

AIR | OBSERVER

the biannual journal of the 137th special operations wing



FAMILY

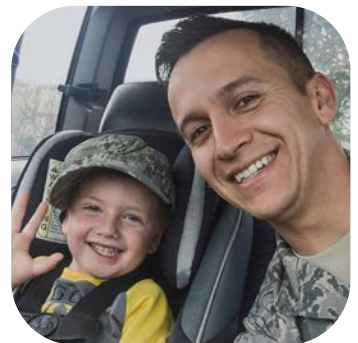
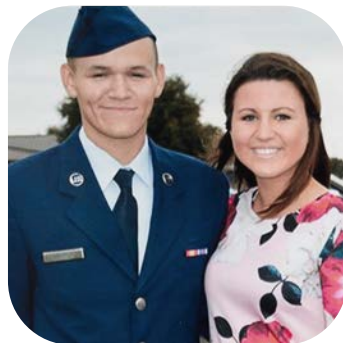
A CELEBRATION OF WILL ROGERS GUARDSMEN AND OUR FAMILIES



SERVICE: 137TH GUARDSMEN SERVE IN THE MILITARY OF A COUNTRY NOT YET THEIRS

LEGACY: WRANGB AIRMEN KEEP MILITARY LEGACY IN THE FAMILY

HONOR: BASE HONOR GUARD HONORS THE FAMILY OF A FORMER MEMBER



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ON THE COVER

This issue's cover celebrates the Guardsmen, spouses, children and other supporters from the past, present and future who comprise the 137th Special Operations Wing family. It is their commitment and dedication that allow the units of Will Rogers Air National Guard Base to loyally and effectively serve local communities, the state, and the nation.

JANUARY 2017 - JUNE 2017

Volume 3 Number 1



Tech. Sgt. Taylor Winge from the 285th Special Operations Intelligence Squadron, his wife Amanda and their son make fitness a family affair while participating in a 5k sponsored by the 137th Special Operations Wing in celebration of the U.S. Air Force's 70th Anniversary at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, May 6, 2017. The 5k was part of a weekend of events including a Community College of the Air Force graduation ceremony, the unveiling of a Minute Man statue, a birthday cake cutting and an evening movie showing. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Brigette Waltermire)

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WING COMMANDER

COL. DEVIN R. WOODEN



Membership in the Oklahoma Air National Guard and the 137th Special Operations Wing provides a unique opportunity to serve our state and nation. The culture and climate of our wing is steeped in comradery and oriented around our families. Make no mistake, our wing is an active participant in the profession of arms. Our Airmen make the ultimate commitment to preserve our way of life and the liberties of all Americans. But, it is the strength of our guard family – past, present and future service members and their immediate families – that serve as the foundation for all of our success.

You have heard it a million times and have probably said it yourself on several occasions; “The Guard is a family”. To say it is one thing; to experience it is an entirely different matter. Throughout my career, I have seen a look of bewilderment on the faces of my contemporaries from other components when I mention our family atmosphere – as if this sense of family is inherent to being a part of the military. “But it’s different here,” I say. “You just have to experience it to understand.”

Those of us who have been around feel it. We sense it. We know what it is and know what it isn’t, even if we can’t always describe it. I am a second generation Guardsman (my father served in the 137th Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron and my uncle in the 137th Services Flight), and our family’s third generation recently returned from deployment last April. My wife served for eight years, and I have logged combat flight hours with my brother-in-law. However, many of our Air Guard members share family lineage much deeper and broader than my own. This concept of family is easy to understand given our role as the hometown militia, but there is so much more to our Air Guard family.

Our newest members know they are part of something special from the moment they meet our professional recruiters and elect to join our ranks. Our student flight immerses them in our proud heritage and prepares them for unmatched success in their initial training, not only as individuals but as members of our family.

Our squadrons form a cohesive cornerstone, fortified by Airmen from diverse backgrounds and life experiences and united behind a common sense of purpose and mission. For many, this desire to serve continues beyond retirement as exhibited by the Gray Eagles Association and the outstanding contributions they make to our service members and immediate families.

Those of us who don the uniform do so voluntarily. However, our immediate family (especially our children) are effectively drafted into service. Our loved ones are called to serve as they pick up the load and adjust to numerous and often demanding training schedules and deployments. Military families are indeed a national treasure. This Air Observer is dedicated to our Air Guard family members, in honor of their commitment, sacrifice, and selfless contribution to our Airmen and their mission.

Col. Wooden
“Woody”

KEY SPOUSE

MRS. KELLY S. WOODEN



Like many of you, I have a love/hate relationship with the Guard. It’s easy to beam with pride when given the opportunity to share about our service or our loved one’s service. However, it’s also just as easy to feel anger and frustration when serving is an inconvenience to our wants and plans. I’ve been blessed to wear the uniform as well as support my husband and brother while they serve. I can honestly say, “one job is not easier than the other.”

As I speak to you today, I’d like to encourage you to have a little fun with this article. Secure four balloons and a permanent marker. Blow up the balloons and tie them off. Label each balloon with one of the following four words: spouse or partner, family, Guard, life. Once the balloons are labeled, throw all four up at once and try to keep them from hitting the floor. Can you do it alone? Can you be more successful at the task if your main supporter is sharing the burden?

During the past 26 years, I’ve learned a few things about staying strong and keeping the family strong while serving as a Guardsman. Col. Wooden talks about the five pillars at his town hall meetings. Wisely, he gives extra attention to the family pillar. It’s the most valuable asset the Guard has!

It’s important to recognize you have two relationships within that family pillar. The first is your spouse or partner. This is the relationship that keeps the Guardsman’s life in balance and functioning during their time serving at home or abroad. The second is the family relationship. The family adds in fun and love! These two relationships are separate but too frequently morph into one. When this occurs, both relationships weaken, for it is out of one the other was created.

The responsibility to keep the family strong is threefold.

Spouses and partners, don’t wait until a deployment to become a part of the military service. I encourage you to get involved, meet other spouses or partners, and share the military life. The Airman and Family Readiness Office has several events and trainings a year.

Guardsmen, take the information home to your spouses and partners about events offered on base. Additionally, I recommend you invite them to meet you for a cold beverage at the Professional Development Center after the drill day ends.

Unit commanders, I encourage you to develop strong family support programs within your unit by providing opportunities to develop relationships among your members and their support systems by scheduling gatherings and training that include the spouse/partner and family.

Finally, to Guardsmen and families, thank you for serving our country! My wish is that you have a love/love relationship with the guard, and it strengthens your family. I hope to see you at the next 5K or family day.

Kelly





THE 137TH FAMILY PORTRAIT | Tech. Sgt. Caroline E. Essex

Airmen from the 137th Special Operations Wing gather in front of the headquarters building on a beautiful spring day, May 6, 2017, at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, to recognize some of the Wing's most prolific contributors. The 137 SOW honored recent Community College of the Air Force graduates, the 2016 Wing Airmen of the Year, recent winners of MAJCOM and DoD level awards and unveiled the unofficially named "Nathan", the Wing's new Minuteman statue to honor 137th Airmen who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

CHAPLAIN

CAPT. JOSEPH D. BAKER



BUILDING A LEGACY OF FAITH

The concept of legacy is somewhat abstract in our fast-paced society. I see the world constantly changing, and I see families changing. I try to anticipate and respond to family problems, but it sometimes seems that things are rapidly deteriorating.

As a Christian, everything I have done, and continue to do, is inspired by the Bible. For Christians, this is the owner's manual. If parents have nothing to consult, like the Bible, then they are depriving themselves of a tremendous amount of information. For example, it is not easy for Christian parents to introduce their children to the Lord without using the Bible. Unfortunately, a lot of parents are so busy that they hardly know their kids, and the years go by so quickly. Many children are growing up without a true understanding of what their faith is all about, however, I want to leave my children a legacy of faith.

In current culture, there seems to be two definitions of legacy. The first is an inheritance. To me, an inheritance is something you give to someone. A legacy, as I define it, is what you build in someone. It is character, values, principles, and a greater understanding of life. That is the legacy I want to leave. And while we are busy earning money and trying to build a home, we cannot forget the task of teaching, training, and building the legacy of faith into our families. My hope is that regardless of a person's faith, we all leave a legacy that our children can build upon as they live their lives.

One important biblical example is that of Moses instructing the children of Israel as they were getting ready to go into the Promised Land. He told them to teach their kids that God loves them, He cares about them, He created them, and that everything is His creation (Deuteronomy 6). This truth applies to us today.

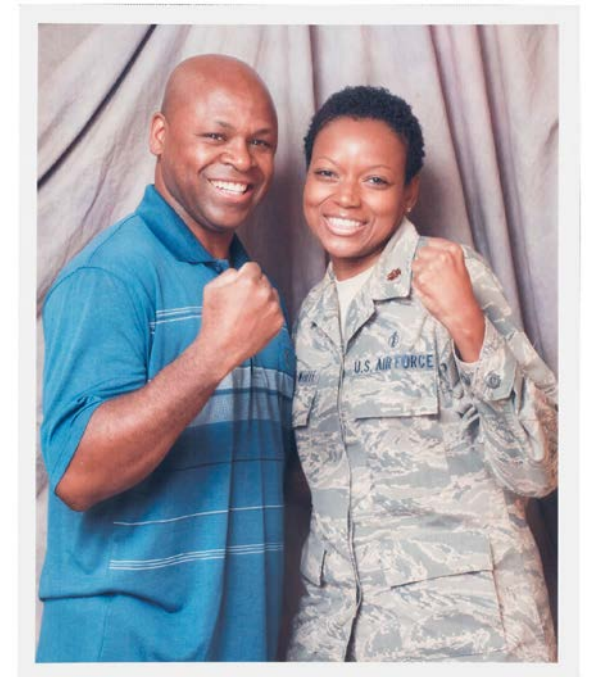
Even amid the stress and hustle, we must teach our children, all day, every day, in the most tactful way that we can. For those of us who don't, we risk leaving a different type of legacy — a tragic one apart from the knowledge of God. That's what I believe.

If this is your belief too, then you must live intentionally, on purpose, to educate your children. You have to be sure that what you are praying about is scriptural and that you are trying to do what God wants you to do. If you are wrong, you'll know it. And if your heart is right, you will find out what it is He wants you to do. What legacy are you leaving?

Ch, Capt Baker

PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

MS. CHARLENE B. WHITE



BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER

Have you ever heard the expression "blood is thicker than water?" It is used occasionally to describe the close bond between families. I recall as a little girl spending time with my family and hearing the phrase quite frequently among adults during conversations in the kitchen. Almost everything started and ended in our kitchen growing up. The kitchen was, and still is, a place of happiness, fun, laughter, tears, pain, and a whole lot of good eating.

Even today, that remains true in my own home. My husband John and I spend most of our time together in the kitchen, and I don't even cook (imagine that!). When we have functions in our home, the kitchen seems to be the gathering point from the beginning of the event until the end.

Over the years, I have thought about this common expression and how it has shaped my views on family. Literally speaking, blood is thicker than water. But does that mean you should choose your family over your friends, regardless of the circumstances or situation? I am positive that is not the meaning my grandparents and other members of my family had in mind during those kitchen discussions.

Throughout the course of my military career, I have been afforded the opportunity to see the world and meet some amazing people along the way. I would consider many of those individuals to be part of my family. Like me, many of you probably consider someone in your Air National Guard community to be family, too.

The truth is that the Air National Guard itself is a family with shared responsibilities for each other's mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. As an adult, I realize, at the end of the day, there is nothing like family — no matter how dysfunctional it may be.

To me, "blood is thicker than water" is knowing you have a place to go in times of need. It's about being in a judgment-free environment with unconditional love. It's about having a sense of belonging and being able to share life's many milestones ... the good and not so good. I believe that whoever provides that is your family, regardless of the biological relationship.

When you hear the saying "blood is thicker than water," remember, you have the choice to determine/define who is blood and who is water. For some of you, water just may be thicker than blood.

In Every Situation Choose Joy!

Charl



GRUMPY OLD AIRMEN | Senior Airman Brigette A. Waltermire

Senior Master Sgt. Kelly E. Kerfoot leads the 137th Logistics Readiness Squadron across the finish line to complete the unofficial Air Force 70th Birthday 5K run at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, May 6, 2017. The LRS team promoted a fun approach to the run and dressed up as elderly 70-year olds to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the USAF and accomplish a scorchingly slow pace of more than 13 minutes a mile. The squadron is currently under investigation, as rumors persist that they cut the course short.

FAMILY READINESS

MRS. TRACY L. POINDEXTER



As a military spouse and military mom, I have found that if you're not always learning and preparing for what life may throw at you, then you may struggle in all aspects of the military life.

The three things I have learned over time are: 1) Educate yourself. 2) Educate your family. 3) Enjoy the journey!

It is never easy saying goodbye to a loved one who is deploying or doing extended training. However, just like Airmen are trained and given the proper resources for their mission, so too can families. We can apply the same concepts for preparation by providing awareness of resources, training and community outreach specifically developed for military families.

One of the most important steps military families can take to become more informed and connected is getting involved in installation and unit activities that build lasting friendships.

Becoming active in and around base while forming relationships with other military families is one of the most important personal investments we can do for ourselves and our family members, because "the military is the largest family in the country" and who doesn't need more family!

I found getting my children involved in military youth activities increased their self-confidence and gave them a bigger picture of the world, which empowered them to follow their dreams. These experiences were fostered by attending activities and camps, allowing them to bond and build lasting, understanding friendships with other military children across the nation.

Being part of this military community network adds another dimension to our life. The military lifestyle comes with obstacles and sacrifices, but knowing what resources and programs are available can change how a person or family responds to those challenges.

We all want to be able to **BOUNCE** back after challenging experiences, not break. There is no cookie-cutter way to ensure everyone is ready for all aspects of this kind of life, but we can help navigate a variety of services and resources to ensure our Airmen can identify and receive benefits from our programs.

If we can help our military families become and stay proactive, then we will all be ready for deployments — we will remain **RESILIENT!**

I feel blessed to be part of the military community as a spouse and a mom. I wouldn't change my military life experience for anything, because it has allowed me to grow, both professionally and personally. It has enabled me to develop programs on the installation as the 137th Special Operations Wing Airman and Family Readiness Program Manager.

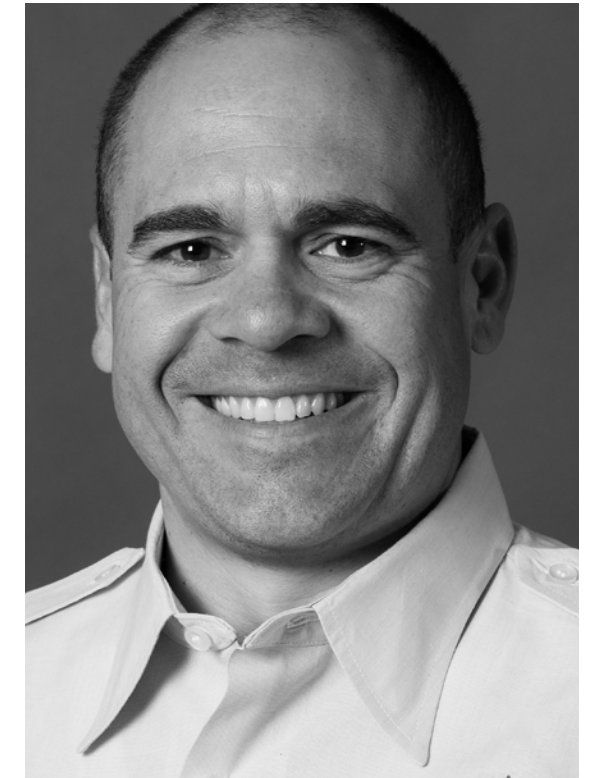
I feel lucky.

I come to work every day and get to do a job I love. My desire is to help other military families enjoy the benefits of the military community, lifestyle and friendships that will last a lifetime, like they have for me!

Tracy

GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

MASTER SGT. JAVIER QUIÑONES-SANTANA



Most of us have heard the phrase "the Air National Guard family" from our leaders in speeches or presentations. I was thinking about that and found that we, the men and women of the Guard, are really part of a family within our units, squadrons and even wing.

My Latin heritage has helped me understand this "family" concept at a very deep level. In the Puerto Rican culture, families stay together through everything; family ties are kept even after children become adults.

This same commitment is true in the Guard. Often times, people will enlist and later retire from the same unit after 20-plus years of service. After retirement, these bonds of friendship and camaraderie stay strong for years.

Thinking more about the similarities between a family and the Guard, I realize that the structure reminds me of my family. Our unit commander is the equivalent to our "papá" or "mamá" (dad or mom) and the wing commander is our "abuelo" or "abuela" (grandpa/ma).

Parents will guide, establish values, lead by example and provide their children with what they need to become a law abiding and responsible citizen. Our commanders do that also. They enforce the standards, ensure that training opportunities are in place, and give all Airmen the tools to complete the mission and improve their skills.

The broader aspects of parenting are done by the wing commander and other senior leaders, kind of like grandparents do. I remember that when I was a kid, my grandparent was the one making sure that traditions were passed from one generation to the next, while ensuring that good manners and proper conduct were observed.

The rest of the unit are basically the siblings. We will work together, agree and disagree together and we always complete the mission while taking care of each other.

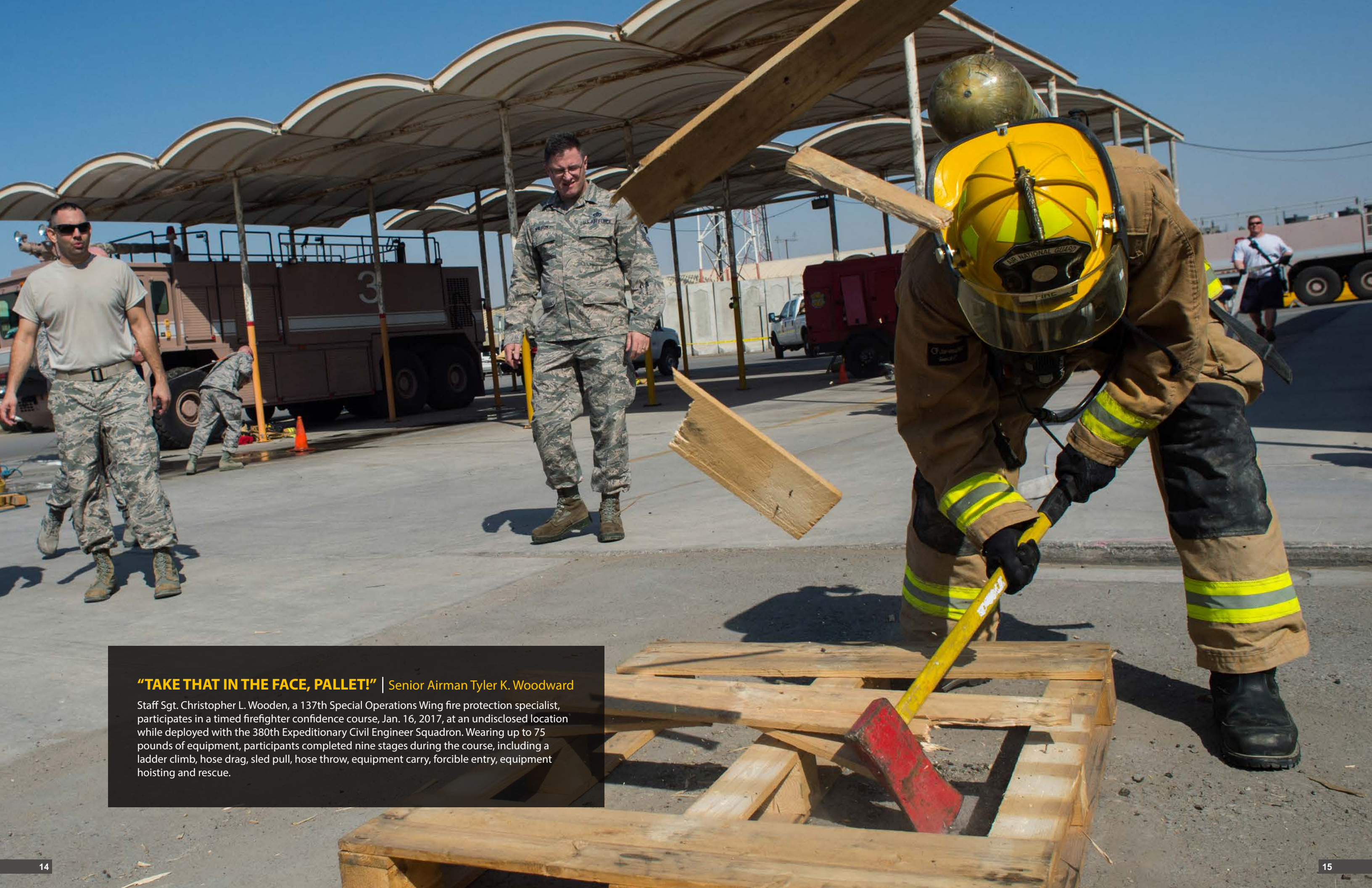
My wife once told me that I was not in a military unit but a fraternity. She said that the way we took care of each other was way beyond a work relationship. I had to agree with her, because every time I was out of town and she had an issue at the house, my Guard brothers were the ones stepping up to the plate and helping out without expecting anything in return. Still today, those ties are as strong as they were 15 years ago.

Though we all are raised with different beliefs and values that form our character. We are all guided by Air Force core values and the Airman's Creed. Together, with consistent leadership, these pillars seem to keep our family moving forward and doing the right things. Many times, those things include caring for a family member's spouse in a time of need.

So, the next time you hear someone talking about the Guard family, you can proudly say, "Yes I am part of that family, and I always will be!"

Javier "Q"





“TAKE THAT IN THE FACE, PALLET!” | Senior Airman Tyler K. Woodward

Staff Sgt. Christopher L. Wooden, a 137th Special Operations Wing fire protection specialist, participates in a timed firefighter confidence course, Jan. 16, 2017, at an undisclosed location while deployed with the 380th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron. Wearing up to 75 pounds of equipment, participants completed nine stages during the course, including a ladder climb, hose drag, sled pull, hose throw, equipment carry, forcible entry, equipment hoisting and rescue.

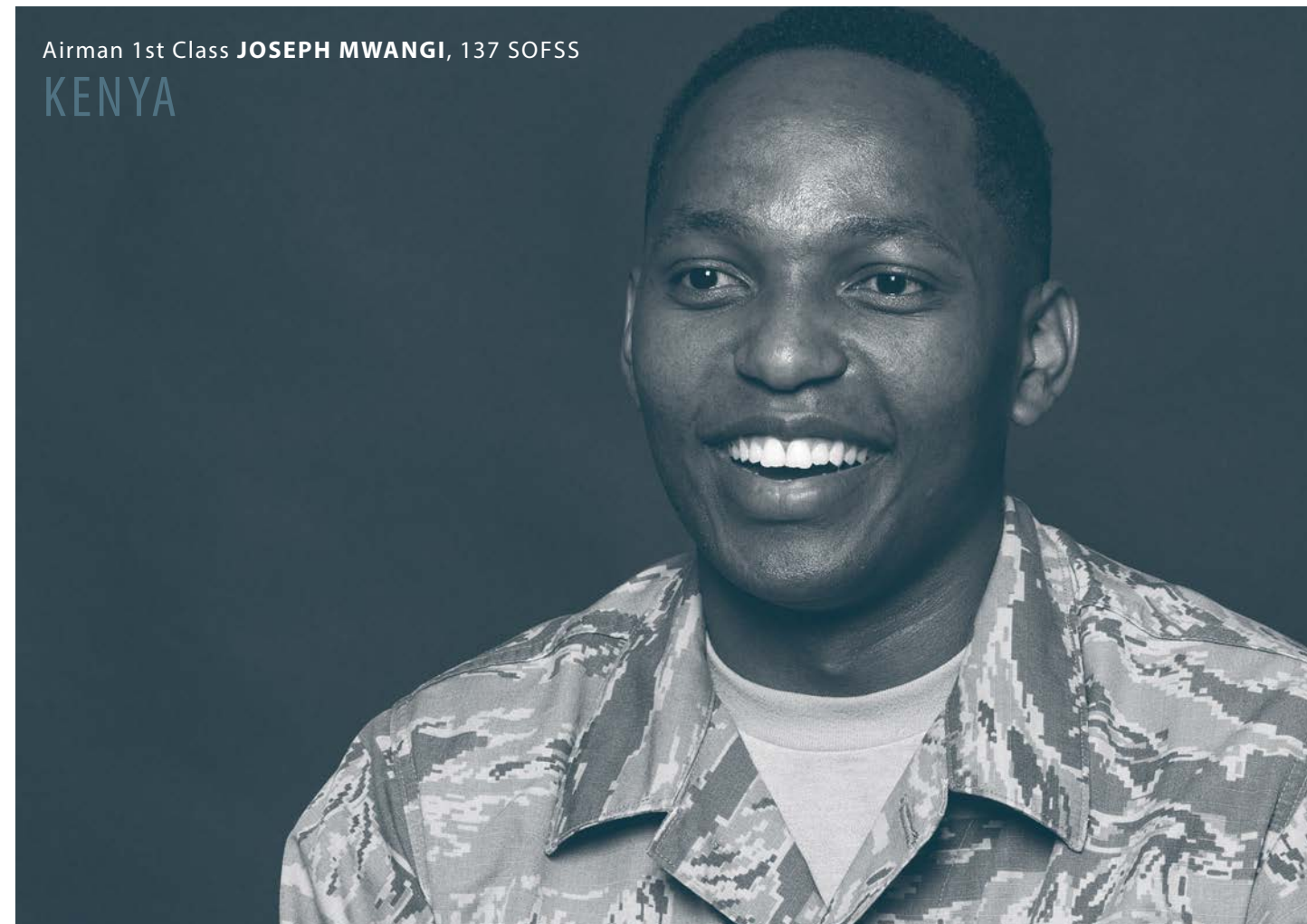
Airman 1st Class **SAMUEL SANDOVAL**, 285 SOIS

MEXICO

SERVICE BEFORE CITIZENSHIP

Airman 1st Class **JOSEPH MWANGI**, 137 SOFSS

KENYA



story STAFF SGT. KASEY M. PHIPPS
photography SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX

The 137th Special Operations Wing reflects the society of both the nation and that state that it serves. As Airmen, members directly serve the Oklahoma Air National Guard and the U.S. Air Force as part of Air Force Special Operations Command. Members swear an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, regardless of their citizenship.

During the 2015 fiscal year, 730,259 people naturalized in the U.S., meaning foreign citizens or nationals met all of the requirements

established by the Immigration and Nationality Act, obtained their U.S. citizenship and can “enjoy nearly all of the same benefits, rights and responsibilities that the Constitution gives to native-born U.S. citizens,” according to the Department of Homeland Security.

Within the 137 SOW, many Airmen proudly serve and are a part of those naturalization numbers.

“Becoming a U.S. citizen is the greatest thing I’ve done so far,” said Airman 1st Class Joseph Mwangi from the 137th Special Operations



Senior Master Sgt. **ELAINE LANOU**, 137 SOFSS
GREAT BRITAIN

Force Support Squadron. Mwangi immigrated to the U.S. from Kenya through the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program, or diversity visa lottery. "Back home, my family is very proud of me, because, there, America is like the eagle of the world. Being a part of that, especially in uniform, is something I'm really proud of."

For Mwangi, the most immediate difference between Kenya and Oklahoma was the weather. He boarded the plane in the full sun and heat of Kenya and stepped out into the snow and sleet of Oklahoma, something he had never experienced before and had only seen in movies.

Language also became a significant barrier.

Staff Sgt. Olga Khomutova, also from the 137 SOFSS, came to the U.S. with her mom and little sister almost 15 years ago. She was 11 years old and her little sister was only two months old when they began the long journey from Russia to Oklahoma in a trip that she dubbed "a nightmare."

"You know the screaming baby on flights?" she asked. "We were the people with the screaming baby."

As soon as they entered the loud, bustling Chicago O'hare International Airport, Khomutova realized that the voices swirling around them sounded like gibberish, making the adjustment to



Senior Master Sgt. **SERGIO FACTUAR**, 137 SOW
PHILIPPINES

American life one step harder.

According to the Department of Homeland Security, the median lawful permanent residency time for naturalization recipients before becoming citizens in fiscal years 2012 to 2015 was seven years. This status, commonly known as having a green card, allows residents to permanently live and work in the U.S., own property, attend public schools and colleges, join the U.S. Armed Forces and apply to become a citizen.

"It takes a while," said Master Sgt. Arlene Nilkumhang, 137 SOW Command Secretary, whose mom is from the Philippines and dad is from Thailand. "It's a long process."

The process includes a lengthy 38-page application; fees; fingerprints; interviews; an English reading, writing and speech test; and a civics test.

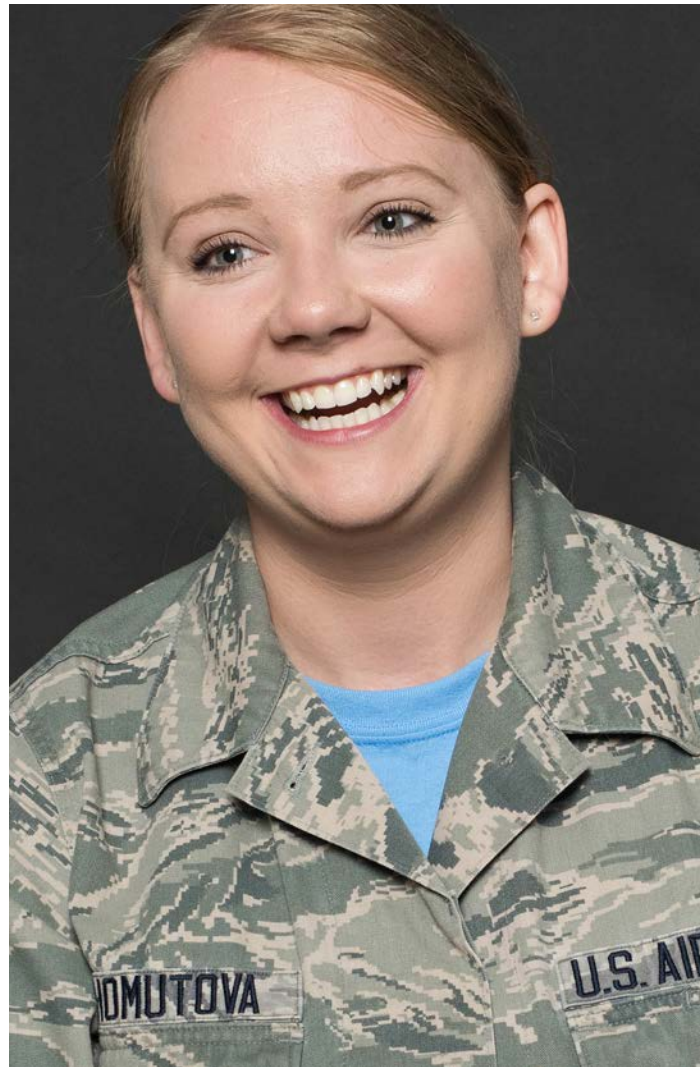
Naturalizing through military service can ease the costs associated with citizenship, by reducing or eliminating costs, and, in some cases, removing physical residency and physical presence requirements that can arise due to deployments.

For Khomutova's mother who married a U.S. citizen, her citizenship still cost 800 dollars. Through the military, Khomutova's citizenship fees were waived and she received money for an education.



"It really is like a family out here. My supervisors almost play a parental role. I can tell they're genuine when they ask how we are – not just because I'm their Airman, but because they actually care."

Staff Sgt. **AMY AKPIRI**, 137 SOFSS
NIGERIA



Staff Sgt. **OLGA KHOMUTOVA**, 137 SOFSS

RUSSIA

"I joined for school and the money, but I stayed because I want the opportunity to give back to other Airmen the leadership and guidance I have received," said Khomutova, who just reenlisted for four additional years after her first enlistment of six years in the Oklahoma Air National Guard. "I have long term plans in the military."

With the money earned through her service, she's now working as a dental hygienist and hopes to commission as an officer.

For others, the wait-time for citizenship can mean time away from family and even their own children.

Master Sgt. Eden Woznick, 137th Human Resources office manager, was born a U.S. citizen in Hawaii while her dad, from the Philippines, was working on a pineapple farm on a work visa. Then, the family moved back to the Philippines, including Master Sgt. Woznick.

After struggling to find opportunity in the Philippines with one son, Woznick decided to move to the U.S. As the only native-born citizen, her plan was to sponsor her family to become U.S. citizens in order to provide them with better lives and opportunities for growth.

However, as the sole provider of income for her family – composed of her parents, son and three siblings not yet in the U.S. – Woznick needed a stable source of income, which she found by enlisting in the active-duty Air Force. Her income funded their immigration, which took a year.



Master Sgt. **ARLENE NILKUMHANG**, 137 SOW

PHILIPPINES

"I made sacrifices," said Woznick. "I left my child with my parents in the Philippines for a year while I was here, and then they lived in California until I could bring them here to Oklahoma at Tinker Air Force Base, where I was stationed at the time. It could have been a different route for them. Here in America we are lucky – very lucky."

Though the military didn't have a direct impact on the citizenship process for her or her family, it provided the stability that helped support the entire family of eight.

"I started with zero – nothing," said Woznick. "I had to save the money first. Without the military and the money to petition for them, it wouldn't have happened so quickly. I was actually making money here that I wouldn't have in the Philippines."

For some 137th Airmen, the hardships of immigration were something experienced by their parents. However as the children of naturalized citizens, they appreciate the benefits and opportunities that rose from those challenges.

"My life is what it is today because of my dad's decision to join the military," said Senior Master Sgt. Sergio Factuar, 137 SOW first sergeant and one of eight siblings whose dad was from the Philippines. "He joined to become a U.S. citizen to create a better life for us."

Nilkumhang, who was the oldest of the first generation of native-born U.S. citizens in her family, visited the Philippines with her mother



Master Sgt. **TRINH MERCER**, 137 SOFSS

VIETNAM

when she was little and remembered that something as small as a shower can be a symbol for how far her family has come.

"We walked outside the house, and there was, no joke, a kiddie pool in the front yard," she recalled. "That's where we took a shower – in public where people were walking down the street – and I remember being so ashamed. I realized how privileged I was in the United States. People just don't understand how differently third-world countries have it."

The Guard has served as a culturally rich and ideally diverse family unit for many Guardsmen, oftentimes providing extra support for their biological families.

"I have a strong bond with my friends here on base," Master Sgt. Trinh Mercer, 137th Customer Service noncommissioned officer who came to the U.S. as a small child from Saigon, Vietnam just before the city fell during the Vietnam War. "They're my family, and I'd do anything for them. The support you have here is just awesome and that never goes away. It lasts a lifetime – even my girls see that."

For Factuar, the bond in the 137 SOW is another layer of pride on top of the pride he already feels for his father.

"I wanted to serve my country, to serve my dad and to serve my family," said Factuar. "To be a part of this base is like my own family anyway. I'm proud of everyone. I feel very fortunate and privileged."



Master Sgt. **EDEN WOZNICK**, 137 SOFSS

PHILIPPINES

The 137 SOW reflects the families in the communities they live and work in every day. Airmen have broken through obstacles and challenges from different countries, circumstances and backgrounds to do one mission.

"We have one thing in common, and it's this uniform," said Senior Master Sgt. Elaine LaNou, 137th Base Training Superintendent who came from Great Britain in 1983 during her senior year with her family for her dad's job and gained citizenship through active-duty U.S. Air Force. "Everyone has a story. Everybody is blended. Everybody is from somewhere – towns and countries you've never heard of – and it's so good."

The uniform oftentimes allows Airmen, native-born citizens or not, to give back to the nation that has given them the opportunity to serve.

"It feels like I'm really doing something," said Airman 1st Class Samuel Sandoval from 285th Special Operations Intelligence Squadron, who came to the U.S. from Mexico 11 years ago. "It gives me a sense of accomplishment that I can't get from any other job. You know whatever we do is going to have global effects." AO



CAPT. (Ret.) **JOHN P. MCCORMACK**
22 Years of Service

CAPT. **CASEY R. MCCORMACK**
13 Years of Service

LT. COL. **DAVID A. MCCORMACK**
17 Years of Service

BRIG. GEN. (Ret.) **JAMES M. MCCORMACK**
37 Years of Service

LEGACY

story SENIOR AIRMAN BRIGETTE A. WALTERMIRE
photography SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX

Tradition. Heritage. Pride.

All of these ideals are commonly referred to when speaking with Airmen following in the footsteps of their relatives. Whether the relative is a grandparent, parent, sibling, aunt, uncle or cousin, all Airmen are proud to carry on a legacy of service.

For Air Guardsmen, this is often more poignant. Unlike active-duty Airmen, Air Guardsmen can often trace their service lineage through multiple squadrons in a single unit over decades.

Stories of generational service at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base are common, but individual career choices can vary significantly. Some follow in the footsteps of their family by enlisting or commissioning to fly, while others choose their own career paths. No matter the career choice, the most daunting part for many is an unspoken pressure to uphold the family legacy.



Lt. Col. David McCormack, 137th Special Operations Wing plans and programs, and his father, now retired Brig. Gen. James M. McCormack, former assistant adjutant general of Oklahoma for Air, stand for a photo in their flight suits at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City.



Maj. Gen. Gregory L. Ferguson, current Air Force Special Operations Command Air National Guard Assistant to the Commander, and retired Brig. Gen. James M. McCormack, former assistant adjutant general of Oklahoma for Air, pin current Capt. Casey McCormack with the rank of second lieutenant during Casey's graduation from Officer Training School at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Ala.

The McCormacks

For Lt. Col. David McCormack, his family legacy dates back to World War II where his grandfather served as a B-17 Flying Fortress mechanic in the Army Air Corps. McCormack's father and uncle went on to become pilots, as did their children.

McCormack decided to join the Guard before his last year of college in 1999. He enlisted at WRANGB in the 137th Aerial Port Squadron while he attended college. After graduating, he commissioned in 2001 and was selected to go to pilot training.

"Obviously, it was in my blood," said McCormack. "As I went through college and started looking at life after graduation, I decided that I wanted to give it a shot and see if I had what it took to fly."

The first in the McCormack line to become a pilot at Will Rogers was David's father, retired Brig. Gen. James McCormack, who began flying during the C-130 Hercules era. Eventually, he became the base commander and presided over the wing transition from C-130s to KC-135 Stratotankers. It was during this same period that David, along with his uncle, brother and cousin, all first enlisted and then were commissioned as pilots.

In true McCormack tradition, there is an unspoken right of passage requiring each to pay their dues as an enlisted member before flying, said David. As each new member of the McCormack family joined WRANGB, they would support each other at graduations,

commissioning events and pilot training graduation. The entourage of "colonels and generals" never failed to impress peers, he said.

While it was nice to be surrounded by family, McCormack also found his familiarity with the Guard beneficial when joining. Having grown up attending airshows and family days, an immediate feeling of trust – along with higher expectations – was apparent with his coworkers.

When asked how family expectations influenced his pilot training experience, McCormack candidly noted that, "you obviously don't want to let your family down." Pointing out the upsides, he stated, "I think it was a good pressure, because I wanted to knock it out of the park."

In total, the McCormacks have logged around 21,500 military flying hours. While only McCormack and his brother remain at WRANGB, he is proud of his military legacy.

"I want to leave a legacy of service," he said. "Traditionally that's been in an airplane, but in the future it will be different."

McCormack now moves to take command of the 137th Civil Engineering Squadron, where his cousin got his start in 1988.

"It's kind of cool ... going full circle," reflected McCormack.



Official military portrait of Chief Master Sgt. Michael L. Randall as a young Airman.



Official military portrait of Lt. Col. (Ret.) Laurence C. Randall, former 137th Mission Support Group Commander at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City.

The Randalls

Another family that has extensive roots at WRANGB are the Randalls. Chief Master Sgt. Michael Randall and his father, retired Lt. Col. Laurance Randall, have had careers at WRANGB totaling 42 and 39 years, respectively.

Laurance joined in 1954, right after the end of the Korean War, and his son followed suit joining in 1975 after Vietnam. Both decided that volunteering in the Guard was preferable to being drafted, and so they ended up at WRANGB.

Laurance had heard about the Guard from his older sister's husband. He said since then both he, his son, his brother, four cousins and a grandson had joined the Guard. However, the best relationship started when he swore in his son.

"It was good working with him," Laurance said.

Randall's first memory of the Guard was taking a tour of the C-97, the "Miss Oklahoma City", also known as the "Talking Bird". For a 10-year-old Randall, the experience left a permanent impression.

Coming right out of high school, Randall planned on serving six years as a flight facilities equipment repairman for the 205th Engineering and Installation Squadron, and then eventually moving to the Federal Aviation Administration.

That plan changed four years later when Randall moved to the 137th Civil Engineering Squadron for a full-time, dual-status position

in 1979. He never imagined he would still be there 40 years later, but Randall has never been one to let opportunity pass by.

"I hope I leave my Airmen with a sense of 'don't wait until you're told to do something,'" he said, using his father's lessons to him as inspiration. "What Dad passed on to me was his work ethic."

Randall said the most impactful thing for him has been watching the civilian population's change in attitude toward people in the military since Vietnam.

"I remember being told: 'Do not leave this base in uniform, and, if you do, you must go straight home,' and that hurt," he said. "I was proud of wearing this uniform."

Over the years, the local community has come to embrace WRANGB Airmen and its evolution from a small auxiliary unit to a still small but integral part of the Air Force Special Operations Command.

"Watching over the years as that has changed, that's the thing that gives me the most pride," he said.



CHIEF MASTER SGT. MICHAEL L. RANDALL
42 Years of Service

LT. COL. (Ret.) LAURENCE C. RANDALL
39 Years of Service



SENIOR MASTER SGT. LINDEL K. BRINEGAR
36 Years of Service

LT. COL. (Ret.) CECIL BRINEGAR
31 Years of Service

SENIOR AIRMAN ISSAC L. BRINEGAR
6 Years of Service

AIRMAN 1ST CLASS EVAN K. BRINEGAR
1 Year of Service



Then Chief Master Sgt. Lindel K. Brinegar (left) stands with his mother, Mrs. Carol S. Brinegar, and his father, Lt. Col. (Ret.) Cecil Brinegar at a Veterans Day event held annually at the Bethany Elementary School, Bethany, Okla. In his current position, he holds the rank of senior master sergeant, but will retire as a chief master sergeant.



Senior Airman Issac L. Brinegar (center) stands with his father, Senior Master Sgt. Lindel K. Brinegar (left), and his recently enlisted brother, Airman 1st Class Evan K. Brinegar (right). This photograph was taken in front of the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron, Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, where Senior Airman Brinegar serves as a tactical air control party specialist.

The Brinegars

The name Brinegar was well known at WRANGB well before Senior Airman Isaac Brinegar decided to transfer from the Army National Guard in 2014. The transition provided him first-hand experience of the difference between belonging at Will Rogers and being a part of any other Guard unit.

According to Brinegar, the switch was due, in part, to his grandfather and father. His grandfather was a member of the active duty Air Force until transferring to WRANGB, and his father enlisted at Will Rogers.

"I joined the Army Guard, and [my dad] always told me that the way of life out here was a much closer group of people," said Brinegar.

While being a tactical air controller party Airmen in the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron is similar to what he did in the Army, Brinegar said that the Air Force and Army have their differences.

"It's been quite an experience ... the opportunity out here is pretty much unlimited," he said.

Brinegar said that it's interesting being fairly new on base and not knowing anyone while most everyone knows his father, or even his grandfather. Prior to joining the Army, Brinegar's father (at the time a boom operator on the KC-135) took him on a flight to let him see what the Air Force was like.

Speaking about his father's character, Brinegar mentioned how people who flew with his father constantly mention his drive and his

"by-the-book" approach. Though not solicited, the high standards demonstrated by his father are often expected by others from Brinegar.

"It's helped push me quite a bit to always perform with excellence and do everything I can to push others," he said. "The biggest thing I hope for right now is that I don't take away from my dad's legacy of always doing the right thing. I hope I can build on that."

Brinegar's transition to the Air side of the house has helped inspire others in his family to think about the guard. His sister and brother have also recently joined the WRANGB team, carrying on the family legacy and increasing the Brinegar count on base to four, including his father.

"I think they see the security and opportunities out here to be more," he said. "[WRANGB has] provided a lot for me – the people and the sense of security." **AO**



HONOR GUARD

As if through a fog, sharp clicks reverberated, cutting through the hush of the room and deliberately calculating the significance of time contained in that single, reverent moment.

story STAFF SGT. KASEY M. PHIPPS
photography SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX



A folded flag rests on the top shelf of a curio cabinet in remembrance of both the honor and pride with which a fallen Guardsmen had served. Folded flags are given to the next of kin by honor guards during funeral honors, blue field of stars always folded smoothly and facing outward.

HUP. CLICK. TWO. CLICK. THREE. CLICK. FOUR. CLICK.

Growing louder, immaculate blue uniforms appeared. Their crisp, steady movements fell in rhythm to the dependable and exacting count, interrupted only by sharp white flashes as the stage lights ricocheted off of the silver of their buckles.

"I was in shock and then awe," recalled Laura Bettis, mother of four. "The whole day was a fog, but I remember the Guard — the hush and total quiet. It was amazing. Breathtaking."

IN MEMORY

That day was May 31, 2016 - the day of the memorial service for two of Laura's sons, Phillip and Marshall Cabe. The room was filled with family and friends, many of whom saw her boys barely more than a week before the service while celebrating the years of their lives in a very different way.

Phillip and Marshall were visiting their father, Michael Cabe, in Hawaii when their skydiving plane went down during takeoff, May 23, 2016. Their deaths came just 13 days after Marshall's 23rd birthday and two days after Phillip's 25th.

Phillip, a former aerospace ground equipment apprentice with the 137th Maintenance Group at the now 137th Special Operations

Wing in Oklahoma City, served in the Oklahoma Air National Guard for five years, including a stint in Qatar in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. When the Wing began its change from an air refueling mission to a special operations mission in 2015, Phillip's career field was no longer essential to operations. With a difficult decision, he chose to separate in lieu of changing careers.

"Phillip loved the Guard," said Laura. "He may have stayed in if it weren't for his career field changing."

Marshall also served in the Army ROTC at Cameron University, where both brothers graduated from.

PREPARATION

The memorial service was held inside Cameron University Theatre, near Fort Sill in Lawton, Oklahoma. The size, acoustics, stage, lighting and even military population acted as a fine microscope under which the 137th Special Operations Wing Base Honor Guard performed. On the lighted stage in the otherwise silent and dark theater, every movement could be scrutinized.

"It should be sharp, precise and purposeful, but it should also look effortless and smooth," said Capt. Henry Pope, 137th Honor Guard officer in charge. "We don't rush our movements. We are there for a reason, and it's usually to honor our nation, our fallen or a veteran and those events should not be rushed."



Airman Phillip Cabe, aerospace ground equipment apprentice with the 137th Maintenance Group, attaches a mother pin to his mother's blouse while the family visited during his last days at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio during U.S. Air Force Basic Military Training. His mother, Laura Bettis, said receiving the pin and seeing Phillip's area during BMT was a proud moment for her. (Photo contributed by Laura Bettis)

Whether it means presenting the colors during a military function, presenting the flag at a retirement ceremony, promoting unit recruitment and awareness, or performing military funeral honors - which can include service as pallbearers, a military rifle salute, the folding of the flag, the presentation of the flag and the playing of Taps - this attention-to-detail spans all of the events performed by the 137th Honor Guard.

At the Cabe memorial service, three members were selected and worked in sync to play Taps and then fold and present the flag to Laura in an already stunned-into-silence room.

"It's heartbreaking to hear the family members mourn their loved ones," said Senior Airman Sarai Chavez, 137th Honor Guard administrator. "However, I was honored that we were able to give the deceased a respectful and meaningful farewell."

However, the ability to carry out the dignified performance and expression of honor does not come without sacrifice.

Before each performance or detail, members of the honor guard arrive at least an hour early to practice at the event location, ensuring those selected for the detail of the 17 total Airmen of the 137th Honor Guard have a hands-on refresher prior to the event.

"We would prefer to practice a few days out, but just-in-time practice is good so that the team can plan out all the details of routes, positioning and any other possible variables that would affect the smoothness of the detail," said Pope. "Everyone is also able to be on the same page as far as roles and responsibilities, and it also shakes off the dust, so to speak, so the movements and timing of the team are in sync."

Even before that, the 137th Honor Guard meets quarterly as a unit to ensure all members can perform any detail at a moment's notice. This readiness includes keeping a professional image and an impeccable honor guard uniform, which can cost around 800 dollars each.

"We have to be highly selective with the individuals we choose," said Pope. "We look for trainees that have been to several training sessions, which shows commitment, and we also have multiple conversations about that commitment. We impress upon them what it means to be chosen to wear the uniform and that is an honor not to be taken lightly."



Marshall Gabe (left) and Airman Phillip Gabe (right), aerospace ground equipment apprentice with the 137th Maintenance Group, pose with their mother Laura Bettis at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio during Phillip's last few days at U.S. Air Force Basic Military Training. Marshall served in the U.S. Army ROTC at Cameron University, near Lawton, Okla., while Phillip was in the Oklahoma Air National Guard at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City. (Photo contributed by Laura Bettis)

WITH DIGNITY

For honor guard members, the voluntary investment in time is nothing compared to the dignity in which they serve the U.S. and the fallen.

"I am the first generation in my family to be in the military, and it's been a wonderful experience so far," said Chavez. "I am honored to serve my country, and it's more of an honor to serve those who served before me by being able to give them their last military honor."

Each military branch has its own official honor guard stationed near Washington D.C., and most state installations have their own as well. The U.S. Air Force honor guard traces its roots to May 1948 when the newly formed Air Force Headquarters Command directed the creation of an elite ceremonial unit.

"In conducting our primary job of rendering funeral honors, there are members of the fallen member's family or friends that have never seen or met anyone in the Air Force or even the military," explained Pope. "So in those times, we are the first and possibly the last time they will ever see anyone in the Air Force. It's an extremely moving experience to be that interface for them. We are at our best, representing the USAF and honoring their loved one."

Together, honor guards service-wide represent every member, past and present, of every branch of the military.

LEGACY OF A FLAG

This year, less than two weeks before the one year anniversary of her sons' deaths, Laura celebrated her first Mother's day without those sons. She and her family celebrated among memorabilia from the lives of her two deceased sons, including the flag that was handed to her during the memorial service by the 137th Honor Guard in honor of Phillip's service to his state and nation.

"I cried," said Laura as she recalled the moment she received the flag. "Watching the motions of everything before it and then them coming down to me and presenting this... It was just amazing. And to know that it was for me and for me to keep forever... and that it was for Phillip, was mind blowing."

The flag now rests on the top shelf of Laura's curio cabinet, one of the first things you see as you enter the house and step into the living



room. She nestled it as if standing guard among the scattered and beloved belongings that represent her two sons' lives.

For Bert Bettis, Laura's husband of 14 years and Army honor guard veteran, the same flag evokes powerful memories and profound pride.

"It comes down to this: for anyone who has ever gone through basic military training or joined the service in any branch, the military is in their heart," said Bert pointing over his shoulder to the displayed flag inside the open glass doors. "It's in their mind. And even more so, it's in their soul. They appreciate the honors, whether they are there to see it or not. That day, the Air Force couldn't have honored our sons any [expletive] better than they did with the 137th Honor Guard. They performed an outstanding ceremony."

LIKE GHOSTS

"On behalf of the President of the United States, the Department of the Air Force and a grateful nation, we offer this flag for the faithful and dedicated service of Phillip Cabe."

After gently entrusting the folded flag to Laura, blue field of stars facing upward, the crisp, white gloves retreated into a dulling trail of clicks until only silence persisted. Left behind was a flag that represents a son and the legacy of millions of other servicemen and women who came before and will continue to come after him.

"They came like ghosts, performed what they needed to - very proudly and very honorably - and then left like ghosts," Bert said of the 137th Special Operations Wing Base Honor Guard. **AO**



AIRMEN DESCENDERS | Senior Airman Tyler K. Woodward

Army and Air National Guardsmen from across the nation trained rappelling out of UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters, May 18, 2017, at Camp Gruber Training Center, near Braggs, Okla. Two Airmen from the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron recently completed the course, which is often referred to as the two most grueling weeks in the Army.

The CARE TEAM

story and photographs
SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX

Modern day Air Commandos are expected to be fit to fight and ready to perform at the highest level at a moment's notice. Sometimes, it is easy to forget that the work of these brave and committed Airmen can influence the community around them locally, nationally and even sometimes, around the world.

In the last calendar year, Airmen from the 137th Special Operations Wing have participated in exercises in the Baltic Region and the Korean Peninsula, deployed around the world in support of global operations in Southwest Asia, provided life-saving expertise to state partners during local disasters across Oklahoma, built a home for a single parent and her three children in central Oklahoma City and woke up early to hydrate runners at this year's Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon.

As Wingmen, Guardsmen, spouses, parents, children and neighbors, Airmen in the Air National Guard regularly make an impact by supporting domestic and national interests at home and abroad. This impact can sometimes be hard for many to fully comprehend, including families, friends and the Airmen themselves.

Being a fit-to-fight Air Commando doesn't just mean physical fitness, though. Perhaps of greater importance is the need to maintain a healthy spiritual outlook, build strong and resilient individuals and families and keep a strong, healthy mental outlook.

"The mission of the 137th requires all facets of our mission to be at peak performance," said Col. Devin R. Wooden, 137 SOW commander. "None are more important than the fitness of our Airmen. Every finely-tuned machine requires periodic maintenance to maintain high levels of readiness."

Fondly referred to as the "care team" — the Chaplain's Office, Family Readiness and Psychological Health Offices are the support network for well rounded spiritual and mental health, both locally and for geo-dispersed Airmen that return to their communities.

"The care team on base provides the perfect blend of resources to ensure our airmen remain focused on our mission," said Wooden. "Their unique skills in tending to the emotional, spiritual, and mental fitness of our force and families reduces stress, improves focus and serves as a force multiplier in executing our mission."



CHAPLAIN

The Wing Chaplain's Office provides members with spiritual care and enables Airmen and their families to exercise their constitutional right to the free exercise of religion.

"It allows Airmen to rely on their faith – something larger than who they are," said Capt. Joseph Baker, 137 SOW chaplain. "It helps them identify with something larger than what they're doing so that they have purpose and meaning and can really focus on the mission."

This is primarily accomplished through religious observances, pastoral care and advising leadership on spiritual, ethical, moral, morale, core values and religious accommodation issues.

"I try to address the needs of all people on base, regardless of their faith background or lack thereof," said Baker. "My goal has been to learn what is valuable to people and to learn how those values impact their beliefs. Those beliefs will then influence relationships and how they can experience reconciliation in their lives, which is vital to anticipating changes in an ever-changing world of influence."



FAMILY READINESS

The Airman and Family Readiness Office assists members and their families striving to balance the competing demands of special operations and family life by providing assistance and education during pre-deployment, deployment and post-deployment, Key Spouse activities and work-life balance support, just to name a few.

"It's very important to be proactive, because there's no time to become ready once everything has started," said Tracy Poindexter, 137 SOW Airman & Family Readiness program manager. "Families get caught up in life, deployments or other life changes and there's no backtracking from there. If you start getting ready by taking advantage of the right resources, knowing the programs, and knowing which people to reach out to, then when something does happen, you're ready."

The support that Family Readiness provides to both families and individuals strengthens the Will Rogers Air National Guard Base community and enables a ready and resilient Wing with strong Airmen and supporting families.

"It's critical that families know our office is here," said Poindexter. "Every person and every need is different, but if they know that our office is here, then they can bring any issue to us. We can get them the resources."




PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

The work of Air Commandos can be both physically and mentally taxing even for those with solid spiritual health and sound family plans. The Director of Psychological Health is an advocate for Airmen to better function within the demands of their individually unique environments.

"It should be normal to come and see me, even if it's just to have a chat," said Charlene White, the 137 SOW Psychological Health director. "You can't take care of yourself or your family without taking care of your mental and emotional well-being. They all kind of go hand-in-hand."

The DPH is also available to members and their families for couples counseling, substance abuse support, depression/anxiety, grief counseling, domestic violence and prevention, and anger and stress management.

"As the DPH I see my primary role as being proactive, and reduce the stigma associated with seeking mental health services," said White. "My goal is to reach members before situations arise, that is why my walkabouts are so important, I make it a point to get into the units to establish a rapport with each individual member." **AO**



MATOP TWENTY-17 | Capt. Micah D. Campbell

Airmen from the 137th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, Oklahoma Air National Guard; 142 AES, Delaware ANG; 146 AES, California ANG; and 183 AES, Mississippi ANG, discuss simulated patient care during the Multiple Aircraft Training Opportunity Program (MATOP) organized by the 137th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron from Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, April 7, 2017. Airmen of the 137 AES were joined by seven of the other eight Air National Guard aeromedical evacuation squadrons as they hosted the annual training event and accomplished mandatory annual aeromedical training requirements.

ONCE UPON A TIME IN A FAR OFF LAND ...

There was a naval flight surgeon deployed on an awfully big adventure. The surgeon had a very young daughter who missed seeing him each night and wished he was home. One day, the surgeon packed his great big bags and headed home. But when he got there, his daughter had forgotten what he looked like!

Sadly, this story actually happened to Betty Mohlenbrock's family. Her husband, the naval flight surgeon, returned from a deployment and his young daughter did not recognize him.

Mohlenbrock founded United Through Reading in 1989 in an effort to prevent the heartbreak that her family, and likely many others, had experienced. UTR is a special service that offers military members the chance to record themselves reading a children's story that their kids enjoy.

As technology availability and capability has advanced to include video conferencing and messaging, UTR has continued to provide book recordings as both a tool for connection with the parent and child literacy. They partner with the USO and other organizations to raise awareness and train volunteers to conduct the program at new locations.

Since its founding, over two million families have used the service at one of the approximately 200 United Through Reading participating locations worldwide.

The Airmen and Family Readiness Office at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base is proud to be a UTR participating center, and makes these services available for anyone.

In addition to using provided books, parents can also bring their own books and use UTR services to record the video.

"Caregivers at home often send their service members out on deployment with a stack of their own personal favorite books," said Taylor Monaco, the United Through Reading director of communications. "We also have had families who have created special, personalized books."

Having UTR as a resource for WRANGB Airmen has already proven to be a valuable tool and was utilized by deployed families during the last year. According to the 137th Special Operations Wing Airman & Family Readiness Program Manager, Tracey Poindexter, members were

able to use the service at both WRANGB and at various USOs at deployed locations.

"Having a video allows the child to have access to their parent anytime, which is important because it helps them stay connected with the deployed parent," said Poindexter. "Schedules don't always allow for the member to call home at a convenient time, so having instant access to that parent is beneficial."

The program offers all service members the chance to send videos home for their children so that their memories never grow old in their children's minds. In kid-time, it seems like a parent will never come back. Never is an awfully long time, but saying goodbye does not have to mean forgetting, thanks to the enchantment of reading every night with a parent, no matter the time or distance.

THE END



Second star
to the right
straight on till
morning



story SENIOR AIRMAN BRIGETTE A. WALTERMIRE
illustration SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX



THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF WRANGB

AIR|OBSERVER
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