, into the chaos that is the modern asymmetrical battlefield. Like ghosts, the Airmen systematically check each room without the need for commands. Minutes later, after the smoke disperses and the calls of "clear" ring out, the stack funnels out, 12 Airmen plus one.

This scenario was tailor-made from start to finish to hone the skills of Airmen newly assigned to the 824th Security Forces Squadron. Known as the Ghostwalkers, they are one of three operational squadrons that make up the 820th Security Forces Group. The group is unique among the Air Force security forces community in that it has no law enforcement mission, allowing its Airmen to train constantly for a very specific mission, two actually.

The unit's primary mission is to provide the Air Force with its only worldwide deployable, first-in, self-sustaining, force-protection capability. They can go anywhere, take over a newly captured airfield and secure it so Air Force support units can prepare it for aircraft bed-down. The second mission is to provide continuous support of current operations and it keeps at least one squadron deployed at all times. This second mission is known as the steady-state mission and, according to the group's commander, Col. Don Derry, it is manned entirely by the 820th SFG.

Ghostwalkers "stack up" as they prepare to enter a mock village. Airman 1st Class Thomas Case and Airman Heather Horton provide security while the entry team gathers.

"We have a specific mission to go someplace and do something." he said. "With three operational squadrons, we relieve each other every six months." He added that the most recent steady-state mission was at Camp Buca, Iraq, where group members provided installation security and undertook outside-the-wire combat operations over the past three years.

Though it provides predictable timelines for deployment and involves a squadron-sized mobilization, the steady-state mission is not the reason the 820th SFG stood up in 1997.

"We were formed for the first-in capability," Colonel Derry said. "For instance, the 823rd SFS is the next squadron that is scheduled to deploy for a steady-state mission in June. But from now until June they are the on-call squadron. If something happens anywhere in the world, those folks, within 24 hours, will have wheels in the wells, traveling to do that particular mission and that mission takes precedence over the steady-state mission."

The term, wheels in the wells, refers to the point when an aircraft is airborne and hints at the training these Airmen undergo. Some unit members train at the Army's jump school at Fort Benning Ga. Though the entire unit is trained in fire-team tactics, numerous different weapons and other special skills, many are qualified in skills that make them more like Air Force infantry than police.

Airmen from the 820th SFG are trained at several Army schools like Airborne School, Pathfinder, Special Reaction Team, the Close Precision Engagement Course, Ranger, Air Assault, Raven, an Army Sniper course and others. This advanced training gives them the ability to go in after the initial forces take over an airfield and secure it before any other Air Force units touch down.

According to Colonel Derry, the unit is not only able to secure and hold ground around the installation, they also can undertake limited offensive operations outside the wire, including the ability to clear an urban site. This first-in capability is what the Ghostwalkers train for at Moody. Though the training seems different in its scope and execution, the real difference between this training and that of other security forces units is that the Ghostwalkers know they will be deploying within a year and that they will be deploying with each other.

"When I went on my first deployment in 2004, I went to a regional training center with 36 other guys, four of them I worked with," said Staff Sgt. Eric Hammons, a squad leader. "Of those four, two were from a different flight. Here I have 13 guys under me and every single day I work with the same 13 guys. As we clear the building, we're only going to get better. They're going to know that when I go into a room I'm going to the right. And, they know that since I'm going right they go left."

Sergeant Hammons and his 13 Ghostwalkers have been together for only a few months. Many of his Airmen arrived from technical school in August. For them, Sergeant Hammons is more than an NCO. He's a leader and mentor who teaches them combat from first-hand experience.

"In tech school we learned the basics: law enforcement and security," said Airman 1st Class Perla Rendon, who possesses a friendly demeanor but is all business when she's clearing a building or ordering a suspect to drop his weapon. "Here we're able to focus on one aspect and really hone our skills and we learn from guys who have been there. It makes a huge difference when it's first-hand experience."

Her fellow Airmen echoed her opinion. During an exercise in clearing a building, a fire team of four Airmen needed to extract a wounded Airman. Taking instruction from Sergeant Hammons, they had to decide on the best course of action for this situation. Drills like this are a part of daily life and the Airmen are

Wearing the simualted dress of an "insurgent" Airman 1st Class Dani Zere watches out for advancing Ghostwalkers. MOUT training provides the members of the 820th SFG with a realistic environment to teach and train combat scenarios for close-quarters battle.

Senior Airman Kendall Iverson leads a fire team in clearing the dark stairwell of a multi-story building. The 824th SFS is one of three squadrons under the 820th SFG that maintain a high operational tempo rotating between deployment, on-call for world-wide response and reconstitution training status.

Moving tactically through smoke concealment, Airman 1st Class Robert Fay trains to be part of a fully-integrated, highly capable and responsive force to protect Expeditionary Air Forces.

"If something happens anywhere in the world, those folks, within 24 hours, will have wheels in the wells..." — Col. Don Derry

encouraged to ask questions, come up with their own scenarios and work through them. Most of the time those scenarios are things the senior cops have experienced already.

"It's like operational Air Force every day," said Airman 1st Class Melissa Gonzalez, who graduated from technical school earlier this year. "In tech school we learn the basics, but here everyone thinks combat. I feel like I'm part of a big family."

Though the Ghostwalkers are able to concentrate on battlefield tactics, they must set time aside to retain proficiency on Air Force core competencies and professional military education. In this respect the Ghostwalkers are unique in the career field.

"I talk to my friends from tech school all the time," said Airman Rendon. "They'll tell me they're about to work the night shift somewhere or a weekend shift. Our schedule is pretty much set at Monday through Friday."

The set schedule gives the Airmen time to complete some of their training but they never get the hands-on practice with the non-combat aspects of the career field.

"Since we don't have a law enforcement mission there is potential for us to be at a disadvantage testing against our peers," said Sergeant Hammons. "We make an effort to provide as much training on those aspects of the job as possible since most of the Airmen in the unit will leave one day and could very well have a law enforcement job."

Though law enforcement is in the future for the Ghostwalkers, the present is their focus. Sergeant Hammons drills his Airmen daily, going over tactics and procedures, answering questions about his past deployments and what they can expect on their upcoming deployments. Until that day comes, many of them will go to Airborne school, train with the Army and hone their skills. After all, it's those skills that make them something different than most security forces, something special; a Ghostwalker.

# Footsteps of the Gho

In the point position, Airman 1st Class Elizabeth Rendon leads the fire team through fading smokey concealment.

Airman 1st Class Melissa Gonzalez leads a fire team through a smokey corridor.

Ghostwalkers storm a building in a mock village looking for opposition forces.

Members of the 824th Security Forces Squadron perform a "stacking" maneuver. Every Airman on the team has a responsibilty to be alert and provide security for the others on the team.

# Spotting the Sun

## NEW ENGLAND OBSERVATORY ANALYSTS HAVE THEIR EYES AND RADIOS ON SOLAR WEATHER AND 2013

STORY BY RANDY ROUGHTON ✪ PHOTOS BY LANCE CHEUNG

A dreamcatcher marks the gravesite of the chief, or sagamore, of the Agawams across from the Sagamore Hill Radio Solar Observatory in Hamilton, Mass. Local legend states that youths desecrated Masconomet's gravesite a few years after his burial in 1655 and Native Americans believed the chief's spirit roamed the coastal New England area until a special ceremony was held in 1993.

Much like Masconomet was believed to keep watch over his people, solar analysts at the Sagamore Hill observatory keep their eyes and antennas focused on the sun to protect astronauts, American troops and communications from potentially damaging solar activity. A powerful solar flare could release deadly radiation and require astronauts in the International Space Station to stay in a protected part of the station. In a war zone on Earth, a communications disruption might put troops at risk during an operation. Solar analysts watch the sun for threats to communications that few people even consider in our technological world.

"No one is ever really interested in the weather until they are impacted by the weather," said Tech. Sgt. Donald R. Milliman, NCO in charge of operations. "The same is true of solar weather."

Solar analysts such as Staff Sgt. Wesley R. Magnus monitor the sun's radio emissions with a radio telescope that uses three parabolic antennas of 28 feet, 8 feet and 3 feet in diameter, along with fixed semi-bicone and tracking antennas. Analysts detect and identify any sudden increases in the sun's radio energy that show solar flares and other activities that could disrupt communications.

The solar alerts provided to the Air Force Weather Agency's Space Weather Operations Center protect national space programs, including Space Shuttle operations, military surveillance and communications systems. When the radio detects an event, the analyst has two minutes to send the alert to AFWA at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb. Analysts at this New England outpost are anxiously waiting because the sun has been quiet in recent years.

"Sometimes the job is like a little child waiting for the first snowflakes of the year," said Sergeant Magnus. "It's about the anticipation and the waiting for something to start happening, but once it does, the go-go is a rush."

Anyone working at the observatory is no stranger to snowflakes.

Master Sgt. Yolanda Hernandez, left, and Staff Sgt. Stephen S. Ensminger, electronic systems maintainers, stand under the sweeping dipoles on a Solar Radio Spectrograph. The SRS measures radio wavelengths between 25-75 MHz.

The 2nd Weather Squadron's, Detachment 2 is located at the Sagamore Hill, Mass., solar observatory. Radio telescope dishes and dipoles stand out in an area most known for horse ranches, seafood and views that resemble Normal Rockwell's art.

Dreamcatchers hang from tree branches at the Chief Masconomet memorial site near Sagamore Hill's solar observatory. Local legends state that the sagamore, or chief, rests peacefully near the observatory.

Snowfall and other winter weather are elements the Sagamore Hill's four sister solar observatory facilities in the Radio Solar Telescope Network don't face. The other sites are located in much warmer climates. "The Radar Site," as some locals call the observatory, is located in two buildings on a 32-acre tract of land on the steep Sagamore Hill near the New England coastal communities of Gloucester, Ipswich and Essex. The nine-person staff deals with up to 60 inches of snow a year, not to mention storms the locals call "nor'easters" and "Alberta Clippers." Sometimes, a few inches of snow might fall on Hanscom Air Force Base, 32 miles away, while Sagamore Hill could receive a foot.

Just getting to work in a winter storm is hazardous, with the ice-covered road leading up the steep hill. Two staff members had automobile accidents in the past couple of years. One person was hospitalized after a collision with a snowplow at the bottom of the hill. During the worst storms, all they can do is park at the bottom of the hill and make the half-mile trip to the building on foot. But, because someone has to watch the sun no matter what the conditions are on Earth, one of the solar analysts sometimes spends the night when a particularly bad storm is expected. During the winter, the job includes shoveling and brushing snow from the antennas and constantly monitoring the weather for heavy snowfall.

"No one is ever really interested in the weather until they are impacted by the weather. The same is true of solar weather."

— Tech. Sgt. Donald R. Milliman, NCOIC

"The one thing that's definitely unique for this site is we are the only cold weather solar site," Sergeant Milliman said. "All of the other sites are in more tropical weather environments where the only thing they really have to deal with is high rain. Here, we actually deal with high winds, ice and snow, as well as heavy rain. I think it's one of the things that makes our site unique."

The observatory's location itself is crucial to its mission to get the best possible view of the sun at its highest point in the middle of the day. The Air Force Cambridge Research Lab chose the site in 1955 because of its elevation and location in the most eastern part of the United States near the Atlantic Ocean.

"One of the main reasons we sit on top of a hill, rather than flat land, is the nice view we have of the sun," Sergeant Milliman said. "Believe it or not, our location is perfect because we are somewhat protected from the elements. The tree lines protect us from the snow, except for when we get nor'easters."

Solar analysts account for only 12 to 15 of the several thousand weather specialists Air Force-wide. So, a position at one of the solar sites is somewhat of a dream job for many in the career field. Staff Sgt. Heath G. King wasn't one of those who yearned to be a weather forecaster, much less a solar analyst. Hurricanes made the Orlando, Fla., native tired of any kind of weather. As luck would have it, Sergeant King was selected as a forecaster, and after assignments at Shaw AFB, S.C., and in Korea, he found himself at the observatory in 2005.

"I came here with a complete clean slate, as far as knowledge of the general layers of the sun," Sergeant King said. "In terms of solar flares, sunspots and other activities on the sun, I learned all of that on the spot through a lot of on-the-job training, trial and error, as well as some interaction with more seasoned analysts who were here before me. I also did a lot of exploration on the Internet."

Much of the learning process came on one day — Dec. 6, 2006 — a day Sergeant King expected to be another quiet one like most of the days since he arrived at the observatory.

"The analyst I was relieving told me everything was quiet. Nothing's going to happen on the sun today,'" he said. "About 30 minutes later, all of the alarms were going off, we were getting updates from all of the other observatories and I was trying to monitor all three computers at one time."

The intense solar flare that day, sent a tsunami-like shockwave across the visible face of the sun and caused serious disruptions in Global Positioning Systems. Solar bursts begin with a flare that sends high-energy electrons into the atmosphere. This produces radio waves that disrupt frequencies used by navigational systems.

"Primarily, the impact we're most concerned with is on satellites and the space station," Sergeant Magnus said. "These frequencies not only affect the satellites, but all ground-to-plane communications, and anything electronic that sends and receives information. For a warfighter's mission, this can affect anything electronic, including GPS systems and shortwave radios."

Sun-watchers saw little solar activity in recent years. Each solar life cycle, an 11-year period that observers note by the number and location of visible sunspots, includes periods of solar maximum and solar minimum. These are periods that indicate the frequency of solar activity. Solar experts called the current

Staff Sgt. Heath King multitasks between phone verifications, e-mail messages, data analysis and system checks in response to a spike in activity on the sun. The solar radio signal is picked up by one or more of five antennas outside the building and processed through the components behind him. Information is then displayed on high-definition monitors. If the activity is high enough, it has the potential to disrupt communications. In that case, he must generate a message to the Air Force Weather Agency within two minutes.

solar minimum one of the lowest on record. In 2008, no sunspots appeared in 266 days, the lowest number since there were 311 spotless days in 1913. As of March 31, 2009, sunspots showed on only 12 of the first 90 days of the year. However, solar weather experts expect the number to increase in the next few years, with the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration predicting the next solar maximum in May 2013.

"When we do hit solar max, we will be ready," Sergeant Magnus said.

Tech. Sgt. Julia F. Hagen is eager for the next solar maximum cycle. Unlike most of her co-workers, Sergeant Hagen worked at other solar sites. She trained at the Holloman Air Force Base, N.M., optical solar site in 2007 before working as a solar analyst at the site in Learmonth, Australia.

"It was interesting to see both sides of solar observing at both optical and radio sites, but unfortunately it's all been during solar minimum," Sergeant Hagen said. "I think it's going to be really busy and a lot more exciting during solar maximum. We will really have to be on our toes sending out messages, especially when the Space Shuttle goes up."

Information gathered by these analysts is primarily intended for the AFWA, whose staff members then pass on alerts to NASA, NOAA, United States Strategic Command, Air Force Space Command and other high-priority programs. Their data often finds a place on the Internet with research by universities and special interest groups. Unlike many of the groups that use the information for research into issues such as climate change and global warming, Air Force solar analysts are more interested in the immediate impact of solar weather.

"Just as weather forecasters are concerned primarily with day-to-day forecasts for flying missions, we're concerned with what's going on in the sun right now, what is going to happen tomorrow, and what has recently happened," Sergeant Magnus said. "Some of the researchers who gather our messages and analyze our data are more concerned with the long-term effects of these solar cycles and how they affect our environment."

Sagamore Hill's observatory is scheduled to automate by 2015. When that happens, solar data transmits directly to the AFWA, at Offutt AFB, Neb. From Offutt. Analysts there can pull up data from any solar observatory.

"Once they are fully automated, they will be building an essential hub at the AFWA," said Staff Sgt. Stephen S. Ensminger, assistant NCO in charge of maintenance. "The analyst will actually [have] remote access to data from anywhere in the world from this site or any other site."

The observatory's remote spot on Sagamore Hill, about 30 miles from Hanscom AFB, requires the staff to take care of its own facility. Sergeant Ensminger, Master Sgt. Yolanda Hernandez, NCO in charge of maintenance, and training supervisor Daniel Holmes are responsible for all facility maintenance, which is sometimes a challenge, considering the age of the equipment.

"Some of the parts are so old, they don't even make them anymore," Sergeant Hernandez said. "As things deteriorate over time, getting replacement parts has been a real challenge. We have to do whatever it takes to keep the equipment running."

Maintenance includes talking daily to solar analysts about how equipment is working, calibrating radios, weekly inspections and monthly equipment testing. The age of the equipment means maintainers must have a good handle on how it's working, from the antennas to the radios.

"It's kind of like having the old dial radio in your car," Sergeant Ensminger said. "You had to track it just right to get the station to come in. That's kind of how these old radios are. There is a bit of finesse that goes into tuning them."

The facility is the network's prototype solar radio site, where maintenance specialists go before they report at another site. Holmes, who leads the specialists through two weeks of initial training, takes his responsibilities seriously.

"I personally feel the importance of our radios grows every time someone puts something into space," he said. "The more satellites, vehicles and people we have up there, the more important is the job we do here. The whole world depends on us for the accuracy of their measurements and I take that very seriously."

The significance of the sacred gravesite, clearly visible from inside the Sagamore site's fence, isn't lost on the staff. Just as Masconomet's spirit watched over the Agawam people, according to Native American legend, Space Shuttle crews and combatant commanders can trust their communications capabilities because someone is keeping watch for them.

# SOLAR ANALYST

## Staff Sgt. Wesley R. Magnus




photo by Lance Cheung


"As solar analysts and weather forecasters, our job is always changing. What the screen may look like one day or hour is going to be completely different the next time you are doing something. Because it is not an exact science, Air Force Instructions and Standard Operating Procedures only go so far. You now rely on your own interpretation and experience. You may have three or four different opinions of a particular event."

**UNIT/BASE:**
DETACHMENT 2, 2ND WEATHER SQUADRON

**HOMETOWN:**
LANSDALE, PENN.

**JOINED AIR FORCE:**
JUNE 29, 2000

**PRIMARY AFSC:**
1W0X1

Hallie Braland knows the significance of a packed duffel bag. Her husband, Staff Sgt. Eric Braland, a member of the 55th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, will soon deploy from Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., to an undisclosed location. When he is away, many of his daily responsibilities shift to her.

# 20 YEARS OF SACRIFICING FOR 'THE HUNT'

## 55TH WING MARKS TWO DECADES OF NON-STOP DEPLOYMENT IN SOUTHWEST ASIA

STORY BY RANDY ROUGHTON ✪ PHOTOS BY LANCE CHEUNG

On most days, Hallie Braland's two young children handle their father's deployment well. While they miss their daddy, the children have learned to cope because Staff Sgt. Eric Braland deploys for about 120 days a year. It's all part of the job for this 55th Maintenance Squadron mechanic at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb. The Bralands have family in Nebraska, but while her husband is away, Hallie fulfills a dual role as mother and father. But on this day, the children are having one of those days where emotions run high and they're not quite as understanding about why their father is gone.

"You have to listen to me," Hallie tells them firmly, "because I'm the only one here right now."

Sacrifices by deployed Airmen and their families are a fact of life at Offutt AFB. The Airmen with the 55th Wing deploy with the RC-135 Rivet Joint aircraft. In August, they will reach the 20th consecutive year of deploying to Southwest Asia. The "Fightin' 55th" is the only wing in the Air Force that has maintained a continuous presence in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility since Operation Desert Storm. Airmen in the wing have averaged three deployments a year during that time.

Mrs. Hallie Braland understands why her husband, Staff Sgt. Eric Braland, a mechanic with the 55th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, deploys. She knows his skills are needed in today's conflicted world. Missing him, and having a heavier workload at home when he is gone, is just part of life as a spouse. Her suggestion to other spouses is to take each day as it comes.

Wing leaders don't anticipate an end to the streak anytime soon.

"If you have a requirement forward for F-15 aircraft, you can rotate through several wings that have those, and they will deploy for 120 days, and be done for a while," said Lt. Col. Chris Canada, 55th Wing director of staff. "But there's only one place to get an RC-135, and that's right here. So no matter what (Air and Space Expeditionary Force) band is being exercised, we're in it.

The 55th Wing's RC-135s are reconnaissance aircraft that provide near real-time, on-scene intelligence collection, analysis and dissemination capabilities. The information RC-135 crews collect is combined with visual intelligence to provide a complete picture of the situation for ground forces. The aircraft's capabilities make them "the eyes and ears for ground forces" in Southwest Asia.

"Reaching 20 years of continuous deployment is a significant milestone because it shows the perseverance of the people in the 55th Wing, and the thirst for what we provide," said Colonel Canada. "We are one of the few wells . . . and there are a lot of thirsty commanders out there for what we can provide."

Wing members live up to the motto of Rivet Joint crew members: "Always on the Hunt." The continuous deployment streak began on Aug. 9, 1990, when RC-135 crews deployed to Saudi Arabia for 24-hour reconnaissance after Saddam Hussein's armed forces invaded Kuwait. The first deploying RC-135 crew flew a combat reconnaissance mission in support of Operation Desert Shield while on the way to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

"We were one of the first in and we never left," Colonel Canada said. "Being deployed . . . has always been something this wing has done. Even before Desert Shield we had the expectation of being deployed 30 days and home for 30 days."

The sacrifices of deployment are nothing new for wing leaders, beginning with Colonel Canada and Lt. Col. Wes Smith, the 55th Wing inspector general. Both were deployed frequently in the early days of operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. While on his second deployment in February 1991, Colonel Smith's first daughter was born. She is now a college freshman.

"In August 1990, we were in Alaska flying missions when Iraq invaded Kuwait, so we were re-directed back to Offutt and then to the Middle East," Colonel Smith said. "By the time we got back to the staging area further in the Middle East, there were already planes in the theater, so we stopped in Athens, Greece, and flew missions out of there, while keeping an eye on the Mediterranean. In November, we went in for Desert Shield and in February for Desert Storm. We stayed there for the duration of the war."

Colonels Canada and Smith understand the stress multiple deployments can have on younger Airmen and their families. They remember what it was like as a young lieutenant or captain away from the family for months at a time in the first few years of marriage.

"Some of us who have been a part of these deployments are a bit older, but there are a lot of folks who are pretty young when they are on their first deployment," Colonel Canada said. "Being married by itself is an adventure, especially when you're young. But throw in an extended separation, not just for a business trip but one where you're potentially in harm's way, and there are a lot of things that can go on in people's minds as far as concerns and expectations.

"During Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm, I had been married for about two years, but we didn't have any children," he said. "That definitely would've weighed on my mind a bit. Obviously, you go out and do the mission no matter what, but in the back of my mind I would think I'm going to miss a birthday or, with a newborn,

Staff Sgt. James L. Vinson has a collection of souvenirs that includes currency from some of the countries on the five continents he's seen on his deployments.

Staff Sgt. James L. Vinson, a 55th Maintenance Squadron aerospace ground equipment craftsman at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., displays some of his deployment memorabilia. Sergeant Vinson has collected items from the five continents he's seen during his Air Force career.

I maybe missing the first steps or another of those important milestones."

During two decades of uninterrupted deployments, the wing's Airmen experienced many changes. The RC-135 has new engines and a glass cockpit with digital instrument panels that replaced round-dial analog gauges from the Operation Desert Storm era. Even the deployment lengths are different. In the early days, members deployed for 60 or 90 days. The number has gone back and forth, but 120-day deployments are now the standard. The mission also has changed from Cold War deterrence to that of following a less conventional enemy. But the fact that the 55th Wing deploys will not change.

"We've always had a deployed nature," Colonel Smith said. "Some folks go for a total of about six months in their military careers. A lot of our folks are gone from 180 to 210 days a year constantly, so there's a recurring need for family support at home."

A key resource for deploying Airmen is the Airman and Family Readiness Center where trained staff are available to help a family plan for the deployment.

"We've bolstered squadron-level programs to help us keep up with spouses and families of deployed members," Colonel Canada said. "If there's something going on and a family needs help, the commanders and first sergeants are aware and can help them out. We have a strong spouse network, particularly at the squadron level. They can share concerns, exchange baby-sitting and support each other like that to help out when you have a military member gone for 30 to 45 days or longer."

Changes that improve daily, deployed life are the advancements of personal technologies, especially the tools available to keep in touch with family back home. Colonels Canada and Smith can remember deployments before e-mail was an option, when occasional telephone calls were the only means of communication. Now there are video chats via laptop computers, more telephones, e-mail and other communication options during deployments. Families also learned communication is just as important before the separation.

"Repeated deployments are hard on marriages," said Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Oledia Bell, deputy wing chaplain. "My suggestion is that couples insulate themselves prior to a deployment. If they don't practice good closeness before the deployment, the time during a deployment can be very difficult and has the ability to rupture families. I think deployments can be emotionally stressful. But even with the stress, it seems that military members and their families are resilient. They do what's asked of them and more."

Serena Pulley arrived at Offutt AFB in November only a few months after she and her husband were married. A month later, Airman 1st Class Brandon Pulley, an airborne systems engineer with the 38th Reconnaissance Squadron, was scheduled for his first deployment. Unlike Eric and Hallie Braland, the families of Pulley and her husband aren't in Nebraska, but in North Carolina. Airman Pulley expected to miss Christmas and his wife's birthday in March. She was more concerned with what her husband would face than with what she would.

> "Reaching 20 years of continuous deployment is a significant milestone because it shows the perseverance of the people in the 55th Wing, and the thirst for what we provide."
>
> — Lt. Col. Chris Canada

"Of course, I'm afraid for him to go out of the country to a place he's never been before," she said. "I won't be able to see him and talk to him every day, and that worries me somewhat. But, I know it's part of his job. Right now, I'm just trying to get familiar with everybody and find friends, and maybe a job to keep me busy during the day."

Far left: Airman 1st Class Brandon Pulley uses a component rack similar to this on the RC-135V/W Rivet Joint. If a problem occurs, this airborne systems engineer with the 38th Reconnisance Squadron based at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., is there to trouble shoot the system, provide solutions or deactivate components for follow-on repair.

Left: Serena Pulley recently married Senior Airman Brandon Pulley. She is adjusting to life as an Air Force spouse and is learning about the benefits available to military families such as the Commissary.

Before he left, Airman Pulley said his thoughts were on how his wife would handle the separation. He knew he would miss her, especially during the holidays, but he was also thinking about the mission and doing the job he was trained for in an unfamiliar place.

"I'll be concerned with what's going on with her while I'm over there," Airman Pulley said. "But I'm also hoping I can do my job to the fullest, especially since it's my first deployment. I've been told you learn so much in your first deployment."

Single Airmen face their own set of challenges. Tech. Sgt. James Vinson said being deployed about 160 days a year for most of the seven years he's been at Offutt AFB makes sustaining friendships and dating relationships difficult.

Sergeant Vinson, a 55th Maintenance Squadron aerospace ground equipment craftsman, was accustomed to frequent deployments at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, before coming to Offutt AFB. While he said he's proud to be a part of the 20-year milestone, being gone so much has an impact. He said just when he gets to the point of getting to know someone, it seems like it's time to leave for another deployment.

"When you're single, it makes a drastic impact on your relationships, especially with meeting new people," Sergeant Vinson said. "You also miss out on a lot of stuff while you're gone (with) your family back home; a lot of holidays and birthdays. Out of the 11 years I've been in the Air Force, this is the second Christmas I'll get to spend at home. I'm thankful that I have an understanding family. They know what I do is important."

Because the unit, due to its unique mission, stays together and deploys together, it can become a family of a different kind.

"I do enjoy the camaraderie of going to a location because the people there become your family," said Sergeant Vinson. "They are your brothers and sisters, the people who watch your back and help keep you safe."

While the wing is full of Airmen with multiple deployments, there are also several people such as Staff Sgt. Kara Welte and Airman 1st Class David Reichel, who haven't gone yet. As a 97th Intelligence Squadron airborne cryptologic linguist, Sergeant Welte is responsible for using signals equipment to detect and identify enemy communications. Airman Reichel is a 55th Maintenance Squadron aerospace ground equipment mechanic. Both are anticipating their first deployments in January.

"I had no idea when I first came to Offutt that we would deploy as much as they do here," said Airman Reichel. "After the first few months in the shop, I heard by word of mouth. The bottom line is I expect to do my job just like I do here. I have a few friends here who are doing the same thing I am because we're deploying at about the same time. But I'm really not worried about my deployment. I'm looking forward to it."

Before leaving for her first deployment, Sergeant Welte gathered advice from the wing's more seasoned deployers on everything from what to pack to how to make the most of the experience. Because she has to carry so much equipment for the job, she learned to limit the personal items.

"I've learned you should pack as little as you can," Sergeant Welte said. "We have three 150-pound bags issued for our equipment, so I know I need to pack light and not to take anything I won't really need in the desert."

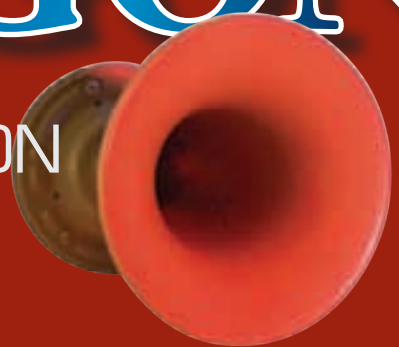
While the Airmen learn what they need to know to make deploying bearable, the families at home learn lessons of their own.

"The biggest thing I've learned is that I have zero control over anything," said Sergeant Braland. "Do not expect or anticipate anything to happen, because you have no idea. You don't know exactly when they're coming home, so don't get your hopes up. You just take it one day at a time and try not to get so worked up."

Fortunately, spouses like Braland and Pulley don't have to do everything alone. From the 55th Wing members who deployed in the early 1990s to those deployed now, the one factor that hasn't changed is the encouragement they give each other, the support from the unit and from their own families and friends.


# AN AIRBORNE PENTAGON

## E-4B ALERT CREWS READY TO JUMP INTO ACTION AT THE SOUND OF A HORN



STORY BY RANDY ROUGHTON ✪ PHOTOS BY LANCE CHEUNG

The familiar sound of a horn ends early afternoon routines in several areas on base. A radio operator immediately stops his workout in the fitness center. A flight attendant leaves her groceries behind on the commissary checkout counter. Two maintainers start the engines on the E-4B National Airborne Operations Center aircraft and wait for the rest of the crew. The crewmembers don't know if the horn signaled an exercise alert or a real-world emergency, so they react as they were trained.

"With each alert, you don't know if it's a practice horn or a real horn," said Master Sgt. Harry Menard, the lead production superintendent with the 55th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., where E-4B crews continue to pull alert duty that has been a requirement for 35 years. "But after you've done this for a long time like I have, it's kind of like riding a bike. You get used to it and you know what's going to happen, so it becomes a reaction instead of just anticipation. The horn will go off and you just react to it because you know what you have to do and you get it done."

The converted Boeing 747 is the airborne operations center for the president, secretary of defense and members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The airplane also serves as a survivable command, control and communications center to direct forces and execute war orders if an attack were to destroy command control centers on the ground.

One of the 1st Airborne Command Control Squadron's four E-4B aircraft remains on alert at all times with a fully manned battle staff, whether at Offutt or at one of many bases elsewhere in the world. The other three aircraft are either at the Boeing Depot in Wichita, Kan., for maintenance, with the squadron trainer or getting washed and lubed. Because the airplane is a 24-hour command center, its external power source is always running and it's ready for takeoff with three maintainers on board who are certified to start the engines.

Former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan called the E-4B "the doomsday airplane" when they were passengers. But the flying command center is more commonly known by its project name, "Nightwatch," a nickname inspired by the Rembrandt painting that shows townspeople protecting their town in the dark. A print of the painting hangs on a wall in the NAOC headquarters, located on Nightwatch Street. The E-4B's nickname goes hand-in-hand with the crewmembers' philosophy of always being alert and prepared for action.

When the Klaxon sounds the alert, crewmembers drop what they're doing and head for the aircraft as quickly as possible. How quickly, no one will say but the crews have been known to leave groceries on the commissary check-out line and meals on the table to answer the call.

"It's really a sense of what we're here for. When everybody else is asleep, we're still watching," said Col. Marty Doebel, NAOC commander. Colonel Doebel has worked with the E-4B through more than half of the three and a half decades its crews have remained on alert.

The 747 airplane looks like Air Force One from a distance as it lands on a flightline, with its long blue line and the words "United States of America" visible on both sides of its white surface. Like Air Force One, the airplane has enhanced nuclear, thermal and electromagnetic pulse protection and a variety of new communications and other technical systems. But up close you can see there's no presidential seal.

Air Force One "is the five-star hotel and we're the motel," Colonel Doebel said. "But, man, we have a lot of capability packed into this motel. The lights are on 24/7. We've really focused on what you would expect to see inside a modern office and what the secretary of defense has access to in his office."

The E-4B's main deck is divided into compartments, including work areas, a conference room, briefing room, and operations and rest areas. The plane normally carries a crew of about 60, but could hold as many as 112 people

However, while Air Force One has the sole mission of transporting the president, the E-4B is intended to be an airborne command center and gives the secretary of defense and staff members an aircraft with offices that can function as if they were in their own offices. The secretary has the plane available for overseas travel so he can communicate securely with senior government and military officials. He also can speak to his office staff and subject-matter experts at the Pentagon through video-teleconferences from the plane.

It is a fully-equipped communications platform and can serve as an airborne command center for all military forces in a crisis. The plane's electronics system covers frequencies from very low to extremely high. This capability enables the secretary of defense to communicate with all military commands worldwide, including tactical and strategic forces, naval ships, planes, nuclear-armed missile facilities and submarines.

"The difference between a fixed command center and ours is this one has wings, so it can fly away from a threat," Colonel Doebel said. "We operate the aircraft whether it's flying or on the ground as an active backup to the National Military Command Center at the Pentagon."

Three battle staffs with members from all four services work on a three-week cycle. While one battle staff is on alert, another is preparing for their week on alert and the other has time off to take care of personal and military business.

Battle staff members pass decisions made by the president, secretary of defense and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the forces. Everyone in one of the battle staff positions has to satisfy requirements of the Personal Reliability Program, which helps to ensure that each member can be trusted with the important responsibilities of the job. The program is similar to a security clearance investigation, but more of "a day-to-day, 24-7 check," Colonel Doebel said.

Staff Sgt. Shawn "Puffy" Combes always sleeps with a light and a hand-held mobile two-way radio on while at the alert facility's crew-rest lodging room. He also keeps a uniform laid out in easy reach so that when the klaxon siren or radio alerts the 21-person crew, they waste no time and head directly to the E-4B aircraft outside their building.

"You absolutely cannot make a mistake with (these decisions)," he said. "You can't have a mistake from the standpoint of not accurately conveying a decision the president has made, or something being transmitted that the president didn't decide. There is zero tolerance for messing that up. So we train on that on a regular basis, and we are stringent with our criteria, whether it's an exercise or an actual decision."

Marine Corps Maj. Matt Stover, a battle staff emergency action officer, is no stranger to responding with urgency. He has worked in search and rescue, as well as a C-130 Hercules and H-46 Sea Knight helicopter pilot. Most people feel nervous when they hear the horn; the answer is to make yourself as competent in your job as possible, according to Major Stover.

"You never get used to hearing it," he said. "You basically go from zero to 60 in nothing flat. Even if you're ready for it, your heart's pounding. All you can do is be confident in your abilities to do your job. The rest is going to take care of itself."

Crewmembers live in a small compound at the NAOC headquarters while on alert. They are limited to certain parts of the base that are equipped with notification sirens so they can hear the horn and

respond quickly. Each crewmember learns from experience tricks that speed response time, whether sleeping, showering or studying. E-4B officials don't say how long it usually takes from sounding the alert to takeoff, but will say it's quick.

"Let's just say it's amazing how fast it happens," said Lt. Col. David B. Gaskill, 1st ACCS commander. "It's an amazingly, impressive and fast response."

Staff Sgt. Elena Alonzo knew she wanted to fly on a large airplane with an important mission when she studied radio operations in technical school. She received both parts of her wish with her assignment as an E-4B radio operator.

"When we were hearing about all of the different platforms, I knew I really wanted a large airframe," she said. "I said, 'I want to go to Offutt. I want to fly in the big plane.' It definitely sounded like a cool mission to me. How many Airmen get to fly secretary of defense and presidential missions?"

The first time Sergeant Alonzo heard the horn for an alert, she was eating lunch with friends at the Fairchild AFB, Wash., golf course. The bases where the E-4B lands are equipped with the Klaxon alert response system, so the crew checks it after landing. As soon as Sergeant Alonzo and the other crewmembers heard the horn, they jumped into a van and ran to the airplane as quickly as possible for the flight back to Offutt.

"We found out later in the day that we didn't have to go anywhere, but it was quite the experience, an adrenaline rush," Sergeant Alonzo said. "My instructors tried to prepare me for the first time I had to respond to the horn, but I don't know if you can ever be really prepared for the first couple of times you hear it."

When Staff Sgt. Krystal Lerohl joined the E-4B crew as a flight attendant, she faced a lot of new challenges that were different from anything she'd seen in her Air Force career. Everything was new, from the size of the plane and the duties of a flight attendant to responding to the horn. Two years later, preparation and training has replaced the panic.

Members of the E4-B crew climb the spiral staircase to reach their duty stations. Everyone has a job to do to prep the already-running aircraft for departure should the alert sirens signal that it's time to go.

"It's always a surprise because you never know when it's going to go off," said Sergeant Lerohl. "But I think I've gotten better because I know what to do now. I'm not sleeping in my uniforms anymore like I did in my first three alerts. I still have my things bunched and ready, though."

In 2005, Department of Defense officials made the decision to retire the entire E-4B fleet, beginning in 2009 and ending in 2011. However, that decision was ultimately reversed following additional studies and risk assessments, with the entire E-4B fleet now programmed to remain in service and continue its mission for at least another decade.

"I think a version of this aircraft will go on until they can find a better way to do what it does," Colonel Doebel said. "The deputy secretary of defense directed that an analysis of alternatives be conducted to explore suitable alternatives to the aircraft. But even if a decision is made soon, we wouldn't see a replacement aircraft until at least the early 2020s. We're anticipating the E-4B will be supporting the NAOC mission until at least 2020."

So E-4B crews will continue to keep their travel bags packed and ready to respond whenever they hear the alert horn. The flight attendant, communications specialists and mechanics can go back to the grocery store and the gym. This time, the alert wasn't a real crisis. But they know any time they hear the horn, it could be.


Staff Sgt. John Lovell is a super high frequency communications specialist. His main duty is maintenance and operation of the 33" parabolic antenna in the hump-shaped radome on the top of the aircraft that is the National Airborne Operations Center. The E-4B is a militarized version of the Boeing 747-200 airframe.

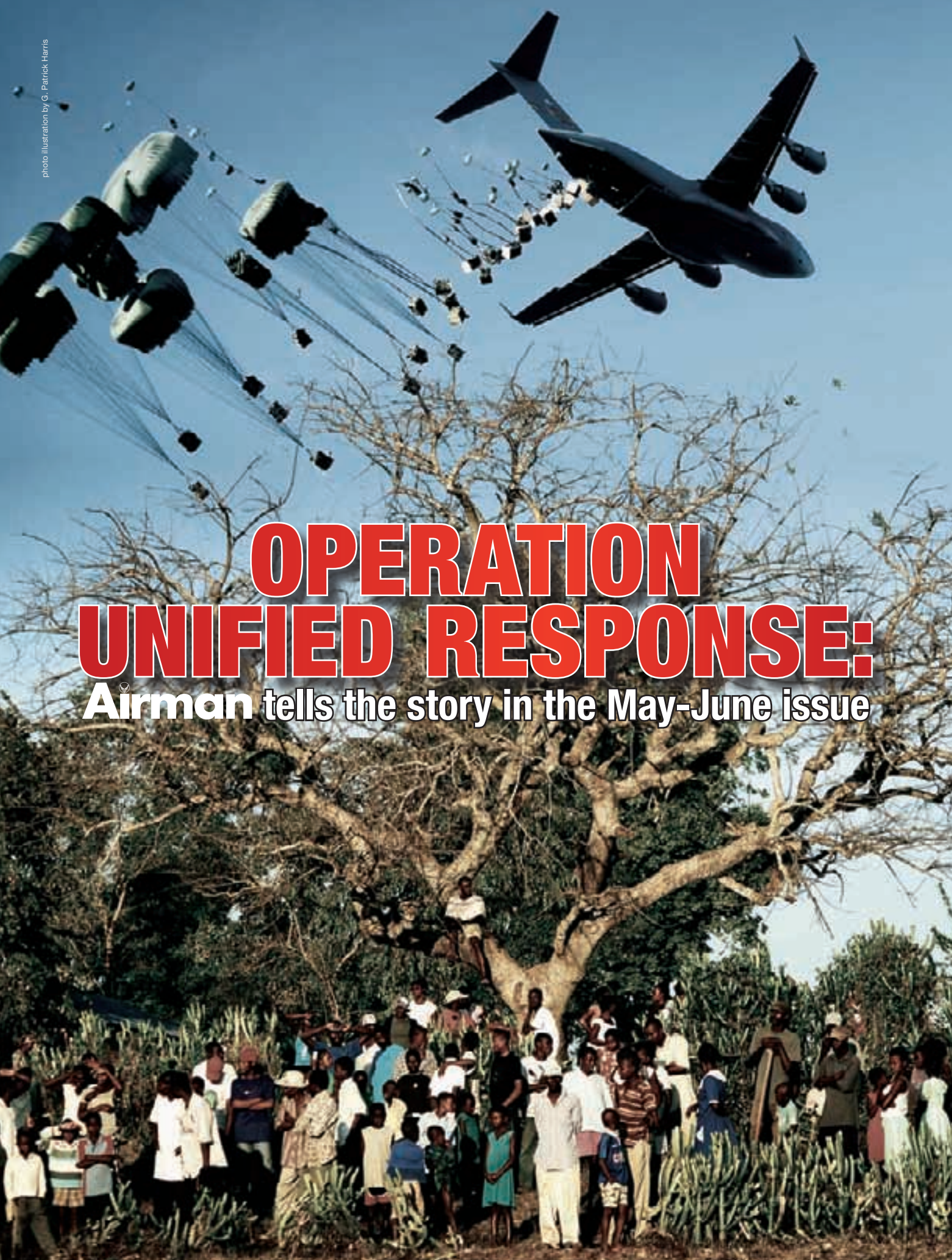


photo illustration by G. Patrick Harris

# OPERATION UNIFIED RESPONSE:

## Airman tells the story in the May-June issue

# TESTED AND TRIED IN TOUGH DUTY

STORY BY
STAFF SGT. J. PAUL CROXON

## AN AIR FORCE MEDIC LEARNS SHE HAS WHAT IT TAKES TO REACH FOR HER DREAMS

U.S. Air Force courtesy photo

Senior Airman Ashley Jackson, a medic deployed from Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, is outside the wire with the Kapisa Provincial Reconstruction Team. As an Air Force medic, she applied combat first aid to Soldiers when their vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device during convoy operations in Kapisa Province.

A girl grew up wanting to be a doctor and help people. She joined a team whose mission was to rebuild a nation and met a child in need of care. Then a bomb tested them all. It seems like the perfect movie teaser. It's not. It's real and it's still unfolding.

The girl is Ashley Jackson. Now a senior airman in the United States Air Force, she grew up in a small town in rural Minnesota, one of those towns where everyone leaves their doors unlocked. She said she's had the desire to help people for as long as she can remember. Medical school was the obvious choice but not the most financially practical. So, she became an Air Force medical technician.

The team is Provincial Reconstruction Team-Kapisa. It consists of people from the Army and Air Force, the State Department and other federal agencies. Originally located at Bagram Air Base, in the Parwan Province of Afghanistan, the unit relocated to a forward operating base controlled by French forces within Kapisa Province. Though they receive support from the French military for their day-to-day needs such as food and shelter, PRTs are designed to be self-sufficient. Team members include communications specialists, security forces members and medics.

For Airman Jackson, the team is also her family away from home.

"I grew up with an older brother," she said. "The guys in the team look at me like my brother does, as a little sister. They always take care of me and were like a group of proud older brothers when I proved myself in combat. But, they still look after me."

Though the team is designed to rebuild a war-torn country, the war is still going on and combat is never far away. According to Airman Jackson, the primary mission for the 60 or so PRT members, is to visit with the people in Kapisa Province and help them rebuild their country. Often, these visits are so PRT members can inspect the building of clinics, roads and schools. In order to get to the inspection sites, they must cross the dangerous countryside. It was on one of these visits that the child, the bomb and the test become part of this story.

In September 2009, Airman Jackson and other PRT members were on the way to a civil affairs meeting. It was during the journey that a call came in over the radio. There were injured locals at the front of the convoy and some were children. This was Airman Jackson's first test as a medic, though not the last that day.

"The call came out over the radio," she said. "There were local nationals injured at the front of the convoy and they needed a medic. I walked up to the front of the convoy and saw two cars pulled off to the side of the road."

In one of the vehicles sat an Afghan National Army soldier who had minor cuts and scratches. One of the PRT Soldiers, Staff Sgt. Bryan Dykes, who is a reservist and a paramedic in his civilian job, stabilized the Afghan soldier. Instructions were given to take him to the hospital. Airman Jackson and Sergeant Dykes went to the other vehicle and found two injured children.

"Both of them were obviously suffering from a concussion, and my patient had small cuts all over the exposed areas of his body," she said. "The kids kept wanting to drift off to sleep as a lot of

concussion patients do. So, we had to keep shaking them to keep them awake. I had placed my hand on the little boy's chest, to shake him to wake him up, and his hand went up to mine and held it against his chest. When I tried to take my hand away, he continued to hold it in place, finally allowing me to pull it away while he continued to hold my hand. I wanted to pick the kid up in my arms and carry him to the hospital myself because I knew that he was scared and in pain."

The children were stabilized and the adults were told to take them to the only hospital in the province and to keep them awake. Airman Jackson passed the test, but this was just the beginning.

After finishing the civil affairs mission, the convoy returned on the same route. Less than five minutes after passing the spot of the earlier accident, an explosion buffeted the mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicle Airman Jackson was riding in and knocked her out. After the dust settled and she regained consciousness, the instinct of wanting to help people, and her training, took over.

"Looking back on the IED, a lot of what happened was muscle memory," she recalled. "My first thought after coming to was, 'can I move my fingers and toes?' After I found out that I could, I knew that although I may be hurt, I'm not hurt bad enough to just lie there. I knew that my friends, my brothers, were in a lot of pain because I could hear them moaning. The only thing that I could think of was that I needed to get to my guys up front and make sure they're OK."

Again, she had Sergeant Dykes near her and together they stabilized the driver and truck commander and then turned their attention to the turret gunner.

"I didn't see any feet inside the turret, so I poked my head inside it," said Airman Jackson. "The restraint harness had worked, but I saw the gunner slumped over his gun, unresponsive."

After checking his vitals, she determined he had a broken femur, the largest bone in the leg. She stabilized and prepared to move him.

"I gave him morphine to prepare him for the pain he was about to experience when we removed him from the turret," she said. "I realigned his leg as best I could, trying not to cause any more damage."

With the aid of other PRT members, the turret gunner was extracted from the destroyed MRAP and put on a body board, allowing Airman Jackson to focus on the driver. He'd managed to open the door but lay on the ground, obviously injured.

"The driver was breathing and was responsive, but couldn't move," Airman Jackson said. "As I talked to him, he alerted me that he was in pain."

Sergeant Dykes and others moved the injured to one location so Airman Jackson could easily monitor them while the convoy commander, Army Sgt. Rob Feiser, radioed for help. A helicopter and Air Force pararescuemen were sent from the 33rd Expeditionary Rescue Squadron and arrived moments later.

Airman Jackson assisted the pararescue team by helping make a sling to limit the movement while en route to the Bagram Airfield emergency room. Airman Jackson and others were released after an examination; however, three Soldiers remained in the hospital for more serious injuries. Though three Soldiers were admitted to the hospital, all the MRAP passengers survived.

Airman Jackson passed the test. She survived combat, provided medical attention to Afghan children and saved the lives of her "brothers" after experiencing the destruction caused by an improvised explosive device. Now that she has been proven in battle and her value as a medic has been established, her "brothers" keep an even closer eye on her.

"Before the IED, I often stayed in the vehicle, though I tried to get out and meet the people as much as I could," she said. "Now, since they have experienced the need for a medic, they take extra care of me. They don't want to lose a 'little sister' and the only medic."

For this family-oriented woman, the IED demonstrated how dangerous her mission is. However, when she talks to her family back at home, they tell her they are proud of their daughter and little sister and understand how important the mission is.

"People don't realize how bad it is for the Afghan people," she said. "There are kids running around in snow, often without shoes. What we do helps to advance them and give them a chance to get back on their feet."

If this were a movie script, there would be a dramatic closing scene. But here in real life, she is still planning her future. Airman Jackson wants to use her education benefits to apply for medical school when she returns home in March. She wants to help people even more, likely as an Air Force doctor. She's been tested and she passed. Airman Jackson said she now has the confidence to do what needs to be done even under the fire this scene ends with. Her story is … to be continued.

photo by Staff Sgt. Samuel Morse

courtesy photo

Senior Airman Ashley Jackson smiles as she listens to President Barack Obama's Thanksgiving message Nov. 26, 2009, at Forward Operating Base Morales-Frazier, Afghanistan. Airman Jackson, a medic with Provincial Reconstruction Team Kapisa, is originally from Lakeville, Minn. She is deployed from Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska.

An Air Force HH-60G Pave Hawk takes off for a medical evacuation mission as the sun sets over Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. Although primarily used for combat search and rescue, the HH-60G supplements the Army's UH-60 Black Hawks in medical evacuations during night and marginal weather conditions.

photo by Capt. Darrick Lee

Senior Airman Ashley Jackson conducts an interview with French military reporters at Forward Operating Base Morales-Frazier, Afghanistan. Airman Jackson, a medic with Provincial Reconstruction Team Kapisa, is originally from Lakeville, Minn. She is deployed from Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska

photo by S gt. Teddy Wade

Senior Airman Ashley Jackson, a medic assigned to the Kapisa-Parwan Provincial Reconstruction Team, observes Soldiers while they help Afghan National Army soldiers recover a truck in Mahmood Raqi, Afghanistan.

photo by Capt. Darrick Lee

In addition to being the medic for her provincial reconstruction team members, she also participates in medical engagements in the Kapisa Province. Much of her time is spent treating children and providing medical education to the population.

STORY BY RANDY ROUGHTON ✪ PHOTOS BY STAFF SGT. BENNE J. DAVIS III

# ONCE AN AIRMAN, ALWAYS AN AIRMAN

## SOME AIRMEN MAY RETIRE BUT THEY FIND WAYS TO CONTINUE TO SERVE

Retired Brig. Gen. Keith B. Connolly flew more than 170 combat missions as a Vietnam War-era pilot. He found a different mission after retiring from his 34-year Air Force career – meeting the needs of fellow veterans and their families in the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., retiree community. The general attacks his new mission with the same relish he had as both a pilot and commander.


After 34 years of active duty service, retired Brig. Gen. Keith B. Connolly continues to serve the military. He's served for more than 20 years as the director of the Retired Activities Office at Davis-Monthan AFB, Az. Gen. Connolly is a direct line between the base and the veteran community providing information, services and volunteers for the base.

"The bottom line is I love it for the same reason we get volunteers," he said. "People love the Air Force and they want to give something back. It amazes me, but it's also the reason I'm doing what I'm doing. We've had to move five times before we got our own building, but now we have a place where we can bring people in and tell them this is our home and this is what we can do for you."

Air Force retiree activities offices work as a liaison between the active-duty elements on base and the retiree communities. They provide retirees with information and services, as well as a volunteer resource for the base. During the 20 years General Connolly has directed the Retired Activities Office at the base in Tucson, he's seen the RAO progress from one desk in one room to a building dedicated solely to retiree activities. Before he retired in July 1990, General Connolly was the 5th Air Force vice commander at Yokota Air Base, Japan. He also commanded the 313th Air Division at Kadena Air Base and was the Pacific Air Forces inspector general. After his retirement in 1990, General Connolly began serving the Davis-Monthan retiree community. In 2000, he added Arizona and New Mexico into his service area as the Air Force Retiree Council representative.

Like many other veterans who find ways to give back to their service in retirement, General Connolly has the philosophy of "Once an Airman, Always an Airman." Although RAO also has volunteers who are both Army and Marine Corps veterans, the staff members share the general's philosophy.

One RAO volunteer is likely the first person veterans see when they visit the office or the voice they hear on the telephone. Thirty-four years after he retired as commander of the 355th Wing, retired Col. Bill Hosmer is back at Davis-Monthan as an RAO volunteer. Like the general, Colonel Hosmer finds his new mission as satisfying as his active-duty career.

"When you're a commander, the people are so important, and this is still dealing with people," Colonel Hosmer said. "You have to be able to deal with people who need help and people who can give help and how to get them together and on the right frequency. I'm doing the same thing now, except it's more on an eyeball-to-eyeball level, and not as an authoritative figure.

"Our philosophy is to never say I don't know," Colonel Hosmer said. "I tell them to give me their phone number and I'll get the answer to them before I leave today. My goal is to get them the answer they need."

To demonstrate the reason for the RAO, Connolly tells a story that received considerable negative publicity in the Tucson media. An Air Force widow tried to get information on her entitlements after the death of her husband, but was unable to get any answers or suggestions to point her in the right direction to get the support she needed.

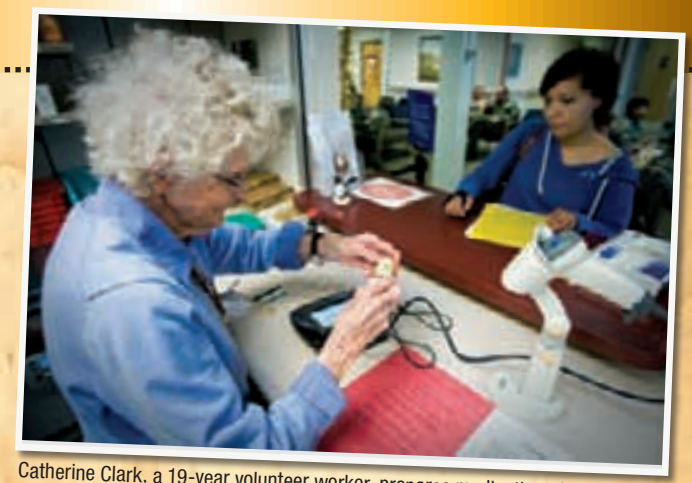
"If you hear just one of these stories, then you know why we're here," Connolly said. "Our retirees deserve more than what we've been giving them. We take care of the retirees and try to make sure they get all of their entitlements. The unfortunate thing is you get nothing if you're not aware of entitlements or don't apply for them. That's a shame because there are a lot of veterans out there who are in need and entitled to a lot of things, but haven't applied for them."

Almost 150 volunteers work out of Davis-Monthan's RAO weekly, with the average volunteer putting in an average of more than 20 hours a week. They work in a variety of places on base, including the hospital, pharmacy and security forces visitor center.

"That's really important on this base because of deployments," General

Derrick Rodgers, a military benefits counselor for the state of Arizona, provides one-on-one care to retired Lt. Col. Donna Rinehart while going over her medical disability paperwork at his office inside the Retired Activities Office facility on Davis-Monthan AFB, Az. Since he is also a veteran, Rodgers was able to move his office on base to serve the men and women of the Tucson area a lot quicker, lessening the potential for a disconnect between veterans and Veterans Affairs.


Retired Col. Bill Hosmer, former commander of the 355th Wing at Davis-Monthan AFB, continues to serve the Tucson community as a volunteer at the Retired Activities Office on Davis-Monthan AFB, Az. Col. Hosmer answers calls and provides information to veterans visiting the RAO. "My satisfaction is taking care of the people, most who don't understand what the VA can do for them," Colonel Hosmer said.



Catherine Clark, a 19-year volunteer worker, prepares medications for delivery at the Davis-Monthan AFB pharmacy. Mrs. Clark has logged more than 9,500 hours as a volunteer since the Air Force began counting volunteer time through the Retired Activities Office.

Connolly said. "The (A-10 Thunderbolt II and C-130 Hercules) are gone all of the time, so we really have a fast beat here. There's a real need for volunteers. We've very fortunate here because success tends to breed success. When somebody is happy as a volunteer, they'll get a friend involved and get them to volunteer."

One of the biggest challenges involves placing the right volunteer in the right job. RAO volunteers work in positions ranging from filling prescriptions at the base pharmacy to visitors, passes at the front gate. RAO staff members check backgrounds of volunteers and make sure they're putting them in a position that fits both their own personalities and their responsibilities.

"Not everyone can do each one of the normal jobs the Air Force needs us to do," General Connolly said. "It takes a special person to help people get passes to the base at the front gate. You have to have a special kind of personality to be in that job. We don't just have people answering telephones. We have people working with computers and in technical fields because the Air Force is stretched so thin with the number of deployments we have here. I can't just put someone in a particular job without knowing a little bit about that person. The bottom line is we try to get the right volunteer for the right job."

RAO volunteers inform veterans and families on military benefits, Reservist retirement benefit, retirement pay and Veterans Affairs burial benefits for retirees. The office also has someone to help with tax returns and estate planning.

Skip Barkley retired from the Army and has been the RAO's Voluntary Income Tax Assistance on-site coordinator since 2001. VITA uses retiree volunteers to help elderly, disabled, limited English-speaking and Native American taxpayers, but the RAO can provide tax assistance for all active and retired military members. Almost 30 RAO tax preparers electronically submit 3,000 federal returns and 3,000 state returns through the office's VITA program annually. All volunteers are certified and tested annually by the IRS, Barkley said.

Barkley explained VITA began with a retiree who convinced the SJA Agency that he could start a program using strictly retirees and would serve not only retirees, but also the military community.

"The two things that make us unique are we are all retirees, therefore we have a high level of expertise because we have continuity," Barkley said. "Secondly, we're capable of preparing returns for all states in the union that tax military or civilian taxpayers. There's probably no better reward than sitting back and looking at a young lady or young man and realizing that they can have confidence in these people to file a competent return and get the best value in their return. We get them the maximum amount of money back."

Controlling rumors and getting facts to retirees is another aspect of the RAO mission. The most persistent rumors recently concerned the health care bill, with many questions from veterans worried about losing their medical benefits.

"I insist that we get them the factual word and not the rumor because there are already too many rumors out there and they really impact some of our senior citizens," General Connolly said. "You can't imagine what it's like for a widow living on the margin, with just Social Security and maybe a small retirement. She's already having to make choices between paying for her medication or her rent, and then she hears something might be taken from her. Even if it's just a threat, it's not a pleasant thing to go through. It's really an unfortunate set of circumstances because our people deserve better. They've given more, so they deserve more, and hopefully, that's what our office is all about."

When Derick Rogers retired as a master sergeant from the Army after more than 21 years on active duty, he found completing VA claims forms difficult. His job now as a benefits counselor for the state of Arizona is to help fellow veterans with the process of making their own claims and understanding their federal and state benefits. He spent much of his Army career as a communications engineer, but is proud of his new mission as a retiree, especially in serving the veteran as an advocate with the VA.

"Coming from dealing with antennas and radios in the field to sitting down on the counseling side of the house was really different," Rogers said. "But it's a great feeling because, as veterans, we've made a lot of sacrifices and the military is a serious wear and tear on your body. So when a veteran comes in here and I can help him or her receive educational, medical or financial benefits, it's a good feeling because I know I didn't have anyone there to help me. They know I can empathize with them. One of the first things I tell them is I'm a military veteran as well as a retiree, so I've gone through all of these processes you guys are going through. I have a little bit more insight and personal interest, as opposed to someone who's never been in the military."

Unlike Army retiree activities staff members, the Air Force program is completely unpaid.

"The good news is you get all of the overtime you want," General Connolly said. "That's what's kept me in it for so many years."

Whether the volunteer greets people at the door or helps retirees complete tax returns, the philosophy is the same – to answer questions and help veterans and their families receive what they're entitled. They often share a bond with the people they're helping because they served in the same military and have already been through the process of retirement.

"The biggest thing to me is we add the personal touch to it," Rogers said. "We build a rapport with everyone we deal with. Even though I have hundreds and hundreds of clients, as soon as they walk out that door, I remember the face and I remember their story. I'm able to help them even more because we have a personal relationship."

STORY BY STAFF SGT. JESSICA L. SWITZER ✪ PHOTO BY STAFF SERGEANT DESIREE PALACIOS

# WANDERING IN THE WILDERNESS

As a journalist, I've covered all kinds of mission-related events: exercises, humanitarian relief operations, load competitions, joint exercises, you name it. So, when my boss asked if I could fill in for a co-worker and cover an adventure competition in West Virginia, I jumped at the opportunity to write a story that wasn't so mission oriented.

I did a little research and found out it was a very physical event and anyone on active duty, in any branch of the military, who could scrape up a four-person team could compete in the challenge. Given the physical nature of the competition, I figured it would be filled with a bunch of super-fit, super-competitive, type-A personalities all bragging about how hardcore they were.

I figured wrong. Way wrong.

The people sitting in the challenge pre-brief were a lot like me. Sure, there were some of the people I expected to see, looking intent and planning strategies, but there were a lot of people that I didn't anticipate. Some of them were a little overweight, and a lot of them hadn't ever done anything like this before. These were people I could relate to!

The first day was beautiful, the perfect kind of day for a run in the woods. We pulled into the parking lot and watched as everyone warmed up and stretched. As I listened to the final pre-competition briefing, I looked around and realized this race was nothing like I expected.

There were the expected teams who all dressed alike and a bunch of others who just dressed in whatever was most comfortable. Then there were the folks in costume. There weren't a lot of them, but one team wore hockey masks and two guys on different teams wore fake moustaches, capes, Speedos® and sneakers.

My first thought was simply, "Holy cow! Did I just see what I thought I just saw?" It wasn't too cold, but it was October in the mountains of West Virginia. I was wearing a hoodie and tights under my jeans to stay warm and here were these two guys running around in what amounted to fancy Underoos®.

It was my first real clue that this was going to be one fun story. It also got me wondering, could I do this? Could I come out here, maybe next year, maybe the year after, and do what these crazy folks were doing?

When they loaded onto buses to start the run, Master Sgt. Cecilio Ricardo, the photographer, and I headed to the end of the run so we could track back from there and catch some images of the runners in action and some triumphant finish line shots. The scenery along the trail was breathtaking. I'd never seen anything quite like it before.

I got a chance to talk to some of the competitors between the run and the white water raft event. Everyone was pumped. They were all chattering to each other, trading good-natured jabs and generally having a great time. I also learned there were a lot of family members who made the trip out here to cheer on their teams. The mood lasted all the way through the rafting event and into the evening at the hotel. Again I wondered, "Is this something I could do?"

The next morning was as miserable as the day before was beautiful. We were up before the sun to make sure we were in place to catch the beginning of the bike race, the first event of the day. In the grey pre-dawn, we watched teams arrive, offload their bikes and prepare for the long, grueling day ahead.

It had rained most of the night. The trails were slick and treacherous. We managed to get to one of the major crossroads where we saw a bunch of people covered in mud. One man even asked if he could use my shirttail to wipe off his glasses. There wasn't an inch of him that wasn't mud-covered.

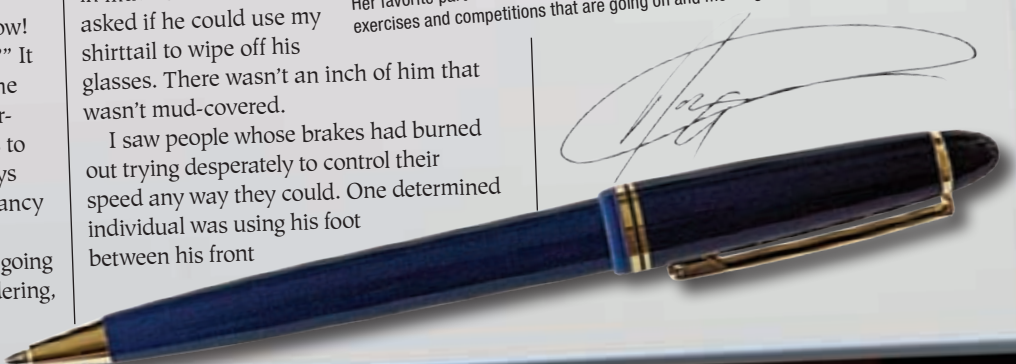
I saw people whose brakes had burned out trying desperately to control their speed any way they could. One determined individual was using his foot between his front wheel and the bike frame. I wondered about it again and asked myself, "Could I do this?"

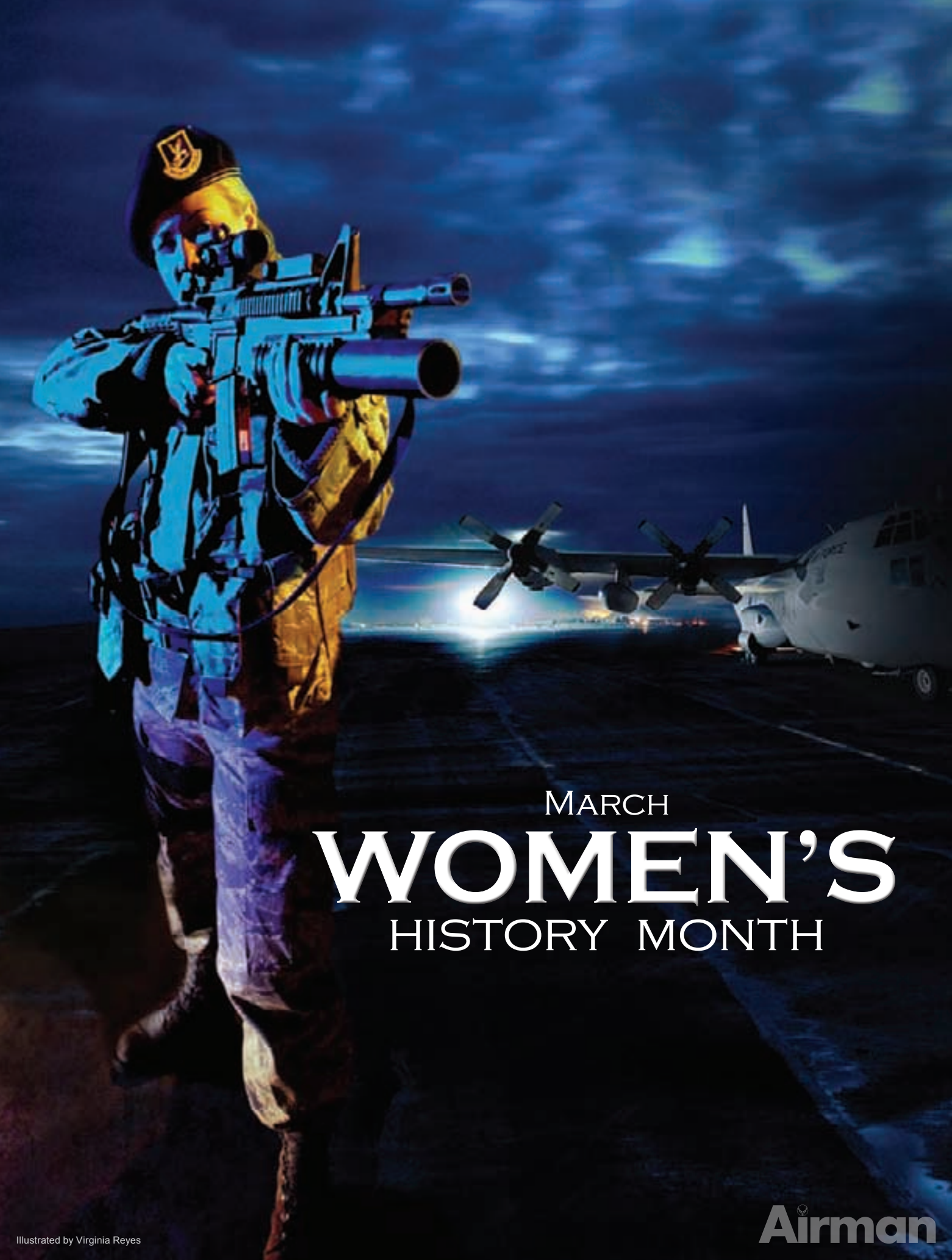
The most extreme trail I'd ever ridden on was the steep hill on my way home from high school when I was a sophomore, before I got my driver's license. Seeing the determination of these riders gave me a new respect for the people who showed up for this competition, sight unseen, and took the challenge and then got through to the finish line.

By the time all of the events were completed, everyone was exhausted. Several teams didn't even make it in until nearly sunset. It was cold and these folks were on the water, in the wind and under the drizzle the whole day. And yet, even though they were shivering, wet and tired, all of them were in high spirits. Everyone cheered for everyone else during the awards presentation.

That's when I figured, "Sure, I could do this. I'd love to be a part of this."

Staff Sgt. Jessica Switzer is a self-proclaimed Air Force "brat" who grew up all over the world and followed her father's footsteps by joining the Air Force in 2002. She is currently a writer for the Joint Hometown News Service and travels the world making sure the story of America's military men and women gets to their hometown newspapers. Her favorite part of the job is having the chance to see all of the different operations, exercises and competitions that are going on and meeting the people involved.






Illustrated by Virginia Reyes

# THE FINAL FRAME

**A FLURRY OF SUPPLIES** | *photo by* TECH. SGT. JAMES L. HARPER JR.

A C-17 Globemaster III delivers humanitarian aid to the outskirts of Port-au-Prince, Haiti.