

+ BRINGING THE THUNDER: THUNDERBIRD MAINTAINERS KEEP SHOW RUNNING BEHIND THE SCENES



MAGAZINE OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

Airman

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MAY-JUNE 2011

FINDING THE
STRENGTH
TO **FIGHT**

THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE COMMEMORATES



MEMORIAL DAY

MAY 30, 2011

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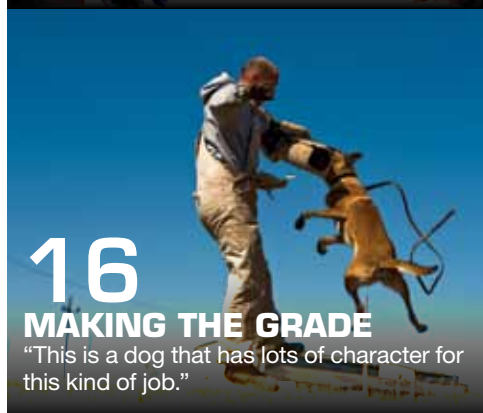
 **Airman**



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FINDING THE STRENGTH TO FIGHT

"I am going to fight so hard that I'll impose my will on my opponent."



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MAKING THE GRADE

"This is a dog that has lots of character for this kind of job."



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BRINGING THE THUNDER

"Everyone has a purpose to be here, and everyone works together."



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PRECISION ENGAGEMENT

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Special tactics Airmen serve as liaison between men and machines.

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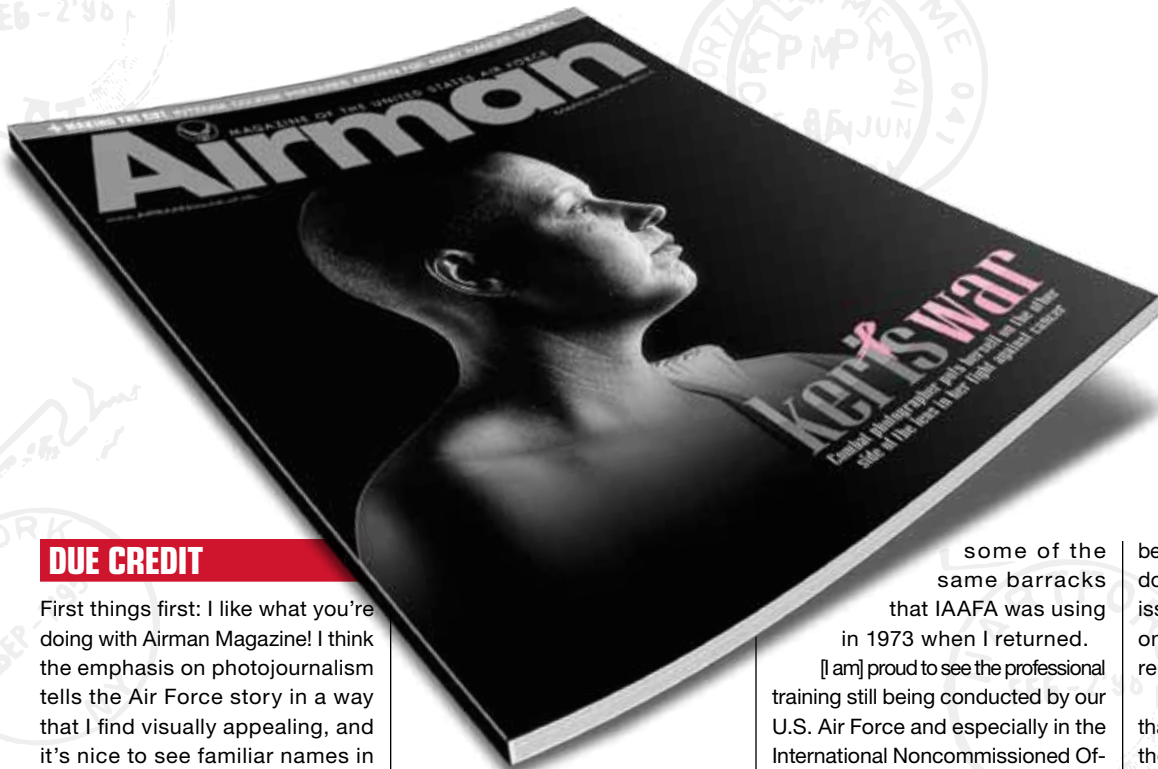
On the Cover

Staff Sgt. James Beck competed at the 2011 Armed Forces Boxing Championship at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

U.S. Air Force photo by Steve White
illustration and design by Luke Borland

COMMENTS

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



DUE CREDIT

First things first: I like what you're doing with Airman Magazine! I think the emphasis on photojournalism tells the Air Force story in a way that I find visually appealing, and it's nice to see familiar names in some of the photo credits.

Speaking of photo credits, however, I must correct the record on one photo that ran in the March-April 2011 issue. The photo of 1st Lt. Sheriden Martinez on the top of page 30 was taken by Mike Kaplan, the chief photographer at the Air Force Academy's photo lab. In addition, the bottom right photo on page 6 is credited to Staff Sgt. Raymond Hoy, but Sergeant Hoy didn't take the photo.

I happen to work in the same office with both 2nd Lt. Meredith Kirchoff (the cheerleader on the left in the page 30 photo) and Sergeant Hoy. Talk about a small Air Force!

All that said, please keep the great stuff coming! I look forward to checking out future issues.

Staff Sgt. Don Branum
U.S. Air Force Academy
Public Affairs

WELCOME BACK



After so many long years of not being in touch with Airman, how nice to read in this most recent issue about IAAFA [Bridging the Gap, March-April 2011].

My last overseas tour was as a noncommissioned officer in charge of training for IAAFA at Albrook Air Force Base, Canal Zone. This tour at Albrook was my final overseas assignment and second time at Albrook, my first being in 1951, when I enlisted in the U.S. Air Force.

The IAAFA assignment was special in so many ways. In 1951, our basic training class occupied

some of the same barracks that IAAFA was using in 1973 when I returned.

[I am] proud to see the professional training still being conducted by our U.S. Air Force and especially in the International Noncommissioned Officer Academy. My IAAFA wings are proudly displayed alongside my Air Force career memorabilia.

Chief Master Sgt. John E. Schmidt Jr.
USAF (Retired)
Tallahassee, Florida



SCOUT'S BEST FRIEND

My name is Zachary Kersey and I'm a boy scout at Ramstein Air Base. I am trying to get my communications merit badge. To earn my badge, I have to write a letter to an editor of a magazine and write a five-minute speech. I chose Airman Magazine

because I read your article on military dogs in the January-February 2011 issue. I'm also preparing a speech on military dogs to complete my requirements.

Thank you for inspiring me to read that article by putting a cute dog on the cover. I really like dogs. Thank you for helping me learn more. I learned that Belgian Malinois are smart dogs that love to explore. I even cut the pictures out and put them on my wall!

Sincerely,
Zachary Kersey

'PAST' TITLE



I want to compliment Airman Magazine on the "Saving the Past From the Future" article [January-February 2011], since what our asset managers do is important to the Air Force mission. However, on page 36, the caption about Mr. Penders states he's a member of the 45th Civil Engineering Squadron. In the early 1990s, the unit designation changed from civil engineering squadron to the current civil engineer squadron.

Great and spot on article otherwise.
Capt. Phillip Hinson
Civil Engineer

Airman

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reflects the morphology, as we move into our future as
an integral part of the warfighting cadre. Change is good.

Rodger Ewing

Airman magazine fan page on Facebook



TACPS ON TOPIC

I recently cross-trained into the elite 1C4X1 career field otherwise known as 1 Chucks or TACP. I was a prior pharmacy tech on the support side of the Air Force and when I joined the TACP community, I noticed the big difference between operational and support.

My reason for writing this letter is to wonder why we do not get as much recognition. I see a lot of security forces and even combat controllers and pararescue jumpers on your magazines, yet I have only seen a few TACPs.

TACPs are the main boots on the ground Air Force-wise. I just recently returned from Afghanistan and noticed that TACP is the main career field that utilizes the Air Force's A-10s, F-16s, F-15s, UAVs and B-1 bombers in theater. Even in the rear (CONUS) we train with those platforms.

We also represent the Air Force to our Army counterparts. We deploy, train and are stationed at Army bases, and go out on combat and recon missions with the Army. We recently lost a TACP brother in January 2010, and he was not recognized in **Airman** magazine. Our ALOs also play a major role. Without our [air liaison officers] we cannot complete our mission and can't be supported like we need.

If you can please reconsider and have more TACPs on your **Airman** magazine, it will greatly help our career field by allowing everyone else to have some knowledge of us, the unsung Airmen.

Staff Sgt. Jose Galang

*13th Air Support
Operations Squadron
Fort Carson, Colo.*

Editor's Note: We agree that TACPs' contributions are vital to the Air Force and should not be unsung. An article featuring TACPs can be found in this issue on page 28 [Precision Engagement].



K-9 KUDOS

Thank you so much for the article on Military Working Dogs [January-February]. I wish that more were taken from local shelters instead of from the breeding program. Glad that they are given the care and medical attention that they deserve — they too are military heroes to all of us.

Keep up the articles on the dogs. Thank you.

Gina



THE BOOK: 2011

Airman keeps getting better, and better, and better. "The Book" is an invaluable resource and beautifully presented.

Col. Joe Panza

USAF Retired

Just got my **Airman** magazine (Book 2011) Love it! Thank you!

Jeannie Belgrave

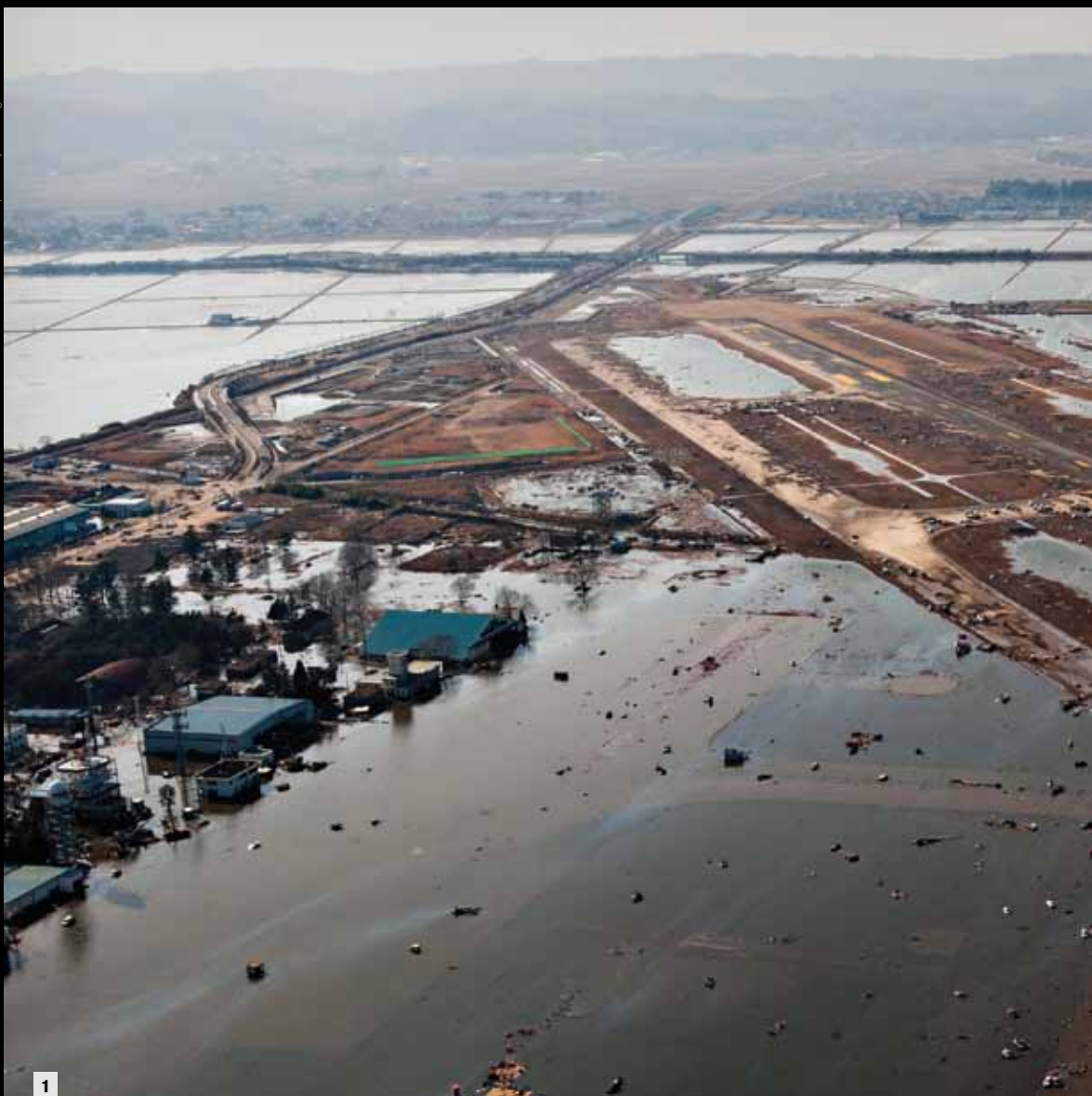
*Airman magazine fan page on
Facebook*

The USAF is transitioning into a more adaptable fighting force. The cover



1. Debris and water covers most of the Sendai Airport after an earthquake and tsunami devastated Japan on March 11. Days after the disaster, a joint team of U.S. Air Force and Marines search and rescue specialists conducted a survey of the damaged airport. The joint team is part of the American disaster relief forces sent to assist with Japan's recovery effort.

photo by Staff Sgt. Samuel Morse



2. Airmen from the 89th Aerial Port Squadron load pallets onto a C-17 Globemaster III at Joint Base Andrews, Md. Air transportation Airmen from the 89th APS created 14 pallets of technical search and rescue gear, including inflatable swift-water rescue boats, generators, trench rescue and cutting equipment. The gear is being transported to more than 80 Fairfax County Urban Search and Rescue technicians to provide assistance in Japan.

3. Tech. Sgt. Michael Welles (center) and members of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force refuel an HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopter in Yamagata, Japan, March 13. The helicopter and crew are assisting in earthquake and tsunami relief operations.

photo by Senior Airman Perry Aston



photo by Staff Sgt. Samuel Morse





4. U.S. Air Force search and rescue personnel partner with a Japanese disaster medical assistance team to offload an earthquake victim from a U.S. Air Force HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopter. American search and rescue personnel transported Japanese citizens from a remote island to a nearby hospital for treatment.

5. Passengers of a commercial airline flight diverted from Narita International Airport in Tokyo take shelter March 11, at Yokota Air Base, Japan. Base officials there provided displaced passengers with food and shelter.

JAPAN DISASTER ASSISTANCE

photo by Airman 1st Class Katrina R. Menchaca



4

photo by Airman 1st Class Andrea Salazar



5



1. Two T-38 Talons sit inside

NASA's Super Guppy aircraft after being shipped to Holloman Air Force Base, N.M. They are the first two of 15 T-38s to be shipped to Holloman for inspection and regeneration before being flown to Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Va. The T-38s return for inspection after every 450 flight hours at their operating locations.

photo by Senior Airman Veronica Stamps



1

2. Cadet 1st Class Josh LeMair,

an Air Force Wings of Blue Parachute Competition Team member, nails an accuracy jump in the U.S. Parachute Association's National Collegiate Parachuting Championships, held in Eloy, Ariz. Wings of Blue teams won gold in four-way open formation skydiving, two-way vertical formation skydiving, intermediate and masters sport accuracy, intermediate and masters classic accuracy and team classic accuracy.

photo by Niklas Daniel



2

3. U.S. Air Force Capt. Nick

Morgans, 46th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron, covers a simulated casualty to protect him from flying dirt as an HH-60 Pave Hawk lands during a mass casualty exercise near Kandahar, Afghanistan.

photo by Staff Sgt. Eric Harris



3

4. The Las Vegas skyline serves

as a backdrop for two F-16 Fighting Falcons parked on the flightline at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev. The F-16s, deployed from the 480th Fighter Squadron, participated in Red Flag 11-2, a combined exercise.

photo by Staff Sgt. Benjamin Wilson



4

Capt. Kellen Sick (left), and Maj. Aaron Ruona, both with the 336th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, prepare their F-15E for a combat mission at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan.





1. Maj. Russ Cook, HH-60 Pave

Hawk instructor pilot, finishes his preflight check at Moody Air Force Base, Ga. Major Cook worked with local authorities to conduct a search and rescue mission for a missing teenager.

2. Airmen from Ellsworth Air

Force Base, S.D., board a plane bound for Southwest Asia. Approximately 300 Airmen deployed in support of overseas contingency operations.

3. Staff Sgt. Tom Wilson fills an

A-10C Thunderbolt II with liquid oxygen at Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan. Sergeant Wilson is a crew chief assigned to the 451st Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron.

photo by Airman 1st Class Benjamin Wiseman



1

photo by Senior Airman Anthony M. Sanchelli



2

photo by Senior Airman Willard E. Grande II



3



4

4. Airman First Class Karl

Goodwin (left) and Staff Sgt. Chris Ruiz of the 902nd Civil Engineering Division's fire department advance on a security forces defender during a force-on-force exercise at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas. The exercise allowed firefighters and security forces to experience aspects of each other's jobs and build camaraderie.

5. Command Chief Master Sgt.

Richard Parsons, U.S. Air Forces Central, flies over Kabul in a Mi-17 helicopter, during his tour of NATO Air Training-Afghanistan/438th Air Expeditionary installations at the Afghan Air Force base in Kabul, Afghanistan.

6. Staff Sgt. Evon Mitchell, attaches the body panels of an F-16C in its 300 hour phase inspection at Joint Base Andrews Md.

7. A Minotaur IV launch vehicle flying STP-S26 is launched from Kodiak Launch Complex, Kodiak, Alaska.



5



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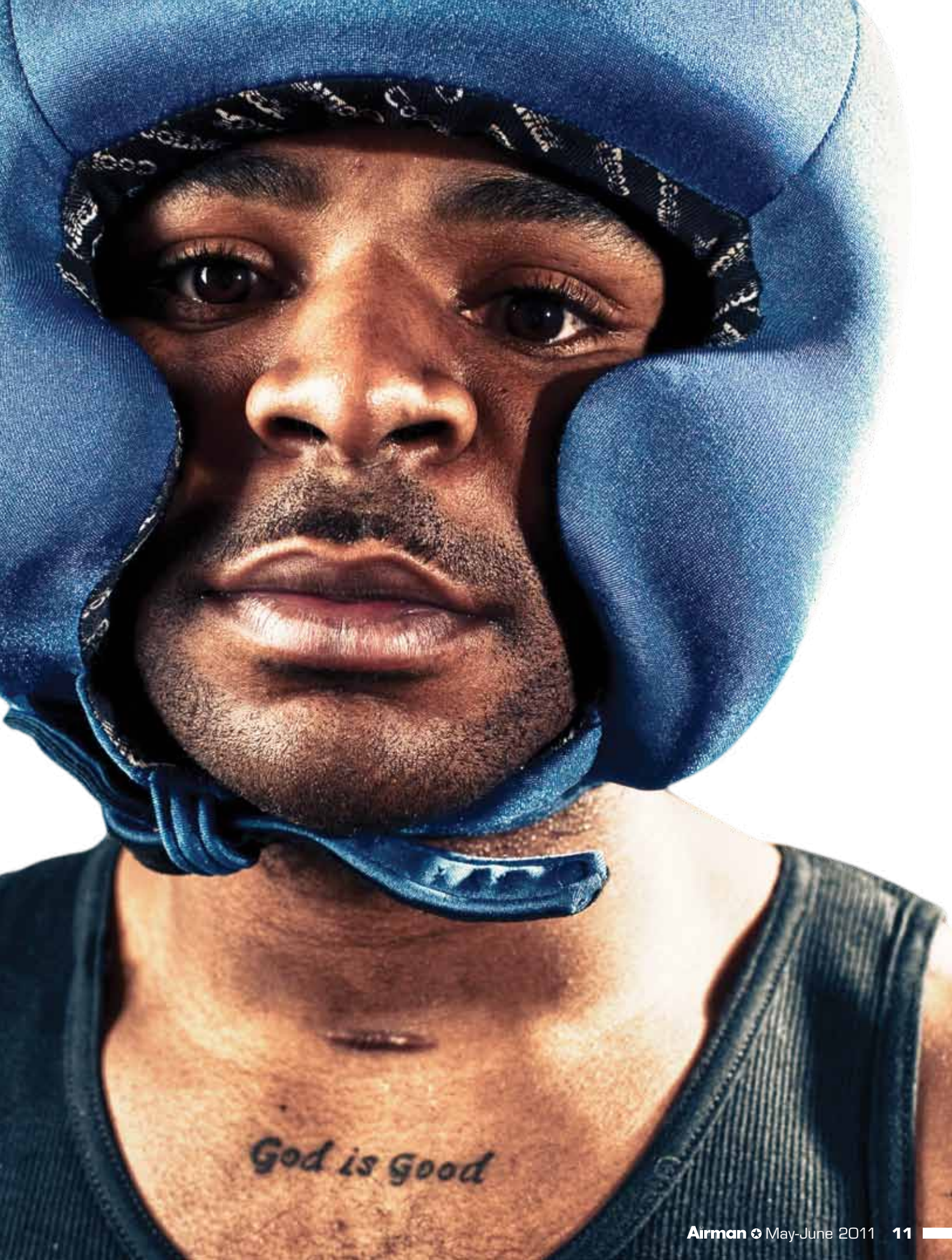
7

FINDING THE STRENGTH TO FIGHT

AIR FORCE BOXER FACES FORMIDABLE OPPONENTS ON CHAMPIONSHIP JOURNEY

STORY BY STAFF SGT. J. PAUL CROXON

Show of strength: Staff Sgt. James Beck's tracheotomy scar and tattoo are physical signs of the opposition he has recently faced and the faith that motivated him to overcome it. The sergeant was photographed by Steve White at Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska.





THEY TOLD ME I MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO SPEAK AGAIN, THAT I MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO STAY IN THE AIR FORCE. NONE OF THEM THOUGHT BOXING WAS EVER GOING TO BE PART OF MY LIFE AGAIN.

Staff Sgt. James Beck



(above, left) Sergeant Beck walks to the dining facility before a fight at the Armed Forces Boxing Championship at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. "I'll only eat a few things the day of [a] fight," he said.

(above, right) Tech. Sgt. Steven Franco checks Sergeant Beck's weight during a training session at the Armed Forces Boxing Championship. The boxers competed for selection to fight at the World Games in Rio de Janeiro.

A pair of marks on Staff Sgt. James Beck's neck tells the interwoven stories of his biggest challenge and greatest strength. One, a two-inch tracheotomy scar, is a permanent reminder of the tumor that almost cost him his career and the sport he loves. The other, a tattoo of the words, "God is Good," indicates the foundation of his recovery and determination to realize his dreams.

Sergeant Beck's two passions, the Air Force and boxing, are as entwined as the marks on his neck. His commitment to each journey gave him the resolve to battle a tumor and self doubt and come back more dangerous in the ring.

FROM HIGH TO LOW

Shortly after enlisting in the Air Force as an aviation resource manager, Sergeant Beck began boxing at a gym near Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Va. He progressed quickly and after a few amateur bouts in the 178-pound weight class, he began shedding weight and dropping weight classes as his strength and agility increased.

"At 178 pounds I was usually fighting against tall guys," he said. "Even though they had the height advantage, I was blessed with long arms and speed and I was able to hold my own. Boxing was something I loved and wanted to stick with."

For Sergeant Beck, boxing became like a second full-time job. After

finishing his Air Force duties for the day, he would go to the gym and train for hours every night, becoming faster, more focused.

"I knew from the beginning that I wanted to make it to the Air Force boxing training camp and then the Armed Forces Boxing Championship," he said. "The chance to represent the Air Force and fight against the best boxers from the other services was my number one goal."

In early 2010, he was selected to go to the training camp and compete for the Air Force slot in his weight class. Before the time came to step into the ring and sweat with his teammates, however, a phone call turned his world on end.

Sergeant Beck gets prepped before a fight at the Armed Forces Boxing Championship.

Sergeant Beck stands with his Air Force teammates at the Armed Forces Boxing Championship opening ceremonies.

"I got my [training camp] selection letter on Friday," Sergeant Beck said. "On Monday, I went into the dentist and he told me, 'You have a tumor and we're going to have to cut a piece of your jaw out. You're probably not going to be able to fight anymore.' That crushed me, it just crushed me."

A benign tumor, misdiagnosed by dentists for years as a harmless cyst, had been growing on his jaw. By the time the correct diagnosis was made, the tumor had eaten away most of the bone in the sergeant's hard palate. He was sent immediately to the hospital to seek treatment.

In April 2010, doctors took bone from the fibula in Sergeant Beck's left leg and shaped it to replace the missing section of his jaw. Muscle and veins also were grafted from the leg to create new arteries to feed the transplanted tissue. Doctors formed a flap of tissue to cover the repair in the roof of the sergeant's mouth and inserted a feeding tube into his nose to sustain him as he healed. Finally, a tracheotomy was performed and breathing tube inserted into his throat.

After his surgery, Sergeant Beck spent a week in the hospital. He went home 30 pounds lighter and remained on the feeding tube for an additional two weeks before beginning physical therapy.

"I remember telling my doctors and coaches that I would box again, that I'd be at the 2011 Air Force boxing training camp," he said. "They told me I might not be able to speak again, that I might not be able to stay in the Air Force. None of them thought boxing was ever going to be part of my life again."

photo by Staff Sgt. Vernon Young Jr.



photo by Staff Sgt. Vernon Young Jr.



FINDING THE STRENGTH TO FIGHT AGAIN

During the nearly three months Sergeant Beck spent in recovery, an in-home nurse, physical therapist and speech therapist worked with him daily. Unable to train or even hold conversations, he listened to music and recordings of his pastor's sermons. The sermons rekindled his faith and positive outlook.

"When I was stuck at home, I started reading about the Old Testament heroes and all the trials and difficulties that they went through," Sergeant Beck said. "I realized that God wouldn't bring me this far to not let me push further. That was my biggest motivation. I couldn't believe God would let me get this close just to take it away."

In addition to his faith, boxing also prepared the sergeant to overcome his lowest moment. While boxing taught him to keep a positive

outlook and keep moving forward, it also taught him what it felt like to give up.

"A few years ago I was fighting in the Golden Gloves when I took a shot that shook me," the sergeant said. "It took all the fight from me. Even though I was winning up until that point, I spent the rest of the fight running from him. The only reason I lost that fight was because I was afraid to keep coming forward. I went home and I had to look at myself in the mirror and had to say to myself that the reason I didn't win the Golden Gloves was because I was scared."

"That was the hardest thing I've ever had to live with, harder even than the surgery. Knowing that I lost, not because the guy was better than me, but because I broke, was something I knew I never wanted to feel again."

By summer, Sergeant Beck was eating solid food again. He had progressed from walking on crutches, taking small steps and walking slowly

to power walking. He shocked his doctors with his fast recovery and appeared to be preparing to box again, possibly even to begin getting back in shape for the 2011 Air Force boxing camp.

Just as he was ready to resume training, the sergeant's plans were abruptly put on hold again in July when he was assigned a two-month deployment to Guam. By the time he returned, Sergeant Beck was 195 pounds and out of shape with only four months to get back to his fighting weight. With a newly revived faith and the knowledge of what giving up felt like, he was determined to keep fighting.

ROAD TO THE ARMED FORCES CHAMPIONSHIP

Over the next four months, Sergeant Beck lost nearly five pounds each week, while adding muscle to his frame. In January, he left for the Air Force training camp just a little heavier than his 152-pound fighting weight. While he

Sergeant Beck (in red) and U.S. Marine Corporal Joel Bolden go toe-to-toe during a semi-final bout during the 2011 Armed Forces Boxing Championship.



was not quite back to his 2010 condition, he went into the camp feeling like he had already won. Whether sparring in the ring or collapsing from exhaustion, he continued to smile.

After two weeks of intense training, he fought fellow teammate, 152-pound Daniel Logan. Sergeant Beck's performance impressed the coaches enough to keep him on the team. He represented the Air Force in the welterweight class three weeks later at the Armed Forces Boxing Championship, held at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. He lost to his opponent by a single point but wasn't discouraged, having come so far.

MOTIVATION

Before a fight and during training, Sergeant Beck listens to a particular

sermon by his pastor, about the Old Testament story of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea.

"My pastor talks about so hating what's behind you that you keep fighting forward," the sergeant said. "The Israelites had Pharaoh's army behind them and the only way forward was through faith. That's where I am. I am going to fight so hard that I'll impose my will on my opponent. I've come so far that I know I'll come back next year stronger and hungrier."

Sergeant Beck's experiences, especially his recovery from surgery, are more than mere coincidences. They have cemented his faith and provide the means to keep fighting forward.

"I needed a doctor who could perform the bone transplant and the best doctor in the area was on my medical

team," he said. "I needed a flap made in my mouth and the best guy was supposed to deploy. His trip was postponed for a week and he was there to perform the surgery on me. I found out that my bone structure was much denser than normal from years of sports and because of that, the bone graft took better. It was like everything prepared me for that one moment."

In one year, James Beck went from 172-pound boxing star, to 143-pound patient, to 195 pounds and out of shape, and finally, back to a 152-pound boxer holding his own against the best in the Department of Defense. While he may have been bested in the ring this year, he's proven that he won't back down from any fight and will always move forward. 

photo by Tech. Sgt. Sean M. Worrell



photo by Tech. Sgt. Sean M. Worrell





MAKING THE GRADE

PUPPIES IMPRESS IN MILITARY WORKING DOG'S 'JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL'

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

The last time we saw Belgian Malinois puppies Rrespect and Rruuk, they were looking for a fun game to play at their foster homes. Now that they've begun developmental young-dog training, Rrespect jumps into cabinets on her trainer's command and Rruuk has a bark that would stop an insurgent in his tracks.

The now 8-month-old puppies and their siblings are on the fast track through what is considered junior high and high school for Department of Defense military working dogs. Next is the MWD's college, the 341st Training Squadron's Dog Training Section at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

The "R" litter was born in June 2010 at the Department of Defense military working dog breeding program facility, also at Lackland. Their names, like all those of puppies born in the breeding program, begin with repeated first letters to separate them as products of the program. Each litter is named with successive letters in the alphabet, restarting with an "A" litter after each "Z" litter.

The "R" litter was the first produced by two of the program's most productive breeding dogs: Arnold, who was not born into the breeding program, and Ssonya. The pair also produced the "U" litter that was born in February, and if the "R" litter's early progress is any indication, they ultimately may be parents to many more productive military working dogs.



Rrespect, a military working puppy, was photographed at 8 months old and in her third week of developmental young dog training.



Rruuk pursues and attacks trainer Corby Czajka, who is using a protective soft bite sleeve to train the puppy in attack scenarios.

Military Working
Dog Trainer Andrew Chumbler pats Rruuk, providing positive reinforcement after Rruuk successfully completed a pursuit training.



Dr. Stewart Hilliard, the military working dog logistics chief, said the litter is one of the best the program has ever produced, according to formal 7-month testing conducted on seven of the puppies about two weeks after training began. Six of the seven tested well in both bite work and detection, while the other puppy passed in detection.

“What they represent to me is a beginning, not a product,” Doctor Hilliard said. “They represent the possibility of using these dogs to breed more fine dogs in the future, rather than just six good dogs for DOD.

“What that means is we have produced a pairing of a male and female dog that has evidently had a really favorable genetic outcome,” he said. “That indicates to me that this group of puppies represents a



THERE'S NO TECHNOLOGY PROVEN MORE EFFECTIVE IN THE DETECTION OF EXPLOSIVES THAN THE CANINE.

— Dan Whidby

Respect literally leaps onto a desk to search one cabinet drawer for a hidden toy, while Rruuk pulls the leash held by trainer Arthur Underwood in his eagerness to begin the game. When he does, he quickly sniffs at several intervals in the row of cabinets before hitting pay dirt.

Respect has a seemingly endless reservoir of energy that trainers strive to harness, but one of her best qualities is her eagerness to work, her foster parent, Tech. Sgt. Joseph Null said.

"She'll low-crawl to work for a reward, and you can't teach that," said Sergeant Null, who's also the military working dog adoptions and dispositions noncommissioned officer in charge.

Trainers consider Rruuk and his brother, Rroddie, the most promising of the exceptionally strong litter, even though Rruuk began training a couple of weeks later than his siblings. At four months old, he broke a toe on his left front foot while running, and had stabilizing pins inserted during surgery at the Holland Working Dog Veterinary Hospital, also at Lackland. The pins were removed in another surgery on Jan. 11, so Rruuk was unable to begin training when the others did.

By his third day of training, however, he had surpassed most of the rest of the litter.

"Once he healed from the first surgery," Ms. Green said, "we went back into doing basic hunt drive exercises, searching for different toys out in different environments like in the grass, in the fields and in piles of different obstacles."

"He hasn't dropped behind the others," she said. "His bite has been developed well enough. His hunt drive is fabulous. This is a dog that has lots of character for this kind of job."

Ms. Green named Rruuk after her retired Maryland State Police dog, who developed cancer and had to be euthanized two weeks before the "R" litter was born. Like his namesake, the puppy has a strong hunt drive and is eager to work for a reward, two attributes that are crucial for an MWD. However, Ms. Green believes Rruuk is already more aggressive and shows other qualities that will serve him well as he progresses in his training.

"I think this puppy is a little more bold than my dog was," she said. "He's really forward about challenging things."

While Mr. Underwood and his fellow trainers — Dan Whidby, Corby

reservoir of the genes we need in our military working dogs."

During their third week of developmental training, Respect and Rruuk panted and squirmed on their trainer's leash as they awaited their chance to search a row of cabinets. A toy had the dogs' attention, but they were equally excited just to search. Searching is the MWD puppies' equivalent of a children's game of hide-and-seek.

"Most of the dogs work out of the pure joy of just searching," said Bernadine Green, Rruuk's foster parent who is also an experienced MWD trainer and the interim breeding program manager. "That hunt drive is so strong; they take so much pleasure out of the searching that the reward is incidental. It's about the game of searching."



Mr. Chumbler handles Rruuk during a search exercise through a training room filled with cabinets. The puppies are taught to search high and low to find their toys and are trained to use their noses and paws to open drawers.

Rruuk keeps tight hold of his toy. The toy, once used as a plaything, is now a primary training aid that helps instructors teach the puppies to search.

Czajka and Andrew Chumbler — worked with puppies in the “P,” “Q” and “R” litters, the “S” litter returned to Lackland from foster care in late February, and the “T” litter puppies were placed in their foster homes. Puppies may be in developmental training from seven to 14 months, but may move to the dog training section as early as 10 months, and trainers think several dogs in the “R” litter will graduate early.

When they do, the dogs will have an important job waiting. Dog handlers say military working dogs save service members’ lives practically every day in Afghanistan and Iraq. They’ve proven to be the most effective countermeasure against improvised explosive devices, the most prevalent current threat to American troops.

“Iraq and Afghanistan have changed the way we do business here,” Mr. Whidby said. “When I went through the dog handler’s course, it was mostly narcotics. Now, it’s mostly explosives.”

“There’s no technology proven more effective in the detection of explosives than the canine.”

When the “R” litter returned to Lackland from foster care, they were housed in kennels reserved for breeding program puppies, where

they stayed for almost two weeks. This was a transition time for the puppies, as they adjusted from life in their foster families’ homes to the kennels. Handlers pulled the puppies daily for medical evaluations and exercise, but the trainers basically gave them time to adjust. By the time training began, Rrespect, Rruuk and their siblings were no longer looking for their foster parents, but for their trainers.

Each trainer works with four or five puppies on a trailer that can carry 18 dogs. At first, they build rapport with the trainee pups, test their possessiveness with toys, hunt drive and how they react in different environments.

Trainers take the puppies in buildings, stairwells, aircraft and other training areas and even other places on base like the motor pool and recycling center to see how they will react to noises like loud machinery.

“While they’re training, they’re also assessing the dog,” Ms. Green said. “If they find a dog to be weak in a certain area, they make a note that he has an issue there and devote extra time to see if it’s going to be an issue he can get past and recover from, or if it’s going to be a detriment to his development in training.”

Trainers also work to bring out the

dog’s bark. They use a decoy who plays a game of hide-and-seek and uses gestures and movements to incite the dog to bark. When the dog responds, the decoy will encourage him to bark again with a flinch or by simply leaving the area to teach him the power of his bark, Ms. Green said.

As for bite work, the puppies began biting chamois rags and soft sleeves, but begin biting regular sleeves before progressing to MWD training.

Mr. Underwood likes what he sees so far, especially with Rruuk and Rroddie, who have impressed all four trainers in their aggression and detection abilities.

“From [Rruuk’s] first day, it was about learning how to look for stuff,” Mr. Underwood said. “By the third or fourth time, you could see his brain working on it and figuring it out.”

Rrespect, Rruuk, Rroddie and the rest of the “R” litter soon will complete their “junior high and high school” of developmental training and advance to MWD college. Whether their future involves establishing the bloodline for future productive litters or saving lives of Airmen in war zones, their trainers feel they’re well on their way to becoming the next group of successful military working dogs. 🐾

FALLEN MARINE'S FAMILY ADOPTS HIS BEST FRIEND

"Whatever is mine is his," Marine Corps Pfc. Colton W. Rusk wrote about Eli, his military working dog, in the final days of their deployment in Afghanistan.

Private Rusk's family helped prove his words true when they adopted the black Labrador retriever in a retirement and adoption ceremony at the military working dog school at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

After 20-year-old Private Rusk was killed Dec. 5 in Helmand province, Afghanistan, by Taliban sniper fire, Marine officials told his parents, Darrell and Kathy Rusk, that Eli, his infantry explosives detector dog, crawled on top of their son to protect him after he was shot. The Rusks drove to Lackland from their home in Orange Grove, Texas, along with their sons, 22-year-old Cody and 12-year-old Brady; and Private Rusk's aunt and grandparents.

Marine Staff Sgt. Jessy Eslick of the Department of Defense Military Working Dog Research and Development Section praised Eli as "a dog that brought Marines home to their families," as he handed the leash to the family. Eli immediately began licking Mrs. Rusk's palms and fell into the arms of his former handler's father.

"Every time he called home, it was always about Eli," said Mrs. Rusk. "It gave me some comfort knowing that Colton wasn't alone over there."

"In his last letter we got the day before we buried him, at the very top was a little smudge that said 'Eli's kisses.'"

"Like Colton said, 'what's mine is his,'" she said. "We're Colton's family, so it's just right that we're Eli's family now."

Eli, who was trained in the military working dog program at Lackland, is reportedly the second military working dog the Marines discharged to permit adoption by a fallen handler's family.

Mrs. Rusk said Texas Gov. Rick Perry started the process of working with the Marines on the dog's discharge, and Scooter Kelo, who trained Eli and also trained Private Rusk in working with the dog, also helped make the adoption possible.

"It gets our minds off the sadness of losing Colton, just knowing we're going to have a little piece of Colton in Eli," Mrs. Rusk said. "I just wish he could talk and tell us some stories. We're going to be able to share the love we have for our son with something that he loved dearly."

Private Rusk deployed to Afghanistan on his 20th birthday, with Eli, as part of the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment at Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Private Rusk often told his parents that dogs like Eli were well-trained at the DOD Military Working Dog School at Lackland and in South Carolina, where he was trained as an improvised explosive device detector dog handler.



"We've had dogs all of our lives," Mr. Rusk said. "Since all of the boys were babies, they had one. Colton was probably the better handler of the bunch. When he went to train in South Carolina, he said, 'Dad, we don't know how to train dogs. These dogs here will bring you a beer, they'll open the can for you, but sometimes they'll drink it for you, too.' He said that was how well-trained the dogs were, and he was really amazed how much you can do with a dog once you've worked with them."

The dog Private Rusk liked to call "My boy, Eli," earned a reputation for wanting to be wherever his handler was. Eli didn't want to sleep on the ground; he slept in Private Rusk's sleeping bag. They even ate together outside after Private Rusk found out that Eli wasn't allowed to eat in the chow hall.

"He told a story of when they were in the chow line one time," Mr. Rusk said. "One of the Marines kicked at the dog one time and told him to get the dog out. Colton and the Marine got into a little scuffle. They told Colton he could stay inside and leave the dog outside, but from then on, Colton and Eli ate outside. That's how tight he and the dog were."

Jan Rusk, Private Rusk's grandmother, said this was another way to honor his memories and help the family as they cope with their loss.

"Eli was a part of Colton, and now they have a little part of Colton back," she said.

After the retirement and adoption ceremony, the Rusks took Eli to their land to be with the family, their horses and three German shepherds.

"You're going home and relaxing," Mrs. Rusk told the dog as she leaned close to Eli and rubbed his snout. "You're going home."

Brady Rusk, 12, hugs Eli at a retirement and adoption ceremony at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. The bomb-sniffing Labrador retriever was assigned to Brady's older brother, Marine Pfc. Colton Rusk, 20, who was killed in action in Afghanistan by Taliban sniper fire. The Department of Defense granted the Rusk family permission to adopt Eli.

Maj. John Gallemore and Master Sgt. Bryan Spangler prepare their aircraft for a show at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. Before the Thunderbirds take to the air, maintainers conduct detailed inspections, ensuring each aircraft is ready to fly.



BRINGING THE Thunder

THUNDERBIRDS MAINTAINERS KEEP SHOW RUNNING BEHIND THE SCENES

STORY BY STAFF SGT. CHRIS POWELL ✪ PHOTOS BY SENIOR AIRMAN CHRIS GRIFFIN





(left) Tech. Sgt. Jose Hildago wipes down an aircraft in preparation for the Lackland air show.

(top right) Tech. Sgt. Eric Albers performs maintenance on a wing panel. The maintainers are responsible for detailed inspections and repairs, ensuring Thunderbirds aircraft are operational at all times.

(bottom right) Staff Sgt. Jennifer Flores and Staff Sgt. Vaughn Copeland keep track of all aircraft maneuvers performed during the air show.

There's a popular saying that states, "behind every great man, there's a great woman." While it is less widely known, ask any Airman about the accuracy of the saying, "behind every great pilot, there's a team of great maintainers," and they'll surely tell you it's nothing but the truth.

Perhaps nowhere in the Air Force is this exemplified more than in the Air Force Thunderbirds. Throughout its 57-year history, the Thunderbirds have never canceled a performance due to maintenance issues.

This streak hasn't come from having the Air Force's best Airmen; it continues because of a mindset instilled in every team member that encompasses all the Air Force core values.

"I've never heard anyone say, 'That's not my job,' said Master Sgt. Lee Davis, the Thunderbirds specialist section chief. "You always have everyone dropping whatever they're doing to get the job done. The teamwork here is second to none."

"Some people may think we're

the best of the best," he explained. "Well, we're the best people at the right time. There are smarter F-16 avionics troops out there; I know that, but I was the right person at the

I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER THAN THE INDIVIDUAL, AND WE HAVE THAT HERE."

— Master Sgt. Lee Davis

right time. I've always wanted to be a part of something bigger than the individual, and we have that here."

An example of that mentality is that some of the Thunderbirds assistant dedicated crew chiefs come from specialties that don't normally perform maintenance on aircraft, such as an aerospace ground equipment mechanic. They perform their primary duties as well as helping maintain the aircraft, giving them experience they normally would never receive at an Air Force base.

"At a normal squadron, I would never touch an aircraft," said Staff Sgt. Jason Wilson, a Thunderbird AGE mechanic and assistant dedicated crew chief. "My job, as an AGE guy, is to take the equipment out to the aircraft. It's nice to come out here, work on the aircraft, become a crew chief and see what they do every day."

To prepare the assistant crew chiefs for performing mechanical maintenance on an aircraft, the team relies on on-the-job training from the crew chiefs.

"Having some of the best maintainers in the Air Force on the team inherently provides some of the best trainers we could hope for," said Chief Master Sgt. Tom Mical, the Thunderbirds chief enlisted manager. "We also have internal quality assurance on the team, and they help provide oversight for us."

Sergeant Wilson said, "It's pretty much like you're a three level coming in, and you work your way up to be signed off like a five or seven level would."

They are then able take the experience and team-first attitude back to traditional units when their

Sergeant Hildago
gives his aircraft a
final shine before
the air show.





photo by Staff Sgt. Jamie Powell

(left) Master Sgt.

Nate Bettisworth and Tech. Sgt. Holly Mays log the Thunderbirds aircraft maneuvers during an air show. The enlisted members of the Thunderbirds team ensure each show runs smoothly from the ground, as well as in the air.

(top right) The

Thunderbirds fly in formation during a show at Lackland Air Force Base.

(bottom right) A

crew chief performs a final post-flight inspection after the Lackland air show.

three-year assignment with the Thunderbirds is over.

"They bring back that pride and professionalism that is here every day," Chief Mical explained.

Knowing the rest of the team takes such pride in its work is especially important to the Thunderbirds pilots, who trust the maintenance team to provide them with safe aircraft.

"We make sure the pilots can walk out to the aircraft, pop in and go," said Staff Sgt. Nathan Kearns, a Thunderbirds crew chief. "Unlike any fighter squadron in the Air Force, [the Thunderbird pilots] do not do a typical walk-around inspection as a normal fighter pilot would. They put faith in us that we're doing our job so they can come out and do theirs."

Once all necessary maintenance is performed on one of the Thunderbirds' 11 F-16 Fighting Falcons, an assistant crew chief inspects the aircraft and fills out the required forms. After that, a crew chief performs his own inspection and ensures the forms are accurate. Finally, the production superintendent completes an inspection and signs the paperwork, officially declaring the aircraft as being ready for flight.

"It adds pressure that [the pilots] don't perform pre- or post-flight walkarounds," Sergeant Kearns said. "Maintaining a \$30 million aircraft and having the pilot's life in our

"MAINTAINING A \$30 MILLION AIRCRAFT AND HAVING THE PILOT'S LIFE IN OUR HANDS IS STRESSFUL, I WON'T LIE, BUT IT'S SOMETHING WE'VE TRAINED FOR."

— Staff Sgt. Nathan Kearns

hands is stressful, I won't lie, but it's something we've trained for.

"We go so far as ensuring every switch in that cockpit is set up for how that individual pilot wants it," he added.

Ensuring every member on the team is properly trained is vital because the maintainers are tasked with another responsibility that involves homeland defense. If Air Force commanders need the F-16s back in the fighting inventory, the maintainers must quickly return them to full fighting capability, Sergeant Kearns said.

"We have a 72-hour time scale to return these aircraft to full-combat capability, which has been tested," he said. "We did it in about 40 hours, minus the paint scheme. So these aircraft could definitely be ready if, God forbid, that ever happens."

While the pilots depend on the maintainers to help them do their jobs, there are Airmen behind the scenes, supporting both the pilots and maintainers in completing their mission.

"Our team is made up of a lot more than just the maintenance career fields," Chief Mical said. "We have about 32 different career fields that range from finance, material management, air transportation, knowledge operations, client systems, RF transmission systems and public affairs."

Those team members also exhibit the Thunderbirds' team-first mentality as they upload and download equipment from the aircraft the team travels aboard while the maintainers work on getting the F-16s ready for flight, Sergeant Davis said.

"Everyone has a purpose, whether it's a crew chief or a finance [Airman]. Everyone has a purpose to be here and everyone works together," he said. "It allows us to be



self sufficient and save a lot of time. We have it down to a pretty exact science.”

But while the Thunderbird maintainers are tasked with unique responsibilities, they still view their mission as being the same as at an Air Force base.

“The basic principles of maintenance are the same,” said Maj. Jason Moore, the Thunderbirds maintenance officer. The only difference is we have the most motivated Airmen in the Air Force doing the work.”

“They take great pride in knowing no air show has ever been canceled due to maintenance difficulties in the 57-year history of the Thunderbirds,” he added. “They’ll work non-stop, doing whatever it takes to get the jets ready for an air show.”

Although the Thunderbirds Airmen work every day to keep that streak going, they never lose sight of the bigger picture, according to Sergeant Davis.

“We’re the voice of the Air Force. People can’t see the Airmen and Soldiers who are in the desert, deployed from their families,” Sergeant Davis said. “All they see is us. It’s important for any demonstration team to get out and spread the word of the Air Force.” 🦅

THE THUNDERBIRDS WANT YOU!



“Ever since I’ve been with the Thunderbirds, we’ve been undermanned,” Sergeant Davis said. “We do what we have to do. Everyone knows we’re short, and it can entail some long hours, but everyone knows what to expect.”

“But we aren’t going to be the team that stops the tradition of no air shows canceled due to maintenance difficulties,” he said. “We’ll do what we have to do to make sure the pilots get trained and the air shows get taken care of.”

Airmen interested in joining the Thunderbirds team must submit a letter of recommendation from their commander, a resume, a 5x7 full-length photo in their short-sleeve blues shirt, a records review, a listing of their last five enlisted performance reports, an Air Force

fitness score sheet, a retainability letter and a signed acknowledgement letter.

Interested Airmen can mail the package to USAFADS/CSS (Attn: Tech Sgt. Basar), 4445 Tyndall Ave., Nellis AFB, NV, 89191-6079.

“It’s very humbling for all of us to represent the professionalism that exists in every unit in the Air Force,” Chief Mical said. “This year, we’ll get the opportunity to demonstrate that in Europe. We’re always on the lookout for those other people who want to represent our force to the American public and to people around the world. It’s a great opportunity.”

(left) Tech. Sgt. Andru Donaldson wipes down the missile rail on his jet following the Thunderbirds aerial demonstration at the Lackland AirFest air show.

(top right) Staff Sgt. Lance Murphy performs his post-flight maintenance.

(bottom right) Staff Sgt. Zachary French wipes down his jet’s canopy during post-flight.

PRECISION ENGAGEMENT



Tech. Sgt. Joseph Napolitano scans the ground from inside an HH-60 Pave Hawk during a National Guard Bureau Joint Quarterly Training Exercise at Fort Benning, Ga. Sergeant Napolitano is assigned to the 101st Rescue Squadron, New York.



SPECIAL TACTICS AIRMEN SERVE AS LIAISON BETWEEN MEN AND MACHINES

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

MENTION THE TERM “AIR STRIKE” THESE DAYS AND A LOT OF PEOPLE THINK YOU’RE TALKING ABOUT PLAYING “CALL OF DUTY,” A POPULAR COMBAT-STYLE VIDEO GAME. IN THE GAME, PLAYERS **CALL IN** VIRTUAL AIR STRIKES ON THEIR OPPONENTS AS A REWARD FOR EARNING A CERTAIN NUMBER OF **KILLS**.

But for Staff Sgt. Kenneth Walker, there’s nothing pretend about it. Calling in air strikes is what he does for a living.

He’s a tactical air control party member with the 116th Air Support Operations Squadron, an Air National Guard unit out of Camp Murray, Wash. TACPs are specialists that advise ground forces on aircraft employment and capabilities and direct combat aircraft onto enemy targets. They typically work in teams of two and deploy with Army combat units.

“Basically, we’re the liaison between ground forces and aircraft,” Sergeant Walker said. “We communicate with the infantry guys and the guys in the air to get bombs on target where they’re needed.”

This might sound routine, but it’s not. Being a TACP means being a highly trained, highly skilled Airman who is adaptive, quick on his feet and great at multi-tasking. Just to become a TACP and earn the coveted black beret, Airmen must pass an initial skills course, a combat survival course, a basic parachutist course

and an advanced special tactics course. In all, this is 32 weeks of rigorous, down-and-dirty training.

“It’s definitely a lot,” Sergeant Walker said. “But it’s all stuff we need to know when we’re out there doing this for real.”

When TACPs aren’t deployed and doing their job for real, they participate in exercises to practice their skills and stay certified in required tasks. The latest was the National Guard Bureau’s Joint Quarterly Training Exercise at Fort Stewart, Ga. Here, TACPs from the 116th ASOS practiced working with Army infantry units and calling in close-air support aircraft, ranging from A-10 Thunderbolt IIs to F-18 Hornets and HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopters.

“It’s great to work with real aircraft and see live rounds hitting targets,” said Tech. Sgt. Benjamin Santiago, a TACP with the 116th ASOS. “Simulations are fine, but the real thing is always better.”

But the exercise doesn’t just give the TACPs some valuable hands-on training; it also lets them check a very important box.

“We have requirements to control aircraft every 90 days and direct the release of ordnance every 180 days to stay current on our certifications,” Sergeant Santiago said.

Senior Airman
Benjamin Hale, Staff
Sgt. Cory Welton
and Staff Sgt. Jacob
Torgerson speak to
the pilot of an A-10
Thunderbolt during
the training exercise
at Camp Townsend,
Ga.





Tech. Sgt. Lionel
Gillis scans the area
during an exercise
at Fort Benning, Ga.
Sergeant Gillis is a
joint terminal attack
controller based out of
Camp Murray, Wash.

YOU SPEND A LOT OF TIME TOGETHER AND LEARN TO RELY ON EACH OTHER.

— Tech. Sgt. Benjamin Santiago

Sergeant Gillis conducts a radio check during the National Guard Bureau's Joint Quarterly Training Exercise.

An A-10 Thunderbolt flies overhead during the exercise at Camp Townsend, Ga.

"Participating in exercises like this lets us meet those requirements."

And meeting these requirements is often difficult. Being a Guard unit, Airmen assigned to the 116th ASOS must balance the demands of their day-to-day civilian jobs with those of the military.

"We have to meet the same requirements as our active duty counterparts, but we're doing it part time," Sergeant Walker said. "So we only get half the time to do what the active-duty guys are doing, and that is challenging at times."

There are deployments, too. TACPs are in high demand in Afghanistan, and 116th ASOS schedulers are routinely sending tactical air controllers over there.

"We've got some guys slated to go here soon, so we'll make sure they get priority when it comes to staying certified," Sergeant Santiago said. "And the training will pay off over there, too."

These men know what they're talking about. In one six month period in 2009, Sergeant Walker's three-man team called in more than 300,000 pounds of bombs in the Kunar Province of Afghanistan.

"It was about a battle every day," he said. "Sometimes two or three a day."

Sergeant Walker attributed the team's success to the rigorous, in-depth training it received prior to leaving: slogging through mud, spending nights in the rain and getting bombs and bullets on target.

"When things start happening for real, you just react and do your job," he



said. "But then you sit back and think, 'Man, I'm glad I went through the suck in training so I was prepared here.'"

To be a TACP means to be versatile, too. They are Air Force elements, but spend the majority of their time working with the Army and other services.

"So not only are we highly trained specialists, but we have the joint aspect to our mission that is also pretty unique," Sergeant Santiago said. "But it's a good relationship ... we help them and they help us."

Another good relationship is the one they have with each other. Being a special tactics unit, TACPs are a close-knit, "get-each-other's-back" kind of team. This is due, in large part, to the nature of the business.

"You spend a lot of time together and learn to rely on each other," Sergeant Santiago said. "And the stresses of the job really bring you together so we're almost like some kind of crazy, dysfunctional family."

Still, the TACPs wouldn't have it any other way.

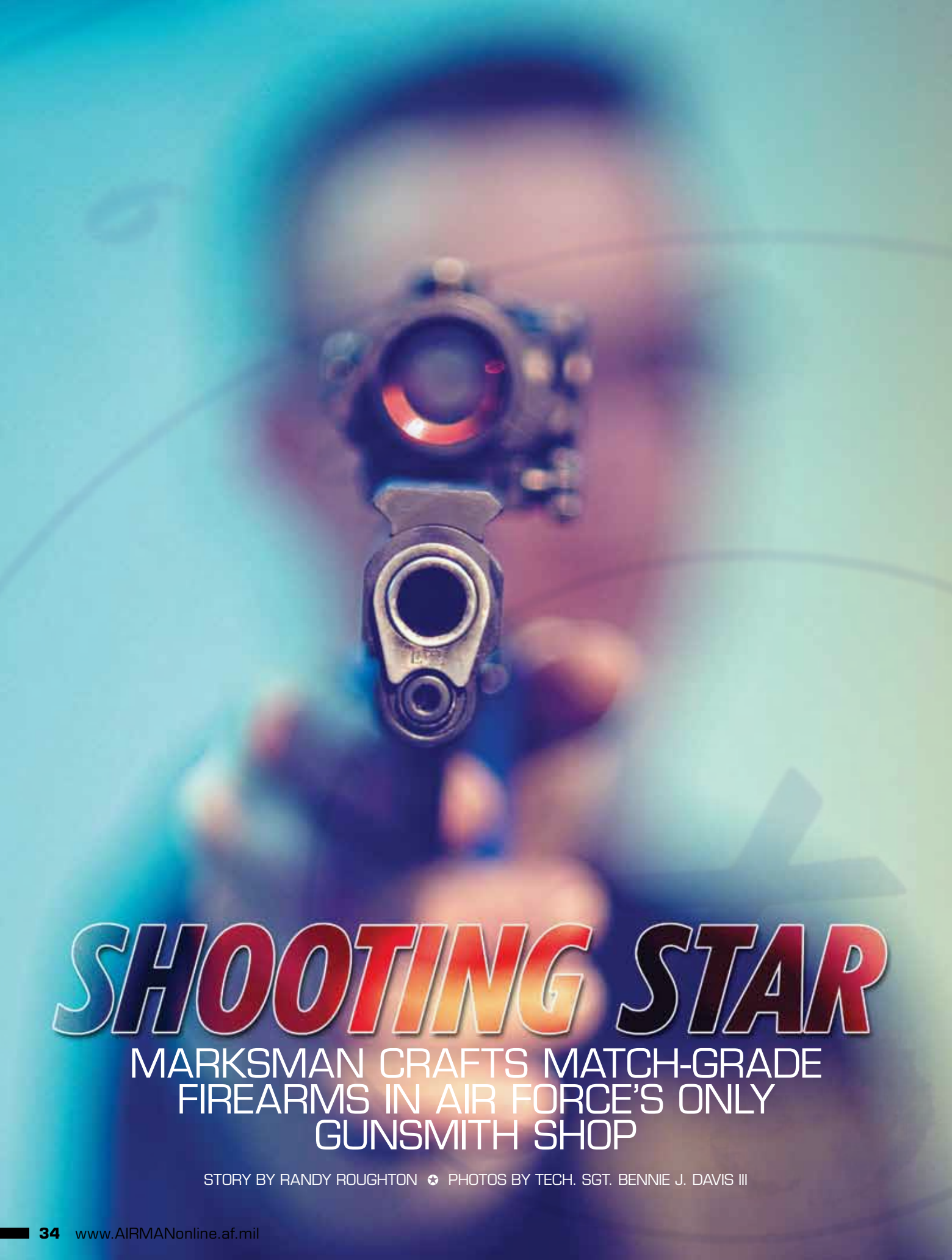
"It's one of the draws to [being a TACP] and one of the reasons I am one," Sergeant Walker said. "You develop some strong relationships and great friendships here that you miss when you leave."

So, while the average TACP might not be very good at playing video games like "Call of Duty," he is good at keeping real Soldiers safe by calling in very real, and very deadly, precision air strikes. 🦅



Senior Airman

Benjamin Hale scans the exercise area using a range finder. Airman Hale is a joint terminal attack controller based out of Camp Murray, Wash.



SHOOTING STAR

MARKSMAN CRAFTS MATCH-GRADE
FIREARMS IN AIR FORCE'S ONLY
GUNSMITH SHOP

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

Building a .45-caliber pistol begins with a box of gun parts. Within a few weeks, the craftsmen in the Air Force's only gunsmith shop can produce a weapon from that original collection of steel components. One such craftsman, Tech. Sgt. Brendan McGloin, doesn't care if the shooter credits him with building his weapon, just that the pistol does its job, whether it's shooting on a range or defending Airmen and airplanes in Afghanistan.

"It's great between me and that shooter when I know that gun knows what it needs to do and he knows that gun knows what it needs to do," said Sergeant McGloin, a combat arms craftsman in the Air Force Gunsmith Shop at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. "When he shoots a 100 on the [firing] line, I don't care if he knows my name or not. As long as the gun's doing what he needs it to do when he pulls that trigger, I'm happy."

The gunsmith shop at Lackland is a tenant unit assigned to the missiles and weapons section in Air Force Materiel Command's Ogden Air Logistics Center at Hill Air Force Base, Utah.

More than 50 years ago, the gunsmith shop and first marksmanship center both opened at Lackland because of Gen. Curtis E. LeMay's promise to ensure Airmen were trained in small arms during the Korean War. The Strategic Air Command commander was outraged when he saw crew chiefs killed with M2 carbines in their hands after North Koreans overran Kimpo Air Base in January 1951.

Today's shop is different from the one that staffed up to 36 gunsmiths in the 1960s; the Air Force has not had a gunsmithing specialty code since combat arms merged into the security forces career field in the late 1990s. But Sergeant McGloin is quick

to point out the differences between combat arms and gunsmithing.

"Combat arms is to gunsmithing what ice skating is to being an astronaut," he said. "The only similarity is they both involve weapons, but I would never call a combat arms guy a gunsmith, and you would never call a gunsmith a combat arms guy. In a nutshell, today's combat arms aren't required or expected to have the mechanical skills necessary to run machinery, making our machinists even more critical. Being combat arms and gunsmiths are really two different worlds."

Eight combat arms specialists, three aircraft machinists and one supply specialist currently cooperate to achieve the gunsmith shop's mission. Combat arms Airmen aren't required to be trained to operate machinery, yet 70 percent of the civilian gunsmith curriculum covers machinist

build a match-grade pistol in about three weeks. He has machinery at his home to do the job himself, but recognizes that the job would take twice the time without the support and resources in the shop.

"I used to do a lot of work at home, but when we started elevating our support for the teams and I was able to bring the work in here, I no longer have to do the machinist aspect of it," Sergeant McGloin said. "So I can work on one piece and farm out the machine work to a machinist, which cuts my time in half on that particular element. Whereas a gunsmith in his shop would have to do every part of it — something like an optic mount on a slide, for example — I don't have to. Once I get the slide fitted to the frame, I can toss the slide to a machinist, and he can put the optic mount on while I begin working on the next part.



Tech. Sgt. Brendan McGloin, a gunsmith and combat arms technician, builds a .45 caliber handgun at the only gunsmith shop in the Air Force, on Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

work, said Richard L. Shelton Jr., gunsmith shop supervisor.

"That 70 percent in the Air Force is filled by aircraft machinists tied with the skills of the combat arms technicians," Shelton said. "This team at the Air Force Gunsmith Shop could not do the job it does for the Air Force shooting team or for our combat Airmen if it weren't for the marriage of the aircraft metal machinists with the skilled combat arms experts. If that team were to be broken up, this shop ceases to exist and could not perform its mission."

With the support of gunsmith shop machinists, Sergeant McGloin can

"The machinists I work with are impeccable. If I didn't have those guys, I'd choose to do the work myself because when my name has to go on it, I need to be able to trust the people I'm working with. At home, it would actually take me about six weeks to do it because of all the extra tasking."

Sergeant McGloin specializes in building competition pistols, but he also designs new customized pistol grips, showcasing the Air Force symbol and the service's history, for general officers.

Sergeant McGloin's interest in guns began in childhood when he would "shoot the G.I. Joe guys with BB



COMBAT ARMS IS TO GUNSMITHING WHAT ICE SKATING IS TO BEING AN ASTRONAUT.

— Tech. Sgt. Brendan McGloin

(from top) Tools of the trade and a work in progress at Sergeant McGloin's workstation in the Air Force Gunsmith Shop.

Sergeant McGloin fires during a .45 caliber rapid fire competition at the 2010 National Rifle Association National Pistol Championships on Camp Perry in Port Clinton, Ohio.

guns." He also liked to disassemble them, although like most boys at that age, he found putting them back together much more difficult.

The sergeant learned he had a talent for firearms mechanics after he enlisted in the Air Force and joined the security forces career field in 1994. After assignments in Iceland and Montana, Sergeant McGloin moved to Camp Bullis and ultimately was assigned to the gunsmith shop at Lackland in March 2004. Within the first couple of months, he found his mentor in the shop: civilian gunsmith Bill Moore.

"I was coming here for a combat

arms job and the one stipulation the superintendent gave me was I wasn't allowed to talk to or bug Mr. Moore for three months," Sergeant McGloin said. "I had to go hard and heavy on combat arms projects and at the end of three months, I could talk to him.

"I did that and after three months, Bill said he wondered why I never said anything to him. He's definitely someone I would consider my mentor. Because I had no official schooling in gunsmithing, he took me through the school curriculum he went through. The way he taught was when I said, 'Bill, how do I do this?' he'd throw a

book at me to figure it out myself. I've always taught that way myself."

In addition to Mr. Moore's daily guidance, Sergeant McGloin benefitted from the expertise of gunsmiths from the Army Marksmanship Unit at Fort Benning, Ga., and the Marine Corps Precision Weapons School in Quantico, Va. They provided hands-on training in their facilities and mobile shops to aid his ability to support Air Force team members.

"They all want us back in the game like the Air Force was 30 years ago, so they're all pretty eager to help," Sergeant McGloin said.

When he isn't transforming gun parts into guns, Sergeant McGloin is also a developmental shooter on the Air Force National Pistol Shooting Team, which his shop now supports by building and maintaining match-grade pistols. He can often be found on a firing range, training for the shooting team's next major competition.

The sergeant placed ninth among marksmen competitors at the 2010 Pistol and Rifle Championships at Camp Perry in Port Clinton, Ohio. The Air Force team's next major test is the inter-service championships at Fort Benning in June.

"It's not so much the ability to shoot," he said. "You have to be committed to it, you have to be dedicated, and you have to be able to persevere because there are going to be bad shots. You have to have the ability to let the bad shot go and focus on the next one.

"Focus is extremely huge, and that's why Camp Perry is such a trick because the environment messes with you so much," he said. "You can have that strong sense of commitment and determination, but if a gust of wind comes by when you get ready to pull that trigger, your perseverance has to hold that gun where it needs to be.

"It's understanding what you see down the barrel of your gun and knowing you're doing everything you need to do and knowing it's going to be a good shot."

The Air Force team only receives partial support, so the shooters have to be creative to finance their own competition and training. Temporary duty assignments for competitions like those at Camp Perry and Fort Benning are only partially funded, although the Red Horse Squadron allowed team members to stay in dormitories at Camp Perry.

Team members also have to invest quite a bit, beginning with their weapons and ammunition, although the gunsmith shop now helps, as with the .45 pistols Sergeant McGloin built for team captain Col. Mark Teskey and Lt. Col. Thomas Reardon last year.

"The entry fee to start this sport is

you have to buy a .22, and you have to buy a .45," said Colonel Teskey, Air Force Office of Special Investigations staff judge advocate at Joint Base Andrews, Md. "A good match-grade .45 typically runs between \$3,000 and \$4,000, and a good .22 is at the very least about \$1,400. So, that's about a \$6,000 investment because you've also got to buy a gun box and you've got to buy a scope.

"We have to supplement and buy lead, brass, bullets, primers and a re-loader, so that's another several thousand dollars a year," Colonel Teskey said. "The gunsmith shop supporting us is really a recent thing and [Sergeant McGloin] is part of that commitment. That saves the shooter between \$2,000 and \$3,000 for a .45."

Just as Sergeant McGloin had his mentor, he's become a mentor for several local shooters on the Texas State Rifle Association Junior Team. Rafe Corley, a student at the University of

Texas at San Antonio, met Sergeant McGloin on the nearby Medina Base range in 2009. Since then, Sergeant McGloin has applied a pistol mechanics teaching style similar to his gunsmith mentor's.

"He's the kind of teacher who will tell you to do something a certain way, then step back and let you do it," Mr. Corley said. "If you screw it up, he'll just say to do it again. Honestly, though, I feel that's the best way to teach gunsmithing."

Sergeant McGloin credits Mr. Corley with helping him improve his own skills while mentoring the young shooter on the mechanics of his pistol. While it might be a different kind of satisfaction than building a pistol from a box of parts, the goal of mentoring is similar. Ultimately, Sergeant McGloin wants the shooter and the weapon to do what they're supposed to do when the time comes. 🦅



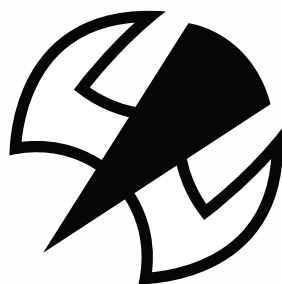
Sergeant McGloin builds and tests all of the .45 caliber handguns the Air Force National Pistol Team members use in competition. Sergeant McGloin serves as the team's noncommissioned officer in charge.

AIRMAN

AIRMAN

AIRMAN

blackbirds



PHOTOS BY
MASTER SGT. JEREMY T. LOCK



AIRMAN



AIRMAN

CV-22 Osprey Flight

Engineer Staff Sgt. Eric Wiggins from the 8th Special Operations Squadron "Blackbirds" scans the ground from an Osprey's back ramp during a training mission at Hurlburt Field, Fla. The CV-22 Osprey's primary mission with the 8th SOS is insertion, extraction and re-supply of unconventional warfare forces and equipment into hostile or enemy-controlled territory.

(top) Sergeant Wiggins puts on his gear and prepares the Osprey's equipment for the mission.

(center, left) Master Sgt. Erik Davis (left) and Sergeant Wiggins grab their training mission gear from life support.

(center, right) A U.S. Air Force CV-22 Osprey from the 8th SOS is marshaled in during training at Hurlburt Field.

(below) Sergeant Davis pre-flights the .50 caliber gun on his plane.



photo by Staff Sgt. Michael B. Keller



**Sergeant Wiggins
communicates
with the pilots as he
watches his Osprey's
engines start up.**



(right) An Osprey takes flight over Hurlburt Field during training. The CV-22 Osprey is a tiltrotor aircraft that combines the takeoff, hover and landing qualities of a helicopter with the long-range, fuel efficiency and speed characteristics of a turboprop aircraft.

(below, left and center) CV-22 Osprey Pilot Maj. James Rowe from the 8th SOS flies during a training mission at Hurlburt Field.

photo by Staff Sgt. Michael B. Keller





(below) Master
Sgt. John Rhoten
watches out the back
of a CV-22 Osprey
during an 8th SOS
training mission
at Hurlburt Field.
Sergeant Rhoten is a
flight engineer.



photo by Staff Sgt. Michael B. Keller

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

FOREVER THE CANDY BOMBER

A SPLIT-SECOND DECISION TO SHARE CANDY RATIONS WITH BLOCKADED CHILDREN ESTABLISHED AN AIR FORCE PILOT'S LASTING LEGACY OF HOPE

(this page)
Then-1st Lt. Gail Halvorsen, an Air Force pilot serving in the Berlin Airlift, offered hope to children of West Berlin through his actions as the Berlin Candy Bomber.

(opposite)
Retired Col. Gail Halvorsen is greeted by a young girl at the 60th Anniversary of "Operation Little Vittles."



acceptance for its plans for Germany's future. The Berlin Airlift began two days later, with U.S. Air Force C-47 Skytrains and C-54 Skymasters delivering milk, flour and medicine to West Berlin. Throughout the duration of the blockade, U.S. and British aircraft delivered more than 2.3 millions tons of supplies.

Colonel Halvorsen was at Templehof filming aircraft landings with his Revere movie camera when he encountered about 30 German children between the ages of 8 and 14, he said in his autobiography, "The Berlin Candy Bomber."

He greeted them with practically all the German he knew, but one of the group spoke English, and he was soon answering questions about how many sacks of flour and loaves of bread the airplanes carried and what other types of cargo were being airlifted.

He talked with the children for an hour before he realized not one had asked him for anything. Instead, they gave him something he didn't expect: the best lesson on freedom he'd ever heard.

"Hitler's past and Stalin's future was their nightmare. American-style freedom was their dream," Colonel Halvorsen said. "They knew what freedom was about. They said someday we'll have enough to eat, but if we lose our freedom, we'll never get it back."

"These were kids, and they were teaching me about freedom. That's what just blew me away."

With Hitler's crumbled Third Reich in their memories and Stalin's chokehold on their future, Germany's children were starving. But as an American pilot learned in a conversation with German youth at Templehof Air Field in July 1948, they were hungry for more than food. What they wanted most was freedom, but the pilot's split-second decision to share his chewing gum led to hope in the form of candy descending from tiny parachutes in the West Berlin sky.

"I got five steps away from them, and then it hit me," said

retired Col. Gail Halvorsen, commonly known as the Berlin Candy Bomber. "I'd been dead-stopped for an hour, and not one kid had put out their hand. Not one. The contrast was so stark because during World War II and all the way back to George Washington, if you were in an American uniform walking down the street, kids would chase you and ask for chocolate and gum."

"The reason they didn't was they were so grateful to our fliers to be free. They wouldn't be a beggar for more than freedom. That was the trigger. Scrooge would've done the same thing. I reached into my pocket, but all I had were two sticks of gum. Right then, the smallest decision I made changed the rest of my life."

Then-1st Lt. Halvorsen, who retired from the Air Force as a colonel in 1974, was one of the American pilots flying round-the-clock missions from Rhein-Main Air Base to Templehof, with 126 missions from July 1948 to February 1949. One day the American pilot, who the German children would later call "Onkel Wackelflugel" or Uncle Wiggly Wings, made the decision that would not only change the lives of numerous German children, but also help the West win the ideological war in the battle for Germany's future.

More than three years after World War II ended, on June 24, 1948, the Soviet Union blocked the Allies' railway and road access to Berlin to force

When he reached into his pocket for the two sticks of Wrigley's Doublemint gum, Colonel Halvorsen debated the wisdom of giving it to them. Perhaps they'd fight over it. But he broke each in half and passed four halves through the barbed wire. He braced for the rush to

the fence that never came. The children who didn't get any of the gum simply asked for a piece of the wrapper so they could smell the aroma. Their reaction, along with the surprise the pilot felt when they didn't beg for anything, led to his decision to do more for them.

"The only way I could get back to deliver it was to drop it from the airplane, 100 feet over their heads, on the approach between the barbed wire fence and bombed-out buildings," Colonel Halvorsen said. "A red light came on that said you can't drop it without permission. But

I rationalized it by saying that starving 2 million people isn't according to Hoyle, either, so what's a few candy bars?"

Colonel Halvorsen told the kids to promise to share and that he'd wiggle the plane's wings so they would know it was his plane, something he'd done for his parents after he received his pilot's license in 1941.

He combined his candy rations with those of his co-pilot and engineer, made the first parachutes with handkerchiefs and strings and tied them to chocolate and gum for the first "Operation Little Vittles" drop from his C-54 Skymaster on July 18, 1948.

The amount of candy steadily increased, along with the number of waiting children, for three weeks until a Berlin newspaper published a photo of the now-famous Candy Bomber. Soon, stacks of letters began arriving at Templehof base operations for "Der Schokoladen Flieger" (the Chocolate Flyer), or "Onkel Wackelflugel."

One day, after he returned from Berlin, he was summoned by Col. James R. Haun, who was the C-54 squadron commander. Colonel Haun had received a call from Brig. Gen. William H. Tunner, deputy commander of operations during the airlift, who wanted to know who was dropping parachutes over Berlin. Colonel Halvorsen knew he was in trouble when Colonel Haun showed him the newspaper with the picture of little parachutes flying out of his C-54.

"You got me in a little trouble there, Halvorsen," Colonel Haun told him.

"I'd had a long relationship with him, but he was put out because he was sandbagged," Colonel Halvorsen said. "So when I talk to kids, especially high school kids, I say, 'when you get a job, don't sandbag your boss.'"

"He said to keep [dropping candy], but keep him informed. It just went crazy after that."

Fellow pilots donated their candy rations. Eventually, they ran out of parachutes, so they



(below) Colonel Halvorsen holds out
a handkerchief that he used as a
parachute for candy that he dropped to
children West Berlin during the Berlin
Airlift.

(right) In his barracks, then-
Lieutenant Gail Halvorsen constructed
parachutes for the chocolate bars he
dropped from his C-54 Skymaster.



made more from cloth and old shirt sleeves before noncommissioned officers' and officers' wives at Rhein-Main began making them. Later, the American Confectioners Association donated 18 tons of candy, mostly sent through a Chicopee, Mass., school where students attached it to parachutes before sending to Berlin through then-Westover Air Force Base, Mass. By the end of the airlift, American pilots had dropped 250,000 parachutes and 23 tons of candy.

"Willie Williams took over after I left Berlin," Colonel Halvorsen said, "and he ended up dropping even more candy than I did."

Since the Berlin Airlift ended in September 1949, Colonel Halvorsen has met countless

Germans whose lives were changed because of "Operation Little Vittles." One of them wrote a letter in the early stages of the candy drops, and they met when he returned to Berlin as Templehof commander in the early 1970s.

Their friendship began from just one of many letters to Berlin's candy bomber from a 7-year-old girl named Mercedes, who loved Der Schokoladen Flieger, but was concerned for her chickens, who thought the airlift planes were chicken hawks. Mercedes asked him to drop candy near the white chickens because she didn't care if he scared them.

Colonel Halvorsen tried, but never could find Mercedes'

white chickens, so he wrote her a letter and sent her candy through the Berlin mail. Twenty four years later, Mercedes' husband, Peter Wild, convinced the Templehof commander to come to his home for dinner. Mercedes showed him the letter he'd written her in 1948, along with the chickens she'd written about in her own letter. Their friendship was even featured in Margot Theis Raven's children's book, "Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot."

Colonel Halvorsen has returned to Berlin nearly 40 times since the airlift. In 1974, he received one of Germany's highest medals, the Grosses Bundesverdienstkreuz, and carried the German team's national

placard into Rice-Eccles Stadium during the opening march for the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. Colonel Halvorsen participated in a re-enactment of "Operation Little Vittles" during the 40th and 50th anniversaries of the Berlin Airlift and also dropped candy from a C-130 Hercules during Operation Provide Promise in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Even at the age of 90, Colonel Halvorsen keeps a busy schedule as he and his wife, Lorraine, split their time between their homes in Arizona and Utah. Several times a year, he still flies the C-54 "Spirit of Freedom," with FAA certification to fly second-in-command. He's also visited many schools, both



(above) Colonel Halvorsen stands in front of a C-54 Skymaster, the aircraft he piloted during the Berlin Airlift, at the Pima Air and Space Museum in Tucson, Ariz.



(left) Colonel Halvorsen demonstrates how the chocolate bars, attached to handkerchief parachutes, drifted to the children of West Berlin after he dropped them from his plane in "Operation Little Vittles." The colonel's initiative, the result of a spontaneous meeting with blockaded children, helped shape early-Cold War German perceptions of American forces in Berlin.

stateside and overseas, and recently visited Iraq to review Air Mobility Command transport operations and visit troops deployed in southwest Asia.

More than 60 years since the airlift, the colonel remains universally beloved as the Candy Bomber, but enjoys one thing about his perpetual notoriety the most.

"The thing I enjoy the most about being the Candy Bomber is seeing the children's reaction even now to the idea of a chocolate bar coming out of the sky," he said. "The most fun I have is doing air drops because even here in the states, there's something magical about a parachute flying out of the sky with a candy bar on it."

As much praise as Colonel Halvorsen receives for bringing hope to a generation of Germans through candy attached to parachutes, he's quick to deflect much of the credit to that first group of children at the barbed wire fence at Templehof. Their gratitude and thankfulness for the pilots during the Berlin Airlift to

keep them free inspired him to reach into his pocket for those two sticks of gum.

The smallest decision, as Colonel Halvorsen calls it, led to 23 tons of candy dropped from the sky for the children of West Berlin and changed countless lives, not to mention the life of the Candy Bomber, himself.

STORY BY STAFF SGT. J. PAUL CROXON ★ PHOTO BY SENIOR AIRMAN CHRISTOPHER GRIFFIN

A FISTFUL OF PERSPECTIVE

I consider myself to be an athletic individual. I don't struggle with the yearly fitness assessments and I work out as much as I am able. I even use physical training as a tool to relieve stress. I thought I could safely call myself an athlete.

My self-proclaimed athletic prowess was knocked down a notch or two recently, when I began working on a story about an Air Force boxer who made me look like a couch potato. Add the fact that he spent the first half of 2010 in a sedentary lifestyle due to medical necessity (see "Finding the Strength to Fight" on page 10), and I realized just how far I had yet to go to be a true athlete and how much more fit I could become.

I first met with the Air Force boxing team in January, and I have to admit, I had preconceived notions about what I would witness. After all, I've seen the "Rocky" movies. I expected to see a lot of jumping rope, some punching bag workouts and maybe a long run or two. These guys weren't fighting the best fighters from Soviet Russia, so I easily discounted the intensity of their workouts. It's not as if Lackland Air Force Base even has a long enough flight of stairs to recreate the "Eye of the Tiger" montage. I was wrong.

I walked into the gym that first day about halfway through the team's circuit training. The boxers were working at stations set up throughout the gym. Some were jumping rope; others were hitting punching bags of various shapes and sizes. It

looked intense, yet effortless. I suppose after countless hours of hitting a punching bag, one perfects the punching movements. I vowed to give it a try. It was "a nice little personal challenge," I thought to myself. Cue the Survivor album.

I should have realized the true nature of my challenge when the boxers took off their sweat suits and nearly two cups of sweat poured out. However, during that first interview I learned that Staff Sgt. James Beck had only been training for a few months prior to arriving. How hard could it be?

The next day, I went to my gym to begin my boxing training. I thought it would be a good way to get inside the mind of my subject. Actually, it's a great way to look like a complete fool. I now believe the training equipment boxers use is designed to weed out the dedicated individuals from the weak through the sheer power of embarrassment.

One piece of equipment is particularly good at making this journalist look ridiculous. I call it "Mr. Peanut," because it's about three feet long, shaped like a figure eight and filled with padding. This diabolical contraption is anchored to the floor and ceiling by two giant rubber bands and rests at about eye level. I think the point is to time your punches so each time it springs back, you punch it again. I learned that the most important part of this exercise is getting past that first hit.

I squared off against Mr. Peanut and delivered my most

powerful right jab. Mr. Peanut shot back at a satisfying speed and then rocketed back, catching me unprepared and knocking the smile off my face.

After looking around to see if anyone noticed — fortunately no one had — I set my feet to give it another try. Again, Mr. Peanut struck back and I was only able to yelp and use my arm to shield my face from another blow. Mr. Peanut was obviously out of my league.

Next, I decided to tackle a more rotund opponent. The heavy bags seemed a more realistic challenge. I noticed the boxers would hit the bag repeatedly for intervals of about a minute and a half, with a minute or so of rest between. I set my stopwatch for a minute and went at it like Ralphie attacking the bully in "A Christmas Story." About three seconds later I was bent over, sucking in air as if I had sprinted 500-meters. This boxing thing was hard.

With newfound respect, I visited the boxers more than a dozen times over the course of five weeks. I realized just how hard these guys train and how reasonable the Air Force physical fitness standard is when compared to their level of fitness. The 1.5-mile jog is challenging, but it pales in comparison with the amount of training needed to compete at Sergeant Beck's level.

The Air Force fitness requirement doesn't ask that we be elite athletes, it necessitates that we be reasonably fit. The yearly assessment shouldn't be something we train to beat once a year. It should be something we can do at any moment. I know that I'd much rather be prepared to take the fitness assessment than step back in the ring against Mr. Peanut.

James C.

Staff Sgt. J. Paul Croxon (left) films Larry Hampp, a member of the Air Force boxing team, during a training session for the 2011 Armed Forces Boxing Championship at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.



BERLIN AIRLIFT



63RD
ANNIVERSARY

JUNE 26

THE FINAL FRAME



DESERT THUNDER

U.S. Air Force photo by MASTER SGT. WILLIAM GREER
AN A-10 THUNDERBOLT II FROM THE 23RD FIGHTER GROUP, MOODY AIR FORCE BASE, GA., FLIES OVER AFGHANISTAN IN SUPPORT OF OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM.

Airman