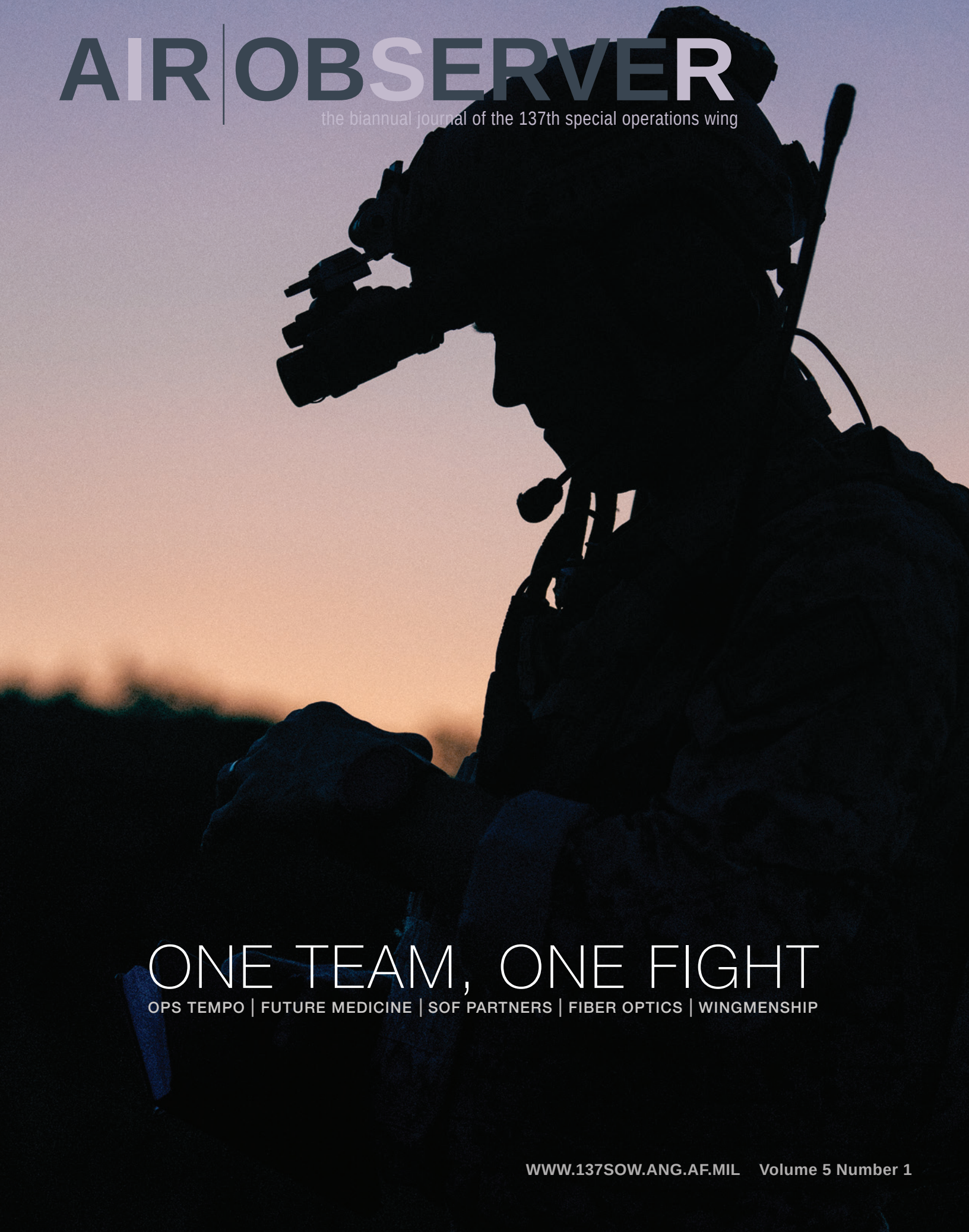
AIR|OBSERVER

the biannual journal of the 137th special operations wing



ONE TEAM, ONE FIGHT

OPS TEMPO | FUTURE MEDICINE | SOF PARTNERS | FIBER OPTICS | WINGMENSHIP

WWW.137SOW.ANG.AF.MIL Volume 5 Number 1

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH: RAZORBACK RANGE, NEAR FORT SMITH, ARKANSAS, JULY 2019

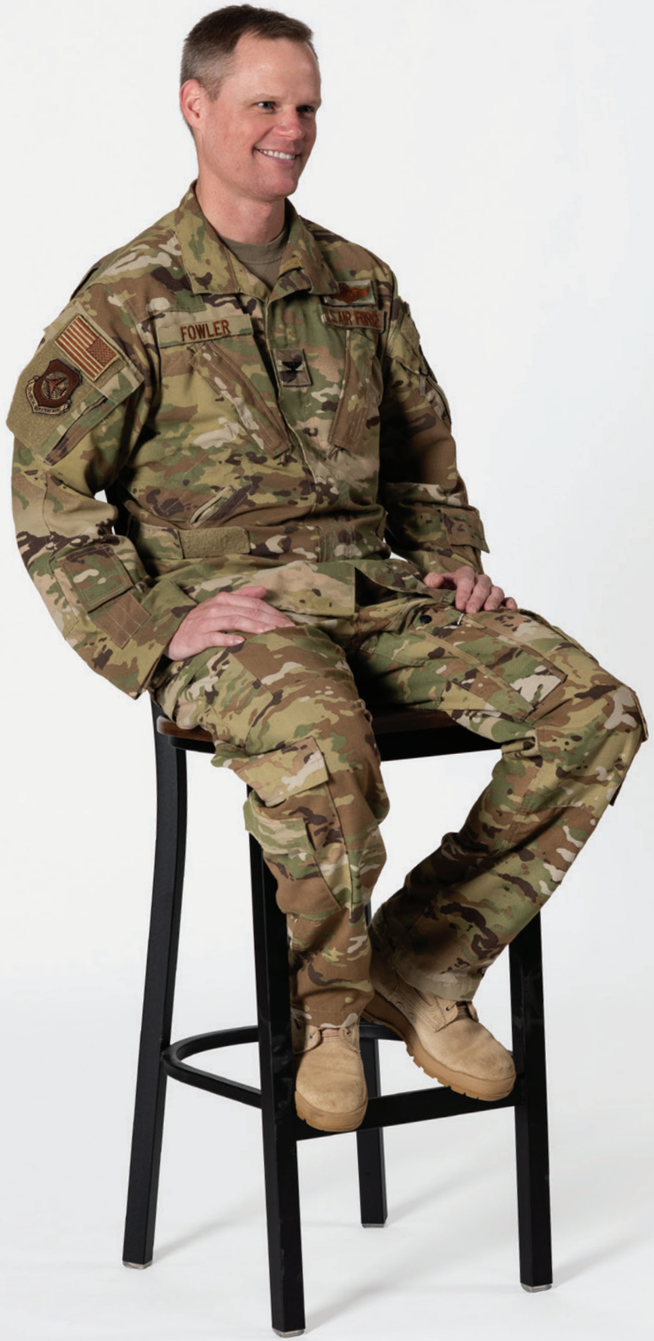
The U.S. Navy Special Warfare Group One (NSWG-1) operator featured in this photograph showcases how our increased operations and cooperation with joint and combined forces enables us to build partnerships through support in the air and on the ground. As the sun set on their mission, the 137th Special Operations Wing Airmen and the NSWG-1 team continued their operations well into the night — embodying the well-known phrase, “Special operations happen at night.”

Cover Photograph: STAFF SGT. JORDAN E. MARTIN

Photograph: SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX

WING COMMANDER

COL. DANIEL R. FOWLER



Photograph: SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX

There is a lot of ongoing discussion about the 'new ops tempo' for the 137th Special Operations Wing. I realize the immediate questions: "How will this affect me? Am I going to deploy like the Active Duty now? How am I supposed to balance this with my civilian job?". So let's take this opportunity to talk about a few details and help the discussion.

First off, the 'new ops tempo' is not new at all. As I visit with each of you through my town hall meetings, we've been discussing how this 'new ops tempo' has been running in the Air National Guard — and here at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base — for about five years. The Air National Guard Readiness Center (ANGRC) started this about half a decade ago during a larger Air Force review of our deployment process called AEF Next. So, if you think there is this huge change coming, it's already happened.

When the ANGRC was looking into this new idea, leadership spent quite a bit of energy and effort making sure it did one important thing for our Airmen; provided predictability. The new ops tempo wasn't just about ops tempo as much as it was about providing predictable timing for people who have to balance a civilian life and career with their military career. The best tool for that balance is predictability.

Using the Involuntary Mobilization Process (which sounds way worse than it is) facilitates predictability for the individuals, the employers, the families ... everybody. The idea is to prevent the 'quick call to see if the Guard can help us out next week' and turn it into a scheduled, organized and well-planned activation with maximized benefits. This concept ensures we have the best chance for maximized benefits (nothing is perfect mind you) and predictability. It simultaneously provides the Active Duty with the strongest guarantee we'll be there to relieve them. The assurance that we're consistently available combined with the predictability for us is the focus of the 'new' ops tempo. And it works — not only for the military but to also help promote work-life balance.

So, how does this work? The Air National Guard deploys in a 1:5 mobility-to-dwell cycle. For example, if one of our Guard members deploys for six months, then their actual total mobility time is a little more than seven months — 7.4 to be exact in this scenario. When a member deploys, they are entitled to paid 'spin-up' days beforehand and reintegration and leave days upon return. Prior to leaving for a 6-month deployment, a member would be entitled to two administrative days (out-processing), seven days of travel and three days of overlap with their counterpart, whose deployment is coming to an end. After the member comes home, they are entitled to 14 days of major command (MAJCOM) downtime for in-processing and administration and 18 days of leave to be back at home with their family and friends. All of this before the member returns to their civilian job or duty at the wing. This total amount of time, 7.4 months, is their total mobility deployment. In the 1:5 'mob-to-dwell' cycle, the member will spend 37 months (7.4 months x 5 = 37 months) at home before they can deploy again. This is their 'mob-to-dwell' for this specific six-month deployment. This calculation works for any period of time, only the days before and after the deployment are adjusted based on the deployment's length.

In contrast, Active Duty deploys using a 1:2 or 1:3 deployment-to-dwell cycle, depending on the career field and based on actual days of boots on ground. Whereas the Guard calculates 'mob-to-dwell,' Active Duty only calculates using 'deploy-to-dwell.' In the same scenario as above, using a 1:3 deploy-to-dwell ratio, Active Duty would deploy for six months and then immediately begin dwell upon their return for 18 months (6 months x 3 = 18 months dwell). So, after 18 months, compared to 37 months for a Guardsman, an Active Duty Airman is preparing to deploy again.

The Guard's 'mob-to-dwell' cycle creates predictability for our members, families and employers. You know when you will be gone, and your family and employer know when you will be home.

Consider this idea on a small scale. In my standard work day, I plan to work out one hour every day at lunch. This lets me plan everything else about my day and not miss any of my workouts. I get my work done and take care of my personal health (and score much better on my Air Force Fitness Assessment too), because I created a pre-planned predictable schedule ... creating balance in my life. Being predictable about something as simple as one hour a day literally creates weeks and months of stability in my workload and personal health. While I may not always get that plan to work 100 percent of the time, having a plan keeps me closer to reaching my goals.

Applying that philosophy to deployment planning can generate several years (not just weeks and months) of predictability. Every squadron has an established mobilization plan to support their specific mission of which we all are a part. This plan lets you know when you're scheduled to fulfill a pre-planned mobilization within the next three to five years, helping you map out other important life events and career opportunities. The guaranteed dwell provided by the Involuntary Mobilization Plan creates predictability, and ensures you have the best chance for maximized benefits. This is how we can balance being both a citizen and an Airman, and continue to do both well. We can intelligently maximize our ability to get in the fight without a total sacrifice of our civilian lives. And just like my workouts every day don't always pan out, adjustments can be made. We have tools to adjust the mobilizations as well when needed. Proactively identifying when something has changed is the key. We can be predictable, we can balance, and we can adjust. It just takes planning — like the involuntary mobility planning.

The unique part for us is how the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC)-factor has changed everything from the original ANGRC plan just a bit. AFSOC's goal is to employ the MC-12W continually at a forward location and provide continuity of presence. Meaning when we deploy, we stay at the same place, working with the same teams, which is different from any other Air National Guard unit. Most wings take turns with other wings to deploy with their own assets to support the same mission. Because we are the only Air Force wing with the MC-12W, no other wing can support our mission and rotation commitment. This makes us the only ANG wing in a constant state of deployment ... no breaks. We're unique.

As such, we persuaded the ANGRC to take another look at how we're built to see if the math was wrong ... turns out it was. This miscalculation impacts the entire base, not just the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) units. Every deployment is a base-level event. From finance, logistics, and unit deployment managers who help each other out, to the families that look after each other during deployments — everyone is involved when someone deploys from the base. You may not realize it, since you've been doing it for half a decade now, but it's true. Nothing happens by itself.

I hope by writing this, I've highlighted a couple small but important things. First, just knowing and understanding this information is valuable. You are already a part of the Operational Reserve, which is becoming increasingly vital to the Department of Defense's Total Force. Second, as leadership, we are well-aware of how deployments affect you, your family, and your employer; we are working to protect your deployment predictability and your benefits while ensuring you have the opportunity to join the fight. Finally, every deployment takes every single one of us — no matter who's going.

Therefore, I encourage you to take advantage of predictability, whether it's working out daily, spending time with your family, growing in your civilian job or supporting global operations abroad. I'm ready and I know you are too! **AO**

Master Sgt. Michael Tice (left), cable antenna systems journeyman and Master Sgt. Matt Burnett (right), cable antenna systems craftsman, assigned to the 205th Engineering and Installation Squadron (205th EIS) at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, install channeling in preparation for incoming fiber optic cables underneath Wyoming Air National Guard Base in Cheyenne, Wyo., Aug. 13, 2019. When all is said and done, the 205th EIS will have installed over 11,000 feet of fiber optic cable underneath the installation during the project.

Trial by Fiber

Story and Photography: Staff Sgt. Jordan E. Martin
Location: Wyoming Air National Guard Base, Cheyenne, Wyoming

It's a long road for a fiber optic cable. The signal itself travels down the line at the speed of light, but the job of physically channeling the cable under the ground and through buildings is only as fast as the hands that work it.

The 205th Engineering and Installation Squadron (205th EIS) routed more than 11,000 feet of fiber optic cable across the winding infrastructure of Wyoming Air National Guard Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming, beginning Aug. 12, 2019. The delicate fiber must navigate sharp hairpin turns and safely travel down tight channels, far underneath the base, ultimately plunging upward to end at terminal points in office communications rooms.

Every inch of the fiber installed is routed by hand. Every cut of cable is double-checked and then triple-checked for accuracy. Damaged lines, wrong turns or not enough cable can mean wasted man-hours, money and delays to a project.

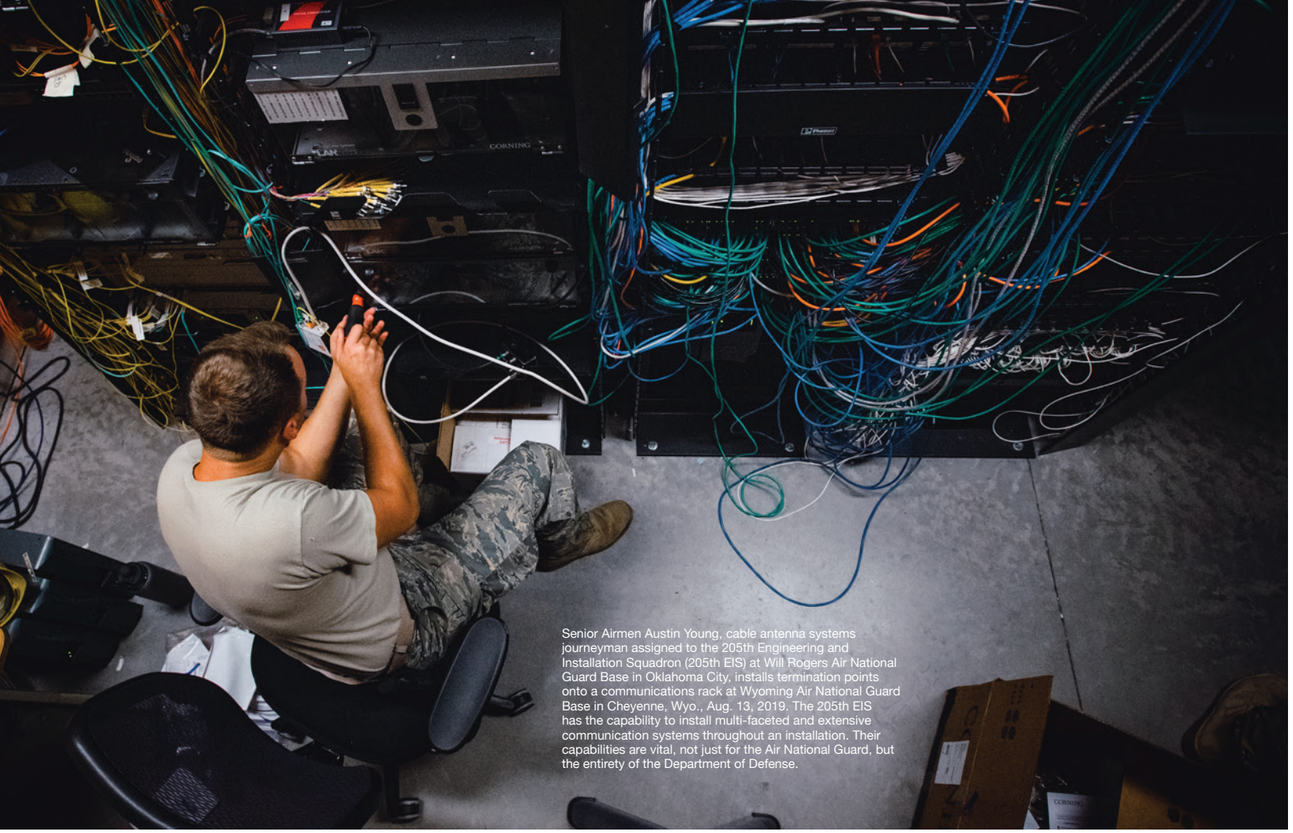
Ultimately, the weight of the pressure, the details, successes and failures of the project fall on a single set of shoulders — the team chief.

Tech. Sgt. Austin Juergens, a radar, airfield and weather systems specialists with the 205th EIS, shouldered the task for the first time and, if successful, could take on the title of project team chief officially.

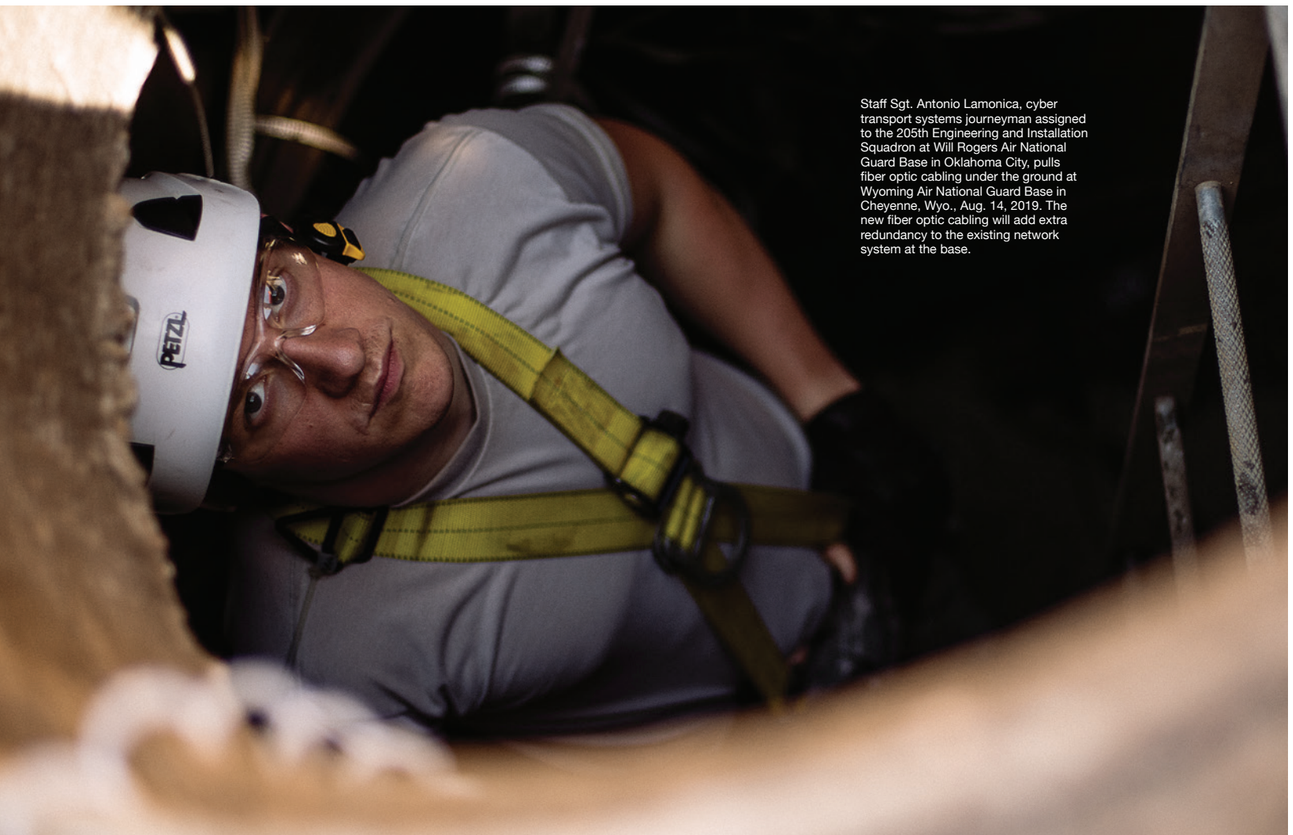
"I've only been in for about nine years," said Juergens. "It's a pretty big accomplishment. Not everyone gets to have it — especially so fast. Even then, it's a very select few."

To even be considered as a candidate for team chief, it takes extensive training, interviews, the trust of the Airman's leadership and, ultimately, commander approval.

"We get jobs from different bases that need upgrades on infrastructure or communication,"



Senior Airmen Austin Young, cable antenna systems journeyman assigned to the 205th Engineering and Installation Squadron (205th EIS) at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, installs termination points onto a communications rack at Wyoming Air National Guard Base in Cheyenne, Wyo., Aug. 13, 2019. The 205th EIS has the capability to install multi-faceted and extensive communication systems throughout an installation. Their capabilities are vital, not just for the Air National Guard, but the entirety of the Department of Defense.



Staff Sgt. Antonio Lamonica, cyber transport systems journeyman assigned to the 205th Engineering and Installation Squadron at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, pulls fiber optic cabling under the ground at Wyoming Air National Guard Base in Cheyenne, Wyo., Aug. 14, 2019. The new fiber optic cabling will add extra redundancy to the existing network system at the base.

explained Juergens. “The team chief goes up there and basically runs the whole show. They get all the paperwork done and communicate with everyone. They’re the head person for the job.”

As one of the 15 existing engineering and installation squadrons in the U.S. Air Force (14 of which belong to the Air National Guard), the 205th EIS installs, removes and relocates command, control, communication, computer and intelligence information systems and infrastructure such as antennas, cabling, radios, navigational aids and meteorological equipment.

On this particular project, the crew of 14 Airmen worked close-quarters to prepare manholes for incoming fiber optic line and inside communication rooms to set up the Wyoming base for the new system. The new fiber optic lines added an extra level of redundancy to the base’s existing fiber optic network. Within the nearly three weeks and 200 man-hours it took to complete, the Airmen also checked on projects they had worked on the year before.

“Last year we did a tower upgrade and installed new grounding and new cabling for all of their antennas and all of their other towers,” said Juergens. “Basically, we come up every year and make sure they are still up to code and don’t need any more work from us.”

In the field, the self-proclaimed “cable dogs” jumped at the opportunity to pull fiber lines in the hot and damp manholes that run the length of Wyoming Air National Guard Base. Rank or skill-level seem to have no bearing on who gets their hands dirty as willingness to get in the holes and worth ethic shine brighter than anything else.

“This is hard work and you can’t expect to come in and not shed sweat,” said Senior Airman Austin Young, a relatively new cable and antenna systems journeyman on the crew. “They expect me to put out just as much work as everyone else. If my supervisors are out in the holes and can work, I need to be able to do everything that they can do.”

That consistency, hard work and professionalism of Juergens and his crew didn’t go unnoticed by the customers they served.

“The most positive thing I’ve noticed is the consistent communication ever since they’ve been here,” said Senior Master Sgt. Eric Farmer, plans and programs superintendent at the 153rd Airlift Wing (153rd AW) at the Wyoming Guard base. “I’ve gotten constant updates from Juergens with what they’re doing, what percentage they are at, and where they are going next, and it’s been really good to be kept in the loop on things.”

Additionally, sourcing the work from inside the Air Force was a huge plus for the Wyoming wing.

“Calling these guys and having them do the work for us is much easier and beneficial for us,” continued Farmer. “They are in-the-know on how things are supposed to be set up, and when working with a commercial contractor you have to develop statements of work and jump over all the poles required on the commercial side of the house. In comparison to working with fellow Air Force, that’s a lot more time consuming.”

The 205th EIS plays an important role in providing a vital service to the Department of Defense and installations around the globe. The unit not only activates for normal deployment rotations, but is requested regularly for Air and Space Expeditionary Force (AEF) deployments and is activated by other branches in efforts to transition temporary deployed systems into more permanent infrastructures.

“There is a big difference between choosing us and a contractor to do the work,” said Juergens. “A contractor is a lot more expensive and they will probably take longer to get the work done. We are cheaper, a lot more knowledgeable, and in most aspects, we work harder.”

Back on site in Wyoming, as the crews worked into the evening to wrap up the day’s work and tie up the literal loose ends of fiber optic cable, Juergens worked to make sure his crews are fed and prepared for the day of work ahead.

With the weight of mission success still squarely on his shoulders, Juergens trusted that he and his team would manage both the scope and detail of the intensive project.

“I am fairly knowledgeable about the job, so I’m not too worried,” he said. “And I have a stacked team with a whole lot of experience. **AO**

DID YOU KNOW ...

THE 137TH SPEC OPS COMM FLIGHT

client systems specialists play a vital role ensuring that we maintain access and control of the critical technology necessary to complete all of our missions?

COMPUTER REPAIRS PER YEAR:

875

AVERAGE CALLS PER YEAR:

12,365

COMM FOCAL POINT

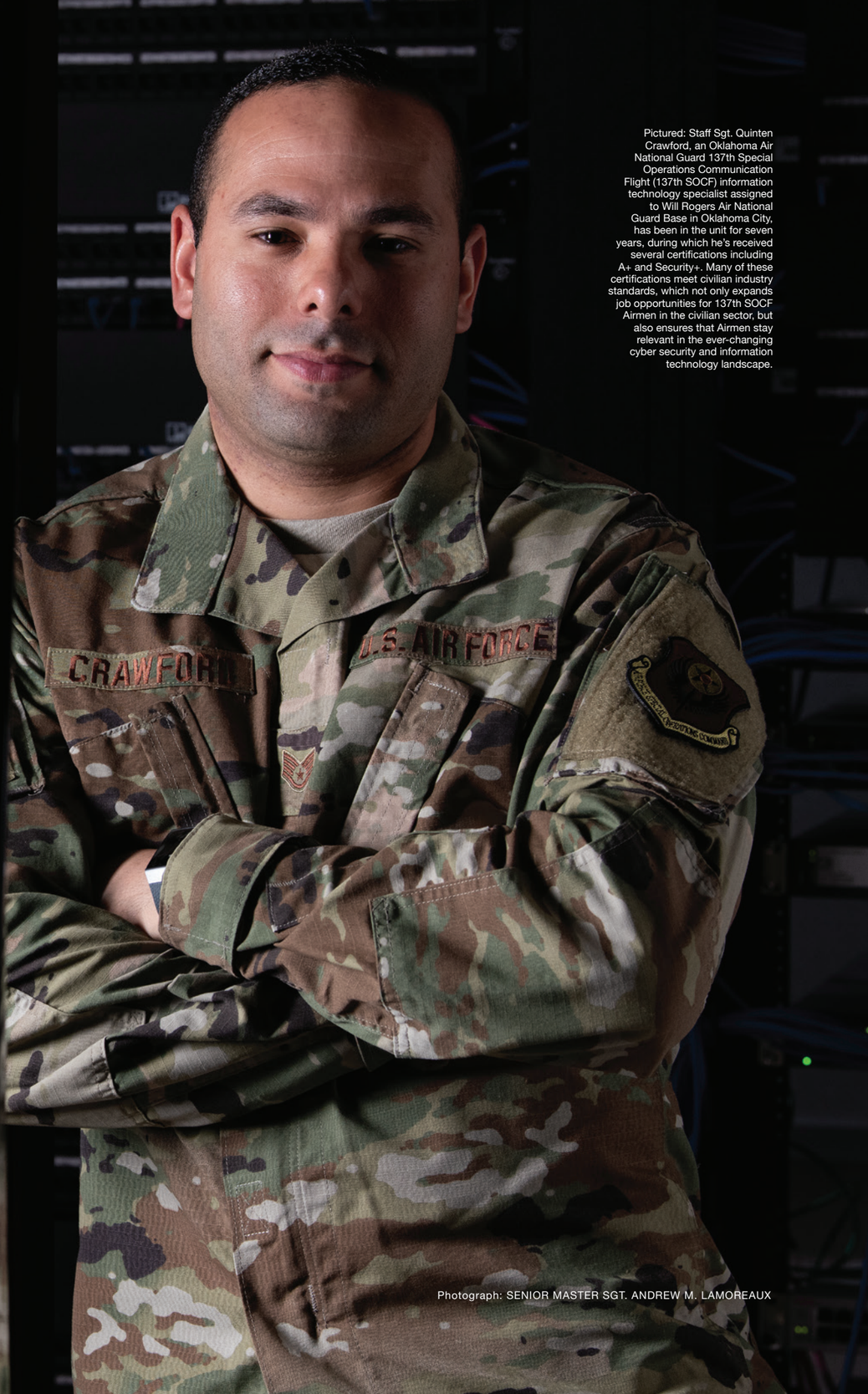
MNO TUV MNO JKL OPER OPER OPER
6 8 6 - 5 0 0 0

BASE (INFO TECH) IT EQUIPMENT MANAGED

4,900

1,124 AVERAGE WORK TICKETS CLOSED PER YEAR

18 AVERAGE PROJECTS **COMPLETED** ANNUALLY THAT AFFECT **COMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE** FOR **ALL** OF WILL ROGERS **AIR NATIONAL GUARD** BASE

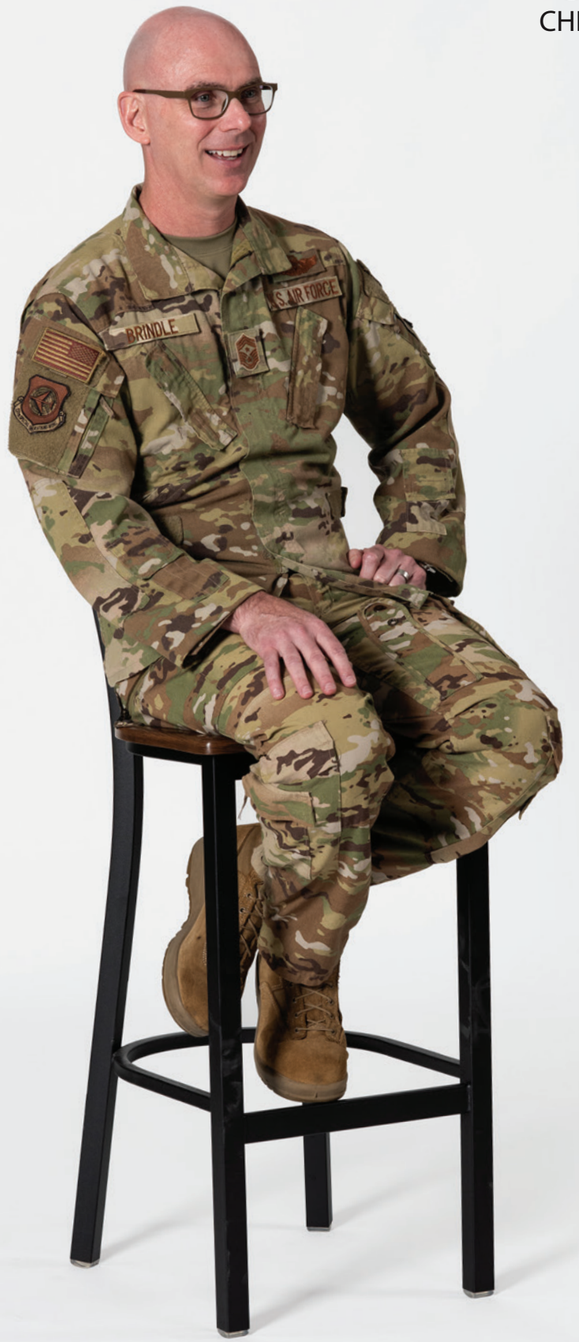


Pictured: Staff Sgt. Quinten Crawford, an Oklahoma Air National Guard 137th Special Operations Communication Flight (137th SOCF) information technology specialist assigned to Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, has been in the unit for seven years, during which he's received several certifications including A+ and Security+. Many of these certifications meet civilian industry standards, which not only expands job opportunities for 137th SOCF Airmen in the civilian sector, but also ensures that Airmen stay relevant in the ever-changing cyber security and information technology landscape.

Photograph: SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX

COMMAND CHIEF

CHIEF MASTER SGT. BRIAN A. BRINDLE



Photograph: SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX

HUMANS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN HARDWARE

"Humans are more important than hardware."

We know this to be the first Truth of Special Operations Forces (SOF). This simple sentence highlights the importance of how we as Airmen contribute more to the success of the organization and its mission than the equipment we use, no matter how expensive or sophisticated it might be. This means that we all have the responsibility to take care of the human element with as much — if not more — attention than we give to our equipment. But even more essential to fulfilling the first SOF Truth is a strong commitment by every one of us to maintain the human element.

Fortunately, we have been using one of the best tools for the job for quite some time — the Wingman Concept. Airmen are taught from early in Basic Military Training the importance of having a wingman to help them, from mundane tasks in garrison, to the most demanding downrange scenarios, and everything in between. It is a proven concept that embodies the Air Force Core Values, develops strong bonds within a team and provides a foundation of security and safety.

The term "Wingman" is so inherently Air Force that it should go without saying that we should be the best at watching out for one another. But like any concept that must be put into practice, it takes learning and skill to make it effective. The origin of the term comes literally from the earliest days of aviation when pilots started flying aircraft in formation, a capability that requires a lot of training and skill. Early on, they learned that to face difficult situations like combat, the mutual support from a wingman is essential to completing the mission and getting home safely.

Wingmen in flight keep each other informed, identifying any issues that may affect the success or safety of the formation, enhancing situational awareness and preparing for contingency plans should things go awry. They scan for threats, such as enemy aircraft or surface-to-air missiles, or other induced risks. If a wingman sees a member of the formation having trouble staying on course, or experiences a system malfunction, she or he speaks up assertively. A correction is made, assistance is offered or a decision to turn for home is made. Regardless, as professional Airmen, we bear the individual responsibility to decide whether to take the wingman's advice; the wingman cannot take over your controls.

It is also a wingman's or leader's responsibility to self-identify issues they may be having with themselves or their equipment. The leader needs to know when the entire formation is not 100 percent able to perform the mission as planned. The mission objectives may not be achieved, and the rest of the formation may be unnecessarily put at risk by diverting resources, attention and energy.

So, what about the human formations of our squadron, group, etc.? How can we improve the ways we watch out for each other? I think that by applying some of the similar concepts from our mission to Fly, Fight, and Win, we can become more effective as wingmen and leaders.

Understand the necessity. Knowing that the success of the mission and everyone involved requires a dedicated commitment to the wingman concept establishes the "why" or purpose that drives us to be alert, proactive and assertive when it comes to caring for one another.

Develop a strong team. Whether it is an office whose members have been working together for years, or a newly-formed expeditionary unit of total strangers, it is important for everyone to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of their teammates, their different roles and how to best communicate. We could fill a library of books about team building, and in addition to communication, each one of them would mention the need to develop a sense of trust. It is that important. We have to have trust in our mission, our leaders, our teammates, our equipment and ourselves. Sometimes that trust is well-earned, sometimes that trust is blind. Part of being a Quiet Professional is knowing that there are others out there as skilled and dedicated as you are, and that they have your back.

You also have to earn the trust of others. Like the lead pilot trusting that her/his wingman will fly safely and perform all the necessary mission tasks, we need to be a trustworthy wingman on the ground. Dignity and respect are essential elements to building trust; without them trust cannot be earned. With our goal of caring for and maintaining the human element, it is important that we all treat each other in a way that helps preserve individuals' dignity and respects their humanity, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, etc. This is actually easier than you think; just be mindful of others.

Another way to be a good wingman, just like in flying, is to scan for threats to the formation. The threats we all face to our wellness, stability or health are as varied as we are. They come from all angles: family, finances, work, trauma, etc. By having a strong sense of Esprit de Corps, and having more open communication, we can maintain the high sense of situational awareness required to provide solid mutual support. You will know who recently got back from a difficult deployment, or who just seems "off", and you'll be able to steer them toward getting whatever help they need. We will also be more willing to identify our own issues, understanding our individual value to the formation and how its success depends on every member to be fully mission capable.

These techniques and many others are all very helpful in helping us maintain our human component. But like any complex or critical action, some training and/or practice is necessary prior to real-world use. Open your communication networks, develop strong teams, and enhance everyone's situational awareness now. Find and utilize various tools and resources to better prepare yourself to engage in potentially serious situations. Visit our Care Team, or www.resilience.af.mil, for some good information.

Build trust in your organizations and relationships so that you can communicate openly. Earn the trust of your fellow Airmen, and offer them your trust. Start small with benign, non-critical situations. Take another tool from the flyer's toolkit: the post-flight debrief. Discuss how you and your wingman handled a situation and how you can do it better next time. Provide and be open to honest feedback. If your formation is well-equipped and well-trained, you will be prepared to cope with more challenging situations. When a fellow Airman needs a wingman for support during an especially difficult time, you will both have the confidence and trust in yourselves and each other to get through it.

Much of this discussion relates to the topic of resiliency, a term we use repeatedly in the context of suicide prevention. Suicide is the deadliest enemy we are facing lately, and no single preventative measure will defeat it. The Wingman Concept, and the notion that "humans are more important than hardware" are just two of the many approaches we can and must take to protect our formations. It takes every tactic, technique and procedure at our disposal to engage our Airmen at all levels, across ranks, age, ideology, etc. It is going to take all of us in the formation to get the job done, and I know we will be successful. I am personally honored to be part of your team, and proud to be your Wingman. **AO**

THE FUTURE OF SAVING WARFIGHTERS

Story and Photography: **Tech. Sgt. Kasey M. Phipps**
Location: **Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center, Alpena, Michigan**
Location: **Camp Grayling Joint Maneuver Training Center, Grayling, Michigan**

Helicopter-driven winds beat the outside of the tent as another influx of patients is assessed in lines of military green litters. Inside the tent, healthcare providers rush around their already established patients, gauging needs, ordering care and making space for the new inflow.

Over the frantic murmurs, crosstalk and the roar of fading helicopter blades, one piqued voice carried over it all.

“That’s my decision?!”

When faced with making the decision to continue possible life-saving treatment by using valuable medical supplies on a single patient, or order morphine and comfort and allow those supplies to put several other service members back into the fight, the Michigan Air National Guard nurse – and other medical group Airmen like her – experienced firsthand the massive transformation to peer and near-peer warfare that was the focus of Northern Strike 2019.

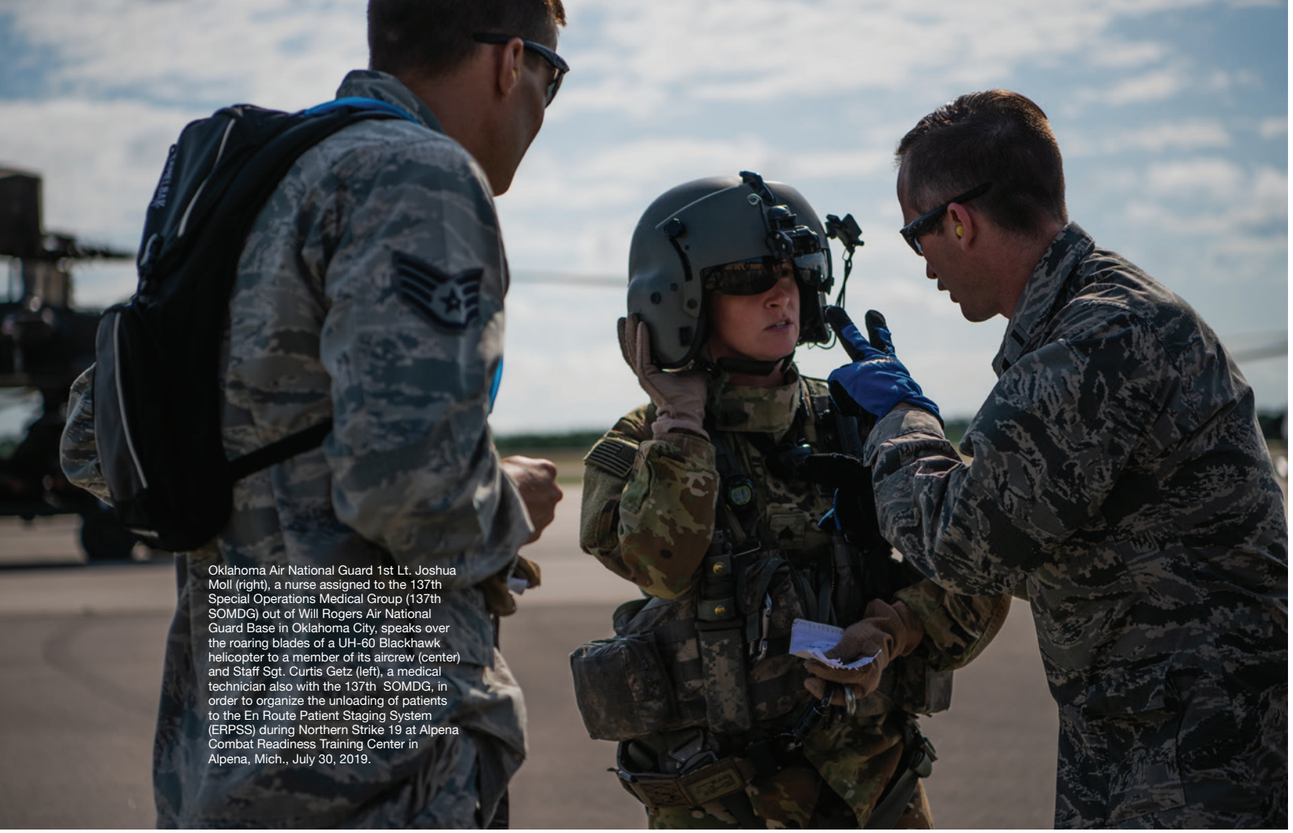
“In a peer, near-peer environment, we don’t own the sky,” said Michigan Air National Guard Col. Sid Martin, Air National Guard Assistant to the United States Air Forces in Europe – Air Forces Africa Surgeon General. “These folks — which include Michigan, Minnesota and Oklahoma medical groups — are beginning to write the book on what patient care and movement is going to look like in this environment, where casualties, no kidding, really overwhelm the system and where people begin to have to make decisions about care based on survivability. In these crisis standards of care, people will begin to have to make very conscious decisions about where we’re going to apply resources because there simply will be more patients that need resources than there are actual resources.”

Northern Strike 19 is a National Guard Bureau-sponsored exercise uniting more than 6,000 service members from more than 20 states, multiple service branches and seven coalition countries during the last two weeks of July 2019 at the Camp Grayling Joint Maneuver Training Center and the Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center, both located in northern Michigan and operated by the Michigan National Guard.

The exercise integrated medical patient movement by adding more realistic wartime stress to the usual casualty care and patient movement system, which included significant capability degradation, crisis standards of care and critical-thinking expansion.

“In the medical community, we’ve gotten used to the fact that things run on a schedule, paperwork is always in-hand, the patients always meet the regulatory definition of what an aeromedical

Michigan Air National Guard Capt. Jahir Ramos (right), a medical provider assigned to the 127th Medical Group out of Selfridge Air National Guard Base near Mount Clemens, Mich., works with an Oklahoma Air National Guard Airman as he evaluates the simulated patient’s condition based off of a patient card during Northern Strike 19 at Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center in Alpena, Mich., July 29, 2019.



Oklahoma Air National Guard 1st Lt. Joshua Moll (right), a nurse assigned to the 137th Special Operations Medical Group (137th SOMDG) out of Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, speaks over the roaring blades of a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter to a member of its aircrew (center) and Staff Sgt. Curtis Getz (left), a medical technician also with the 137th SOMDG, in order to organize the unloading of patients to the En Route Patient Staging System (ERPSS) during Northern Strike 19 at Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center in Alpena, Mich., July 30, 2019.

Michigan Air National Guard Senior Airman Richard Burnett, a medical technician assigned to the 127th Medical Group out of Selfridge Air National Guard Base near Mount Clemens, Mich., properly re-secures a mannequin-simulated patient to a NATO military litter after searching it, and other the other patients from a massive influx of casualties, for weapons or other harmful materials before admittance into the En Route Patient Staging System (ERPSS) during Northern Strike 19 at Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center in Alpena, Mich., July 30, 2019.

evacuation patient is ...” said Oklahoma Air National Guard Col. Keith Reed, 137th Special Operations Medical Group (137th SOMDG) commander. “Some of the harsh realities of war come to play in that peer or near-peer environment.”

Those harsh realities of war include more casualties, more critical patients, less resources, and facilities that are closer to the warfront and less advanced than those in more established NATO areas. It also requires a stronger focus of resources on returning more service members to the fight, not home.

“In 2007, if you came to us as an American service member alive, you had a 98 percent chance of leaving our facility alive,” recalled Martin.

“Everybody still expects that 98 percent, but when I was briefing the team for this, I said, ‘Twenty percent might be good enough,’” continued Minnesota Air National Guard Col. Matt Peterson, Air National Guard Assistant to National Guard Bureau Joint Surgeon. “That sucks.”

“We’re still going to try to save as many people as we can,” continued Peterson. “That’s our nature. It’s what providers do. But at the end of the day, it’s ‘How many people can I get back into the fight?’ Because it’s that big of a fight.”

The overall casualty care and patient movement system, which is end-to-end, starts downrange at the point of injury (or POI) and continues into a Role 4 medical facility stateside.

“So let’s say at the POI, a Soldier, Airman, Marine, what have you, is injured,” explained Oklahoma Air National Guard 1st Lt. Sarah Willhight, 137th SOMDG medical administrative officer and En Route Patient Staging System planner for Northern Strike 19. “That’s considered Role 1, where you’re doing Self Aid Buddy Care or initial life-saving measures. Then, you would want to get them to a Role 2, which is like your field hospital.”

Next, the patient would ideally be treated and stabilized, properly documented and then put into the system to be medically evacuated or casualty evacuated to a staging area, called the En Route Patient Staging System, or ERPSS.

“At ERPSS, usually you’ll have a stable patient,” continued Willhight. “We receive them, we take care of their paperwork, their personal effects, make sure that they don’t have any weapons hidden, give them something to eat and then load them onto a plane for Aeromedical Evacuation Teams to take them to a Role 3, which is still usually a hospital not within the United States.”

ERPSS is an active duty-funded personnel package that acts as a sort of hold-over for patients awaiting evacuation to a higher level of care. The 137th SOMDG is assigned the ERPSS 10, which is made up of 13 personnel and designed to care for 10 patients for two to six hours, 40 patients a day, for seven days before needing a resupply. The highest echelon of care is nursing.

Despite its design, the scenarios of Northern Strike sent 50 in-bound and unregulated patients to the ERPSS within a 45-minute window, forcing the medical teams to scramble and stretch not just the capabilities of ERPSS, but also the limits of the Airmen.

“What was the most challenging during this three-day exercise for us was the actualization that even though we were set up as an ERPSS-10 package, we were still receiving patients we didn't have the capability of saving,” said Oklahoma Air National Guard Airman 1st Class Misha Claytor, 137th SOMDG medical technician. “If you think of real-world situations, it's actually very sad. I learned that even though some or even most can't be saved, as a medic, you have to move on and keep trying for the next person. Emotions need to be set aside for the entire time you work.”

For the 137th SOMDG, the ERPSS personnel package contains the only deployable positions within the unit, outside of the first sergeant and superintendent, which means it requires unique training that extends past the usual physicals and immunizations for which most Airmen know medical groups at Guard bases.

“To be a part of ERPSS for us is an opportunity to deploy, because we don’t get a lot of those opportunities,” said Willhight. “Our primary mission is to make sure the members of our base have their medical readiness items taken care of. So ERPSS is what we can do to feel like we’re a more integral part of the war fight. The need for us out there is hard to see when we’re not actually exercising our clinical skills.”

“We are the expeditionary ERPSS,” said Willhight. “It’s a modular system, so we’re normally first on the ground, on a bare base.”

As an expeditionary system, the ERPSS was setup right off of major airways — such as the Army Airfield at Grayling and near bare-bones field hospitals while deployed — where medical helicopters coast nearly to the front tent opening to offload patients. While training for ERPSS, Airmen even learn night-vision driving and loading and offloading patients to buses, ambulances, aircraft, Humvees and two-ton trucks.

“Your ERPSS people are in the fight,” emphasized Martin. “This is not in-garrison operations. They are training to go to war and they are as critical a piece of the puzzle as any of the things that go ‘bang’ or ‘boom’ in the night. We need Oklahoma, including the ERPSS, to continue to play a part outside the state to help us develop what the future looks like.” **AO**

DID YOU KNOW ...

THE 137TH SOLRS FUELS MGMT FLT

manages the refueling of every aircraft on the flight line and are responsible for the vehicles, equipment and storage facilities that are vital to refueling while also ensuring the compliance of all safety regulations for these volatile liquids?

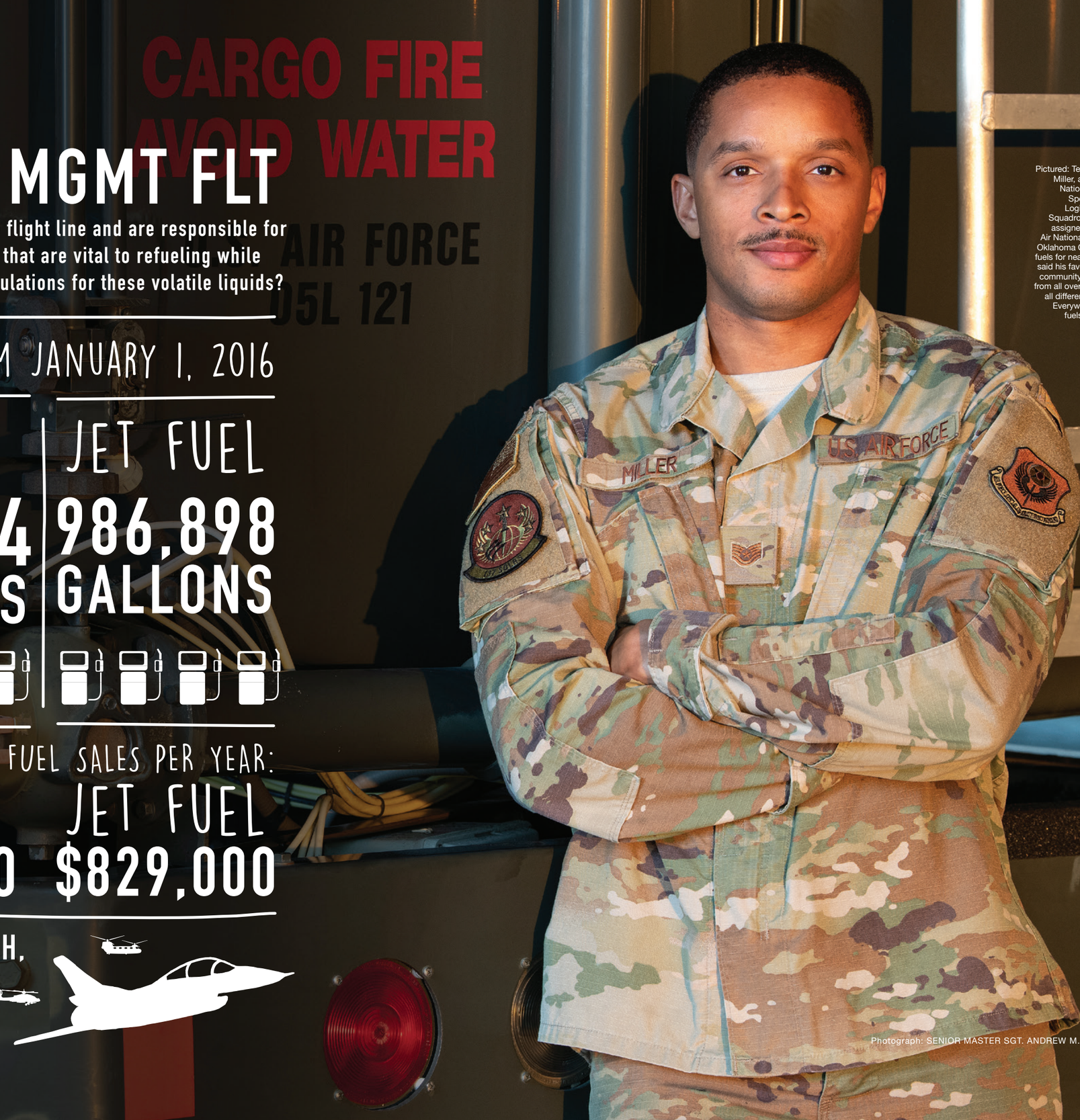
TOTAL GALLONS PUMPED FROM JANUARY 1, 2016

UNLEADED	DIESEL	JET FUEL
31,230 GALLONS	41,454 GALLONS	986,898 GALLONS

DEFENSE LOGISTICS AGENCY ENERGY FUEL SALES PER YEAR:

UNLEADED	DIESEL	JET FUEL
$29,000	$43,000	$829,000

AIRCRAFT SERVICED: **MC-12W, C-130H, C-17, C-5, KC-135, CH-47, F-16, UH-60, AH-64, UH-72 and U-28**

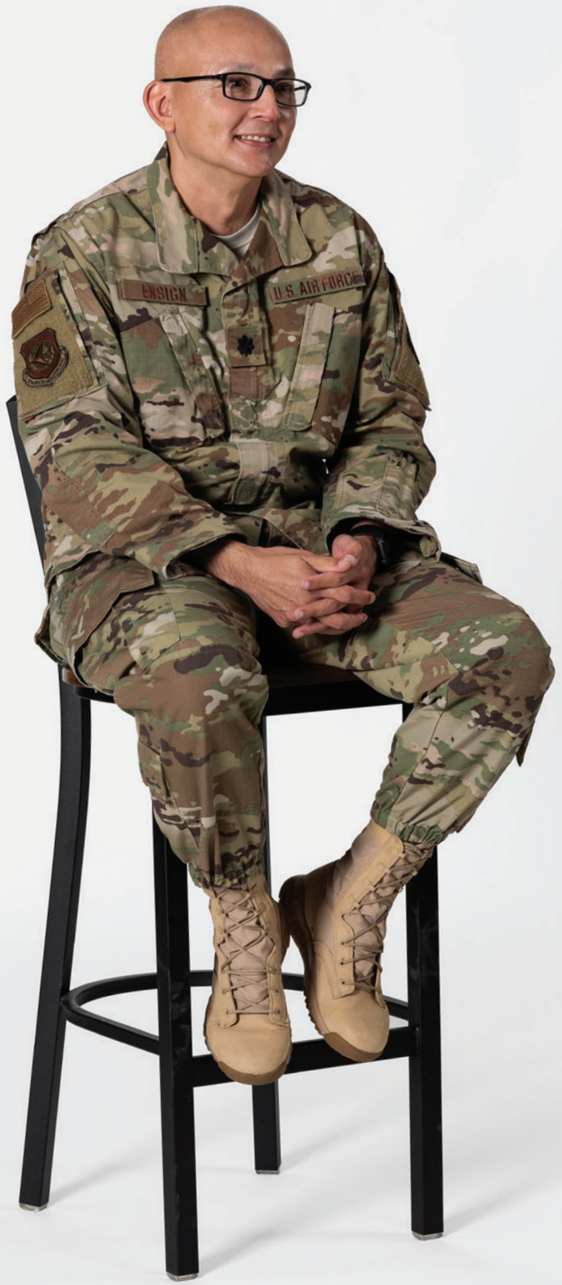


Pictured: Tech. Sgt. Kentrell Miller, an Oklahoma Air National Guard 137th Special Operations Logistics Readiness Squadron fuels operator assigned to Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, has been in fuels for nearly 13 years. He said his favorite thing is the community: "I have friends from all over the world, from all different backgrounds. Everywhere I go, I have fuels family nearby."

Photograph: SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX

COMPTROLLER

LT. COL. KHANH M. ENSIGN



Photograph: SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX

SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF

In 1997, Dr. Richard Carlson wrote his groundbreaking book, which was number one on the New York Times list for over 100 weeks, called “Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff ... and It’s All Small Stuff.” In his book, Dr. Carlson shared several techniques to help stop the little things in your life from driving you bonkers. To help manage your expectations about my writing and prior to you reading any further, you should understand a couple of things: 1) this will NOT be groundbreaking; 2) this will NOT end up being number one on the New York Times list; and 3) this is more about you actually “Sweating Some of the Small Stuff.”

Throughout my career, I have learned the importance of members taking care of the “small stuff” because it ultimately allows us to be more effective at our mission. For example, several months ago after one of our staff meetings, one of our senior leaders was explaining his expectations to me regarding how my Comptroller Flight members and I should approach meeting various requirements.

If you are not familiar with our staff meetings, they are like most staff meetings, which often contain presentation slides highlighting various requirements and the status of the members in accomplishing those requirements — names colored yellow for requirements coming due and colored red for requirements overdue. These requirements (aka “small stuff”) typically include items such as fitness testing, medical readiness, performance reports and various training.

When explaining his expectations to me this senior leader simply said, “Khanh, if you’re yellow, you’re red.” If I am yellow, I am red?!? Was this colonel totally confused about the definition of “primary colors” and how these colors actually work? Absolutely not. He was trying to emphasize the importance of taking care of the “small stuff” and, more importantly, taking care of it in a timely manner. Do not wait until you are overdue to take care of a requirement — take care of it as soon as you are aware it is coming due. Get after that “yellow” requirement using the same sense of urgency as if it was an overdue “red” requirement.

Most of our “small stuff” requirements happen on a recurring basis, so there should be very few surprises when it comes to the due dates — we should all know when we are due for a fitness test, teeth cleaning, performance report, etc. You may be saying to yourself “This fella doesn’t know — I have way too much to get after right now, so what’s the big deal if I wait until right before the deadline to meet a requirement?” Well I have observed on many occasions where members with well-constructed plans to procrastinate to the last possible moment to accomplish a requirement fail due to unforeseen circumstances.

So, what is the potential harm if we find ourselves overdue on one of these requirements? Being overdue for your fitness test and/or performance report could result in an invitation for you to meet and explain why you are overdue to your supervisor, commander, group commander, and even wing commander. All these meetings require time — time that could be better spent getting after our mission. As members of the Air National Guard, we should be prepared and ready to deploy at any time — being overdue on your medical readiness could prevent you from doing so. And in the event you were already tasked to deploy but now are unable to due to medical readiness, a replacement from your unit or some other unit would be needed. Finding this replacement would take time — time that again could be better spent getting after our mission.

As the Comptroller, I would be remiss if I did not discuss the importance of members taking care of the “small stuff” related to finance as well, because it, too, ultimately allows us to be more effective at our mission. And yes, I know what some of you who know me are thinking ... “Here we go again! Will this fella ever stop nagging us about finance issues?” And for those folks who really know me, you probably already know that as long as I am the Comptroller, the answer to that question is “very doubtful.” So, what is the finance related “small stuff” I think is important for members to take care of that will ultimately allow us to be more effective at our mission? To keep this short work from turning into a novel, the finance related “small stuff” I will discuss only includes annual training orders, timecards, travel authorizations and vouchers, and government travel cards.

Upon completion of your annual training orders, it is important you complete your statement of duty and ensure it gets certified. Failing to do this could result in a delay of pay. If you are a technician, it is important you complete your timecard and ensure it is certified in a timely manner. Failing to do this could result in a delay of pay.

Are you starting to see a trend here? Unless you are independently wealthy (and I would venture a guess if you are reading this it is unlikely you are), a delay in pay could have at least some level of impact on your life. The time spent by you figuring out how to correct this delay in pay and how to meet your financial obligations because of the delay, along with the time spent by my personnel in the Comptroller Flight researching and correcting the issue, could be better spent getting after the mission.

Upon notification of travel, it is important you complete your travel authorization in a timely manner. Failing to do this could result in your reservation(s) not being booked. When traveling, there are very few things more frustrating than showing up to the airport, rental car desk, and/or hotel and finding out you do not have a reservation. The time spent contacting the travel management company/commercial travel office or my personnel in the Comptroller Flight to book your reservation(s) could be better spent getting after the mission.

Upon completion of travel, it is important you complete your travel voucher in a timely manner. Failing to do this could result in a delay of pay. Further, it could result in a delay of payment to your government travel card. While I have already discussed the potential impacts of a delay in pay, being delinquent on your government travel card balance because of a delay of pay could have the same result as being overdue for your fitness test and/or performance report – an invitation for you to meet and explain why you are delinquent to your supervisor, commander, group commander, and even wing commander. All these meetings require time – time that again could be better spent getting after the mission.

So again, let’s get after taking care of the “small stuff” and getting after it in a timely manner, because doing so will ultimately allow us to be more effective at our mission. **AO**

Operators from Naval Special Warfare establish their location after being infilled to Razorback Range near Fort Smith, Ark., by an Oklahoma Army National Guard CH-47 Chinook, assigned to the 2nd General Support Aviation Battalion, 149th Aviation Regiment of the 36th Combat Aviation Brigade, 36th Infantry Division, during a full mission profile training with the 137th Special Operations Group Mission Support Team out of Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, July 23, 2019.

STACKING THE DECK

Story: **Staff Sgt. Brigette A. Waltermire**
Photography: **Senior Master Sgt. Andrew M. LaMoreaux**
Location: **Razorback Range, near Fort Smith, Arkansas**

Planning, coordination and execution.

Every operation, training mission or brief in the United States military must follow this basic process.

That is where the 137th Special Operations Group Mission Support Team (137th SOG MST) at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City excels. Their ability to meticulously and fluidly execute makes them one of the most unique assets in the country for special operations joint and combined training.

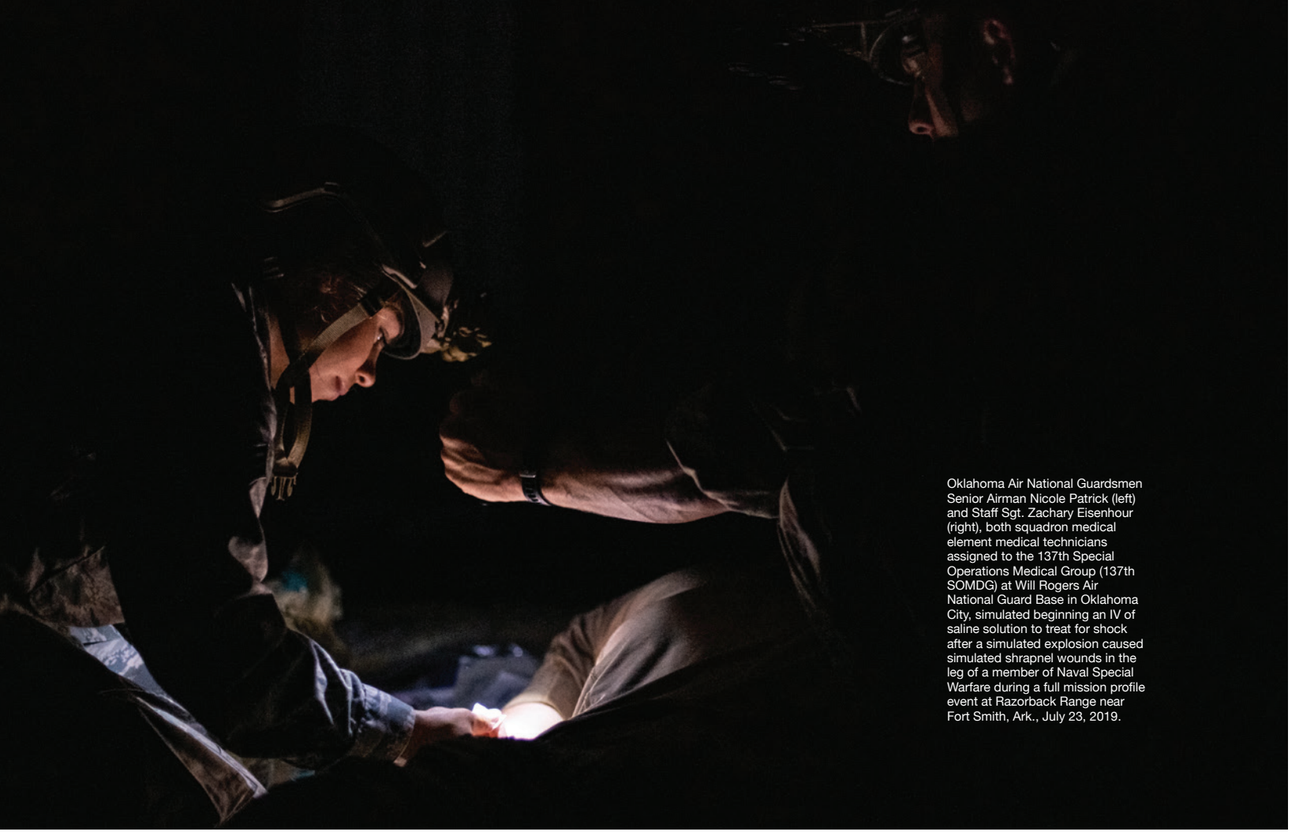
Originally established to support and train its fellow operations squadron and the MC-12W intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance mission, the 137th SOG MST coordinates training events spanning from one day to two weeks for special operations military personnel who request it — such as U.S. Naval Special Warfare (NSW) out of San Diego who trained for two weeks with the 137th SOG MST's help, July 15-26, 2019.

NSW came to Oklahoma City for the third time this year in order to conduct integrated close air support and ground forces training in a full mission profile environment involving simultaneous events with simulated and live ordnance at three different locations in the local Oklahoma City area; Falcon Range located near Lawton, Oklahoma; and Razorback Range near Fort Smith, Arkansas. The event focused on NSW Joint Terminal Attack Controllers (JTACs) and ground force commanders (GFCs) and required them to work closely together to control all supporting air assets as well as the movement of their team on the ground, which together included units from four major service branches: the U.S. Army, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Marine Corps and the U.S. Navy.

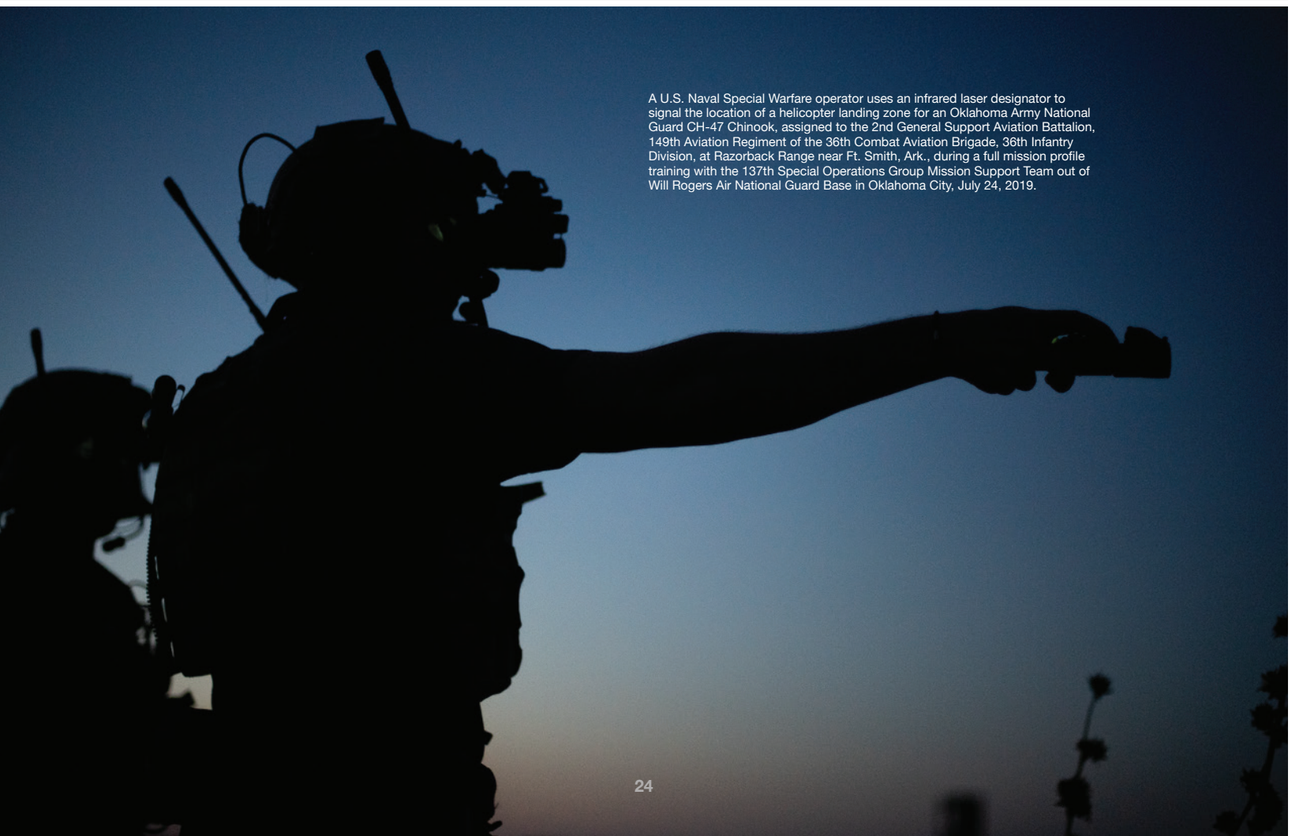
"Any Special Operations Forces (SOF) customer can come here, where we can provide them the opportunity to work with us and the MC-12W in order to better understand the unique capabilities it provides while also conducting and executing an array of training with a robust stack of close air support and intelligence aircraft watching their every move in a concerted effort to find, fix and finish adversaries," said Oklahoma Air National Guard Tech. Sgt. Jason Farrand, 137th SOG MST noncommissioned officer in charge and lead mission coordinator.

Throughout the training, the Naval Special Warfare JTACs and ground force commanders learned to respond to a variety of scenarios that required assessing potential threats and countering those threats. Part of the capabilities they learned to utilize included air support assets that are essential to missions — from planning and execution to completion. This exercise allowed the JTACs to work with a diverse set of supporting assets, including seven different aircraft from New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma.

"The fact they get to be there with all of the pilots is a unique part of the environment," said a NSW Training Detachment JTAC chief petty officer. "Downrange, you don't typically have a debriefing face-to-face with pilots — everything is usually coordinated over the phone. Working with aircraft and being a part of the mission briefs helps our guys understand what the aircraft can do."



Oklahoma Air National Guardsmen Senior Airman Nicole Patrick (left) and Staff Sgt. Zachary Eisenhour (right), both squadron medical element medical technicians assigned to the 137th Special Operations Medical Group (137th SOMDG) at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, simulated beginning an IV of saline solution to treat for shock after a simulated explosion caused simulated shrapnel wounds in the leg of a member of Naval Special Warfare during a full mission profile event at Razorback Range near Fort Smith, Ark., July 23, 2019.



A U.S. Naval Special Warfare operator uses an infrared laser designator to signal the location of a helicopter landing zone for an Oklahoma Army National Guard CH-47 Chinook, assigned to the 2nd General Support Aviation Battalion, 149th Aviation Regiment of the 36th Combat Aviation Brigade, 36th Infantry Division, at Razorback Range near Ft. Smith, Ark., during a full mission profile training with the 137th Special Operations Group Mission Support Team out of Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, July 24, 2019.

The MST worked with the NSW Training Detachment to create a training plan that would focus on what they needed to accomplish for their JTACs and ground force commanders' currencies and proficiencies. By creating dynamic scenarios, the MST was also able to meet the training needs of the participating air crews.

"All the leads [for the exercise] got together and built in contingencies-to-scenarios months in advance," said a NSW Training Detachment JTAC instructor. "The JTACs have no idea what is going to happen — they think that it's one thing and then suddenly have a contingency which changes it. The white cell capability the MST brings allows us to create dynamic scenarios to stress our JTACs and bring their training to the next level."

A white cell can essentially act as whatever leadership oversight role the training audience might need them to be throughout the planning and execution stages of an operation. For a single exercise, the JTAC would have to create a mission plan, give a brief to the ground force commander, execute a scenario and conduct a debriefing. The MST has worked for months planning for this basic cycle in that white-cell role, from creating daily 70-80 page air briefs to coordinating with aircraft coming in from different locations.

In all, the two-week exercise saw a rotation of CH-47F Chinooks from Detachment 1, Company B, 2-149th General Support Aviation Battalion (2-149th GSAB) out of Lexington, Oklahoma; F-16 Fighting Falcons from the 457th Fighter Squadron in Fort Worth, Texas; F/A-18 Hornets from the Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 112 in Fort Worth; U-28As from the 318th Special Operations Squadron and AC-130W Stinger IIs from the 16th Special Operations Squadron from Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico; range coordinators; and MC-12Ws from Oklahoma City.

The JTACs and ground force commanders usually encountered counter-insurgency missions during their training, which require them to find a target, assess its threat level and address the threat after receiving sufficient information to make a decision. On the range, the JTACs must coordinate and communicate with the multiple aircraft in the airspace above, continue to track the target, as well as relay information coming from the intelligence gathered by some of those aircraft to the GFC – all while prioritizing and responding to immediate threats to the team on the ground.

To help juggle those roles, the MC-12 provides ground forces with intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance — before, during and after the mission — as well as communicates to assets in the air. The aircraft can provide full motion video and signals intelligence (SIGINT) about people of interest on the ground, which means there can be visual confirmation that the individual in question matches the one identified as a target. In war, that can be anyone from a hostage to a terrorist cell leader.

"We are going to develop the intelligence to meet a trigger that is defined by the ground force commander ... to trigger that operation for that team to now go out," said 1st Lt. Patrick DeVito, an MC-12 combat systems officer with the 185th Special Operations Squadron. "It could be days or weeks of doing this. Obviously training, we expedite that timeline to hours, so we'll come overhead hours in advance, and then we will provide them with that real-time reporting of what we're seeing at that moment until that trigger is met."

Though the MC-12 is usually the aircraft highest in the stack and furthest from the JTAC, it's oftentimes the aircraft with which the JTAC works most directly. As the highest point over the battlespace, it can open lines of communication between other parties on the ground or in the air when direct communication might not be possible due to environmental or communication platform issues.

"Before we step out the door, we discuss any contingencies and develop what's called a PACE plan — primary, alternate, contingency and emergency plans — for any type of communication," DeVito said. "We will always try to maintain what the primary is, but once something stops working or a piece of equipment fails, you have to be able to quickly shift to what that next item is down the chain to get that communication line out."

Within the scenarios, the JTACs required extraction by helicopters from one area and insertion into another. As such, the participating Chinooks required certain landing zones, but the JTACs couldn't always directly communicate with the helicopters.

The MC-12 was able to measure potential landing zones and help the two parties communicate, which takes some pressure off of the JTAC who is simultaneously tracking a target, prioritizing immediate threats on the ground, coordinating aircraft movement overhead, helping intelligence-gathering aircraft lock on to that target, waiting for intelligence to confirm the target, relay the confirmation and any other pertinent information such as aircraft capabilities to the GFC, develop an action-plan with the GFC based on that information and call in close air support if needed.

The MC-12 aircrews had required training areas as well, so the MST instructors worked those into the scenarios which added unexpected elements for the NSW JTACs.

"The value of this training done this way is invaluable," said DeVito. "Having a system with different branches, different air attack capabilities and having to speak one language creates uniformity that is vital in a true battle space. Having that capability at home where quality training can be accomplished before deploying lets these JTACs and ground commanders be fully-qualified and ready."

For the Chinooks, this exercise was as much of an opportunity to train for real-world scenarios as it was for NSW.

"We try to train to the hardest mission that we could possibly get, which is supporting the ground force, so that the guys are prepared for the worst next time we go downrange," said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Bryon Anderson, standardization pilot for the 2-149th GSAB. "The direct support mission for the U.S. Special Operations Command, that our units could possibly get, is the hardest mission we could train for. That's the unique part of the relationship we've developed."

The planning stages for this exercise brought together a variety of aircraft and scenarios that the NSW chief petty officer said he did not experience before until an actual deployment. The planning occurred months in advance and was coordinated by the MST to successfully bring together all of the components that made the exercise realistic to the special operations missions each party would encounter in a real battle space downrange.

"We integrate SIGINT and close air support under one exercise umbrella and give our SOF customers time to absorb it, focus on it and successfully exploit it the next time they go downrange," said Farrand. "The attention and one-on-one focus is exclusive to what we do here." **AO**

DID YOU KNOW ...

THE 137TH SPEC OPS SEC FORCES SQ

Defenders ensure the safety of our people, property & resources and go through extensive training in law enforcement and combat tactics to protect bases both stateside and overseas?

MONTHLY FLIGHT OPERATIONS (AVERAGE)

PERSONNEL CHECKED IDENTIFICATION
5,000

ALARMS RECEIVED
200

COMMERCIAL VEHICLES SEARCHED
140

BUILDINGS CHECKED
720

BADGES CHECKED RESTRICTED AREA
200

CALLS FIELDED
1,500

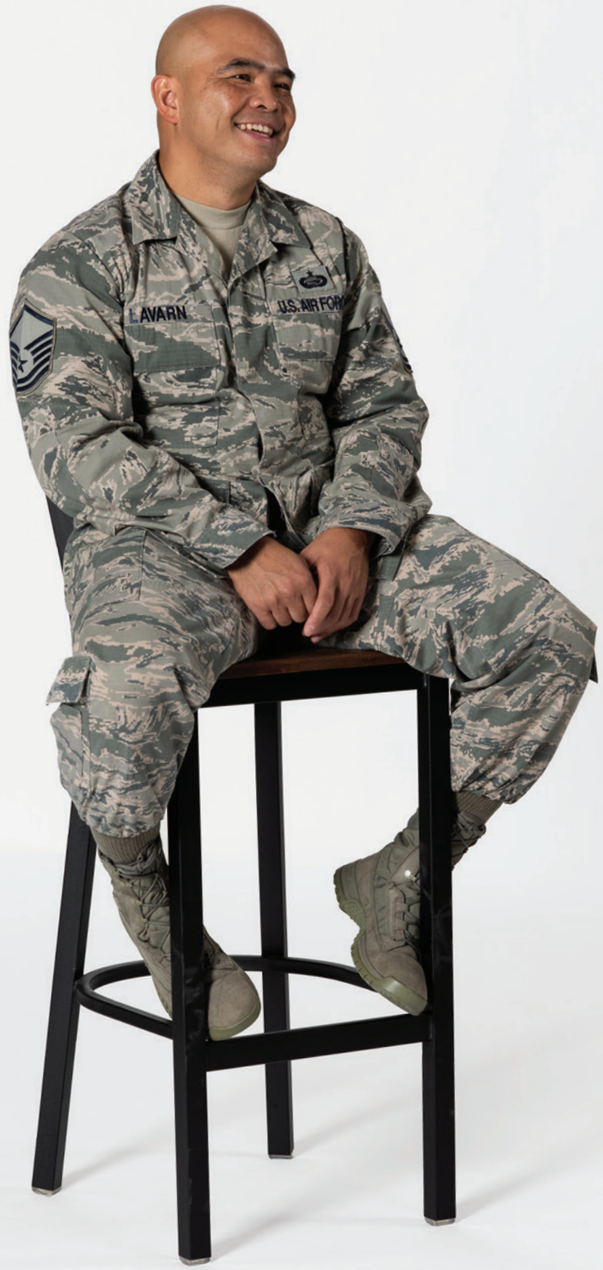
TOTAL YEARLY TRAINING ROUNDS EXPENDED: **197,506**
ONE HUNDRED AND NINETY SEVEN THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED AND SIX ROUNDS

Pictured: Staff Sgt. Kirby Beaty, an Oklahoma Air National Guard 137th Special Operations Security Forces Squadron (137th SOSFS) Defender assigned to Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, joined the 137th SOSFS in 2016 after serving 10 years as artillery in the U.S. Marine Corps. Beaty said he became a Defender because he wanted to be a first responder who others would call when they needed help.

Photograph: SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX

INSTALLATION PERSONNEL READINESS

MASTER SGT. EKARATH LAVARN



Photograph: SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX

(NO) TIME TO SPARE

As drill status Guardsmen, we only have a couple of days during drill to complete all of our training. Those drill weekends get busy, and the pieces begin moving all at once. From meetings to mandatory trainings to base-wide events, it seems like there is hardly any time left to spare. However, with what little time we have, we must allow ourselves to take care of our personal affairs. Everyone is in charge of their own career, BUT that also includes their families and dependents.

During drill and in life, we are all so focused on completing a task, we tend to push the surrounding tasks to the side. Take deployments for instance. As Guardsmen, we deploy to unknown locations and perform our duties and responsibilities to the highest level of efficiency. We constantly and consistently train to do so. For me, deploying is probably the easiest thing to do. I train, I go, and I do the job. However, my family doesn't have that kind of training. Now, for me and my family, the difficulty lies in ensuring they are taken care of in my absence. My first major deployment was in 2003 as a U.S. Army Soldier. Deploying with the Army is different than deploying with the Air Force in that I wasn't sure when I'd return home. I ended up deploying nearly eight months when it was all said and done. Before I I left, I was of course worried about my family and the added stresses of the deployment. Who pays the bills? Who takes care of the yard? That stress affects everyone.

But, similar to what we have here at the Wing, the Army also has a pre-deployment process. It allows service members to take care of their personal affairs before leaving. At the time, I was a young E-5 and I hated that I had to go to trainings, briefings and mandatory meetings with the various offices around base. Like most, I didn't fully understand the importance of ensuring my personal affairs were covered. I just wanted to spend every moment I had with my family. Fast forward to during my deployment, and I saw firsthand exactly what it meant to be away from them. Despite the inevitable stresses, I was reassured that I had done everything I could for my family in light of my absence.

To prepare now, we can take small steps, such as ensuring that our personnel records are updated. Our Virtual Record of Emergency Data (vRED) provides names and addresses of next of kin to be notified in the event of death or injury, and Service Members' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) serves as an official source document for designating beneficiaries. Although updating vRED may seem redundant, we have to change the mindset of it just being an annual requirement and look closer into how it impacts not only us, but also our families. Instead of going into vRED and just clicking submit just to "check the box" of being current, I recommend everyone take the time to analyze their information. Is your address and phone number correct? Look at the Unpaid Pay and Allowances, Death Gratuity, and Person Authorized to Direct Disposition (PADD) of your remains. Is it the same/different? Is your emergency contact (next of kin) information updated and correct? Emergency contact info is probably the most overlooked. It's easy to lose track of who you put on there and their whereabouts — sometimes they move or life changes for them. Update it. If something happens to the member, we need information as accurate as possible so we can contact the family members who need to know.

From a personnel specialist stand point, I have seen multiple accounts of records not actively updated. For example, an instance of death. We never want to think that it could happen, but as service members, we should always prepare for the situation in which it might. In this scenario, the first thing we would do is pull the member's vRED information. This particular member had not kept their emergency contact information updated. The name nor the number were correct. Now, we must utilize other options, such as contacting law enforcement, next of kin's work address, and even getting in touch with neighbors to assist in finding the next of kin. In this scenario, despite our best efforts, the next of kin found out about their loved ones death on the news a few days after it happened.

Imagine the emotions — the anger, the sadness, the loss, the turmoil, the lack of understanding. To them, the Air Force failed them in a time of great need and vulnerability. They were furious. Why did we as a wing never try to contact them?

Another common issue is an out-of-date SGLI. For example, a member was divorced, remarried and forgot to update their information. In this scenario, something happened to the member and their former spouse received 100 percent of their insurance money; the member's current dependents and current spouse received nothing. Legally, we as personnel specialists can't do anything about it. Five minutes. Five minutes was all it would have taken to login into milConnect and update their beneficiaries. It takes five minutes online with the SGLI Online Enrollment System (SOES).

Another common issue is having no phone or address for the designated beneficiary. Delay in contacting the member's beneficiaries is also delaying paperwork that goes out to ensure that our families and dependents receive compensation for us serving. To try to assist, our office sends out annual reminders to the commander support staff to remind members to update vRED, SOES, and other personnel-related programs.

What can be viewed as the least of everyone's priorities, can be detrimental and stressful to a struggling or grieving family. We understand that drill gets hectic, but we also understand that it only takes a few minutes to ensure your records are up-to-date. Life can change in an instant, sending shockwaves through a family. Your records should reflect those changes — no matter how large or small.

So, please, take charge of your career by also taking care of your families and dependents. Put your mind at ease knowing that your family is taken care of. You never know what can happen. **AO**

SAVING LIVES IN THE FUTURE BATTLESPACE

Story and Photography: **Tech. Sgt. Kasey M. Phipps**
Location: **Henry E. Rohlsen Airport, St. Croix, Virgin Islands**

In and out of emerald islands that dot the clear turquoise of the Caribbean Sea, a Texas Air National Guard C-130 Hercules from the 136th Airlift Wing out of Carswell Field, Texas, weaves close enough to see the windows of the colorful houses in the hills below as its crew executes low-level navigation during a training event at the U.S. Virgin Island of St. Croix, Aug 21-24, 2019.

As white caps glitter across the sea below and clouds lazily dance overhead, the Oklahoma Air National Guard Aeromedical Evacuation aircrew working within the fuselage of the C-130 hurriedly don their oxygen masks while preparing for rapid decompression.

“St. Croix is an exotic destination,” said Oklahoma Air National Guard (ANG) Maj. Chris Lane, director of operations for 137th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron (137th AES) out of Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City. “But we don’t really care what the destination is as long we can train there and back.”

The four-day event — which included two seven-hour flights to and from St. Croix, a four-hour ground training and evaluation meeting the second day, and a two-hour low-level flight the third day — was largely driven by an overhaul of career field-wide aeromedical evacuation training and evaluation standards.

“Our training is much more robust now,” explained Oklahoma ANG Tech. Sgt. Aaron Rickey, 137th AES standards and evaluations noncommissioned officer in charge. “Because it’s new, we’re trying to step into it — to see what it actually takes to get everything done, because we’ve never seen these types of requirements before.”

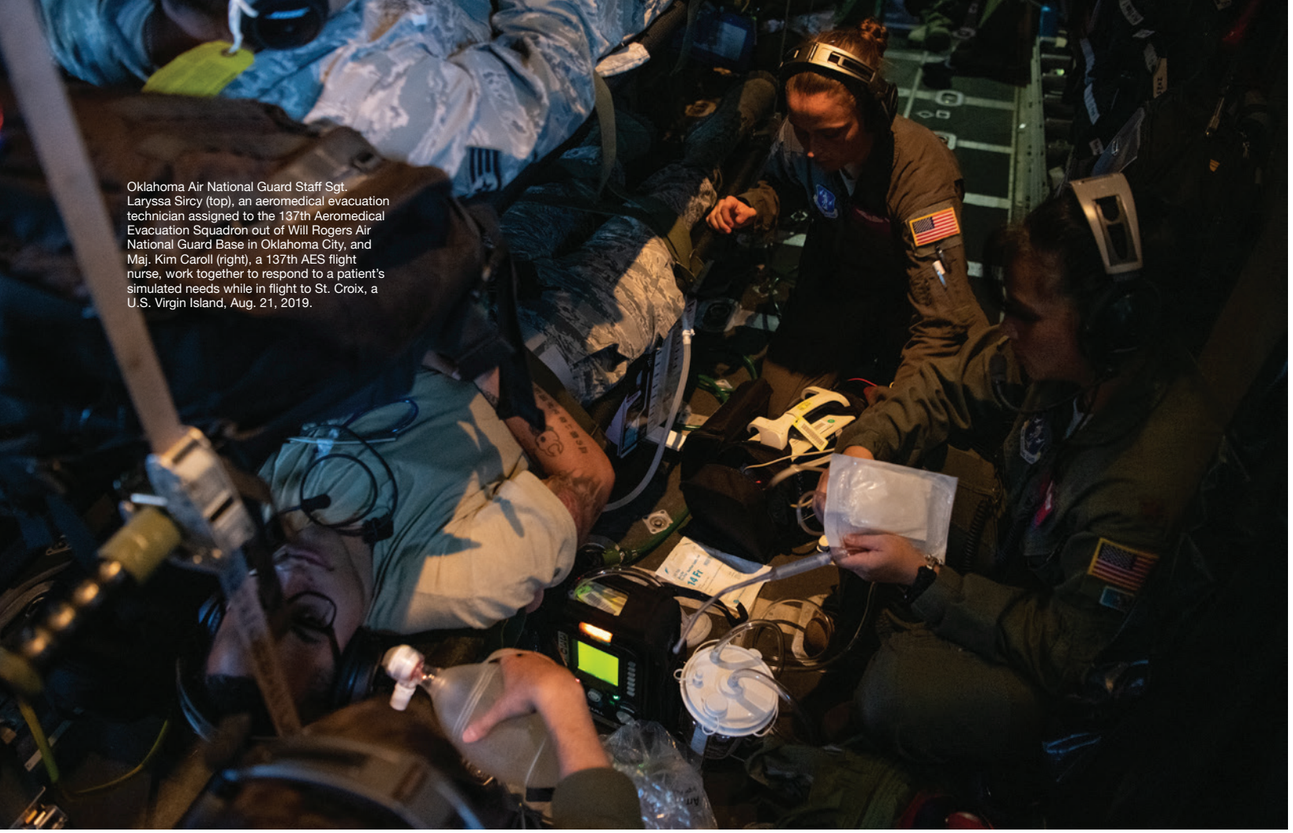
Aeromedical evacuation Airmen training requirements break down into two main categories: flying and clinical. Though the flying requirements, such as emergency flight procedures and aircraft configuration, remained largely unchanged through the overhaul, the more clinical or medical requirements steeply increased.

“There are only so many ways to put out a fire or prepare for a crash landing,” said Lane. “But the clinical requirements increased in volume. They surged about 20 percent in volume, and the density, or quality, of training increased a lot as well.”

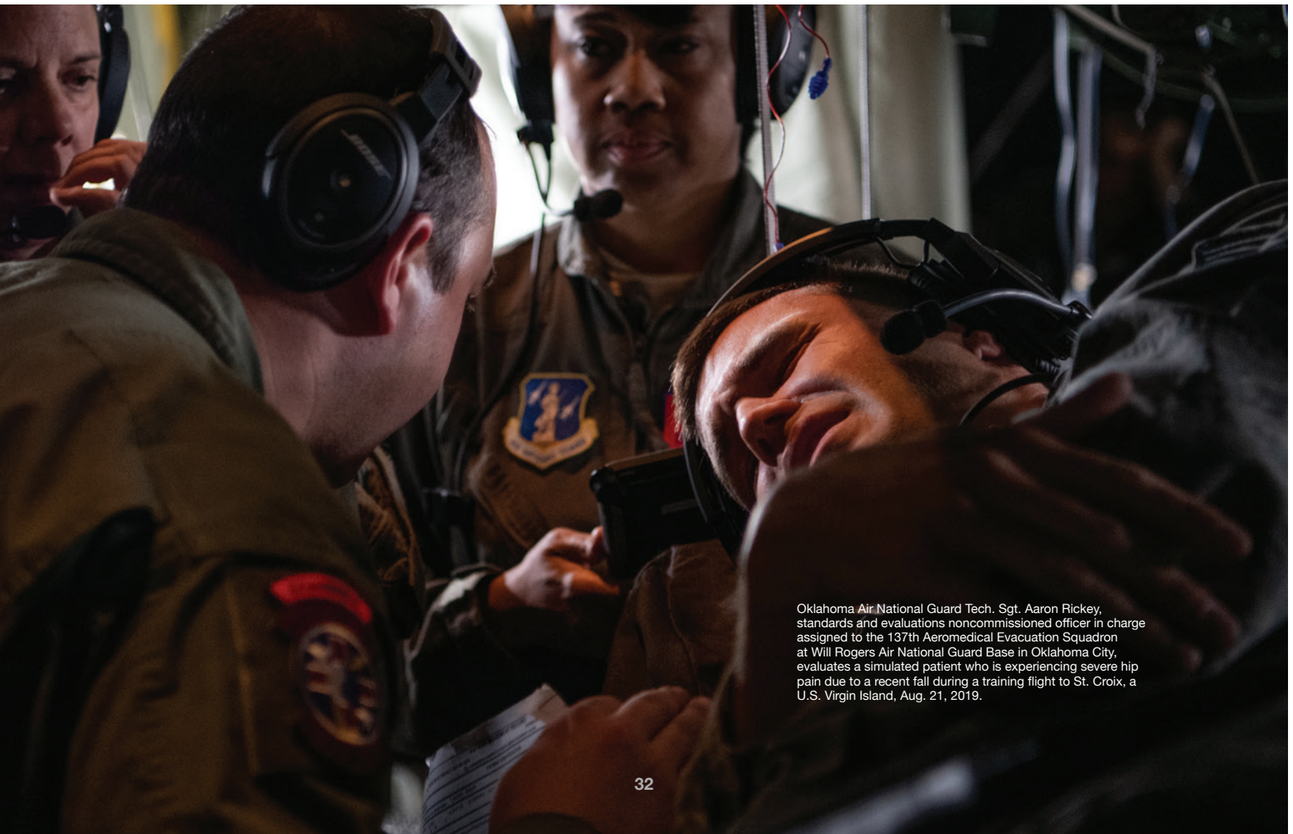
Oklahoma ANG Staff Sgt. Avery Keller, a 137th AES aeromedical evacuation technician, used the pain management training requirement as an example.

“We used to talk about pain management for a bit to establish understanding and then we got the credit,” said Keller. “Now you have to know every single route of administration, you have to know benzodiazepine toxicity, narcotic toxicity, and every pump in detail. Each item is four to five times larger than it used to be,

Oklahoma Air National Guard aircrews assigned to the 137th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron out of Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City prepare litter patients to be loaded onto a Texas Air National Guard C-130 Hercules assigned to the 136th Airlift Wing out of Carswell, Texas, before taking off toward the U.S. Virgin Island of St. Croix from Will Rogers, Aug. 21, 2019.



Oklahoma Air National Guard Staff Sgt. Laryssa Sircy (top), an aeromedical evacuation technician assigned to the 137th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron out of Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, and Maj. Kim Caroll (right), a 137th AES flight nurse, work together to respond to a patient's simulated needs while in flight to St. Croix, a U.S. Virgin Island, Aug. 21, 2019.



Oklahoma Air National Guard Tech. Sgt. Aaron Rickey, standards and evaluations noncommissioned officer in charge assigned to the 137th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, evaluates a simulated patient who is experiencing severe hip pain due to a recent fall during a training flight to St. Croix, a U.S. Virgin Island, Aug. 21, 2019.

so instead of getting 20 items per flight checked off, you're looking at three to four."

Combining the more detailed training requirements with regular, semi-annual evaluation windows and the added stress of needing at least half of their requirements accomplished in the air as opposed to training on the ground, the aircrews necessitate more flights and more time on those flights.

"When we fly locally, we have very set and limited training times," said Rickey. "When we do an off-station training event, we have seven hours there and seven hours back depending on the location. That affords us a lot more time to get requirements accomplished. Almost everyone who attended this event completed about 90 percent of the requirements they needed for their semi-annual evaluation period done — in a matter of a few days."

Within those days, the squadron accomplished an estimated 415 individual training items (out of the 1,800 required by the entire squadron in a six-month evaluation period) and hundreds of hours of total training for the 16 aircrew members within the 16.5 hours of combined flight.

"To be able to maximize and concentrate that training into one event is huge for us," said Lane.

Staying current in training is especially important for members of the 137th AES when considering their deployment rotations, which fall under three categories. The first is their regular Air and Space Expeditionary Forces (AEF) rotation that occurs every 15 to 17 months. The second is focused on domestic operations or disaster response, in which the unit is "on-call" for hurricane season. The third is week-long operational missions that occur at least every quarter, during which the crews fly live patients returning from combat zones.

"Our rotations vary," said Lane. "The tempo is always high, and the missions vary. That's okay. That's what we want."

Along with frequent and overlapping rotations, the 137th AES is faced with another challenge that events like the one in St. Croix help with — the lack of an intrinsic airframe — which often puts the squadron "at the mercy" of aircrews and their flying requirements.

"We're universally qualified, which means we can fly and operate on several different U.S. Air Force airframes," explained Lane. "Developing relationships with other units, like with the 136th Airlift Wing that we worked with in St. Croix, is important. We don't want to paint ourselves into one corner with one airframe, especially one that we're not using in contingency environments. Combining those resources is best for everyone."

An anticipated and trending change in those contingency environments is, in fact, what drove the overhaul in the aeromedical evacuation career field in the first place.

"So for that last 20 years in operations in Afghanistan, it's been in a non-traditional battlespace," said Lane. "Although we've had a constant flow of patients, the volume of the patients has been pretty low. An average flight from Afghanistan to Germany would have maybe 20 patients with a mixture of acuity, such as sick, not sick, ambulatory and litter-bound."

Looking into the Air Force's future operational plans, that non-traditional battle space shifts to more peer-to-peer environments.

"When we model those out and look at what engagements with those kinds of adversaries look like, the volume of patients significantly increases," said Lane.

A typical aeromedical evacuation aircrew is made up of two nurses and three medics, but when you pair those crews with 200 or even 500 patients on a large aircraft with limited medical support, the aircrew must be more reliant on themselves and their medical knowledge.

"In order for us to meet the growing needs of the Air Force in that type of environment, we need to be more clinically competent," said Lane.

So, not only are crews required to accomplish more training on the clinical side, but they're also required to maintain the knowledge they already have.

"It's just like adding 10 percent more knowledge on the 90 percent you already have," explained Keller.

In flight, aircrews must know and recognize details ranging from patient accountability and wellness to properly facing patients in order to compensate for airflow in case of a contagion. Having live patients, such as those in the St. Croix event, and the added pressure of the time limitations of the front-end crews builds an element of reality to the already hands-on training.

"You have to have a really good working knowledge," explained Keller. "It all has to be muscle memory because you can't just pull out your checklist every time a patient codes. You can't develop that memory on checklists alone. That's why these flights are so important."

Caring for patients in the air has its own complications. Lack of oxygen, too much noise, too little light, too much vibration and too little space all complicate tasks that would normally be routine on the ground.

"When we use live people, not only can they show a grimace, pain and alertness, but they also remind us to think about comfort," said Lane. "The small things make people feel like you care about them, whether you're in a hospital, with your family or in the back of a plane."

The St. Croix training event was also unique in that it utilized Airmen from around the Oklahoma Air National Guard base as patients, which not only helped to save resources, but also allowed members of the base to be face-to-face with the 137th AES's mission.

"Everybody knows that the aeromedical evacuation squadron is here on base, but people rarely get to see what they do," said Oklahoma ANG Senior Master Sgt. Thomas Verdine, 137th Special Operation Wing Inspector General superintendent. "They have the additional tasking of not just medical professionals, but also fliers. They care for, load, unload and navigate patients through in-flight emergencies for hours at a time."

"We really are moving service members out there," said Lane. "If you ask any of us, the reason we do this job is because we want those service members on the ground to know that we're there for them no matter what. I think that's universal. The Air Force will launch an entire crew for one person who's injured, and that's important to us." **AO**

DID YOU KNOW ...

THE 137TH SOLRS MATERIAL MGMT

specialists manage inventory, run complex supply systems and ensure every asset — from paperclips to multimillion-dollar machinery — is accounted for and where it needs to be to complete the mission?

EQUIPMENT ACCOUNTS TOTALING

$26M

$$$$$$$$$$$$
$$$$$$$$$$$$
$$$$$$$$$$$$
$$$$$$$$$$$$

BASE SUPPORT GOVERNMENT PURCHASE CARD

$155,000

DEFENSE LOGISTICS AGENCY (DLA) DISPOSITION SERVICES

TOTAL WITHDRAWN LINE ITEMS	TOTAL TURN-IN LINE ITEMS
2,364	**16,013**
WING SAVINGS	WING SAVINGS
$140,000	**$1.1M**

OPERATIONAL CAMOUFLAGE PATTERN (OCP)

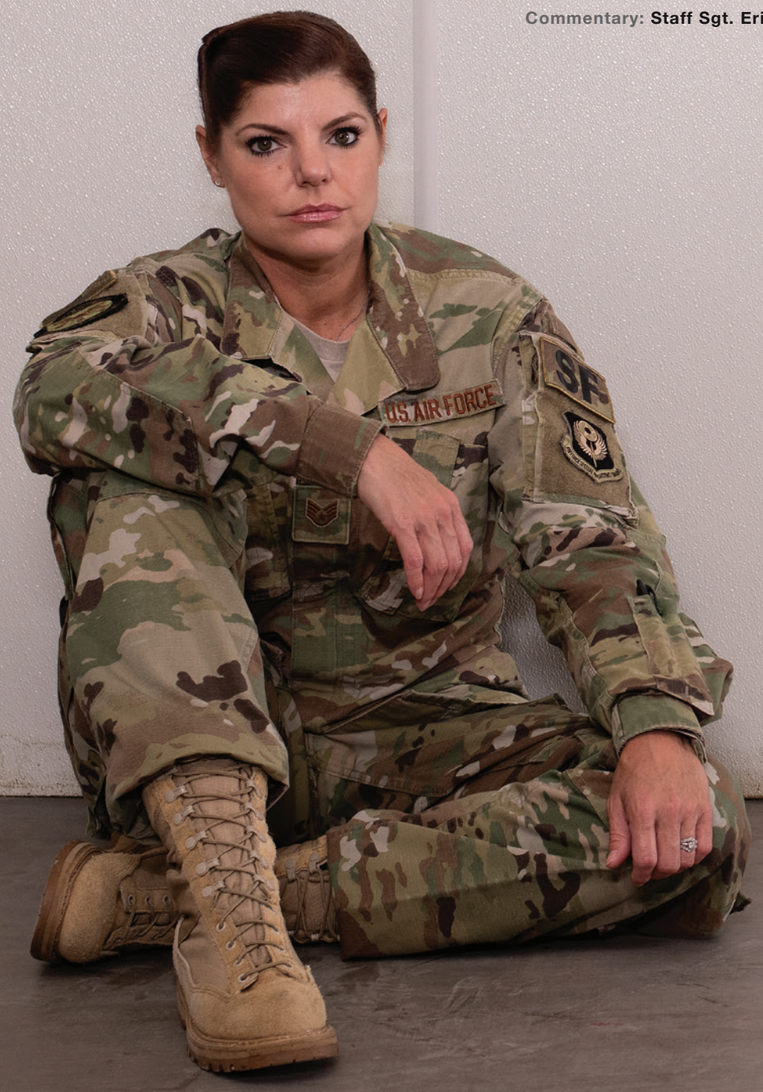
INITIAL ROLLOUT: **885**

Pictured: Master Sgt. Larissa Howell, an Oklahoma Air National Guard (ANG) 137th Special Operations Logistics Readiness Squadron HAZMAT manager assigned to Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, has been in the ANG for 14 years and was formerly in civil engineering. Because Howell — along with the 14 other supply Airmen — is responsible for issuing almost all supplies (which range from weapons to underwear) for the base, she said the best part of her job is meeting every single new Airman during their initial in-processing issue.

Photograph: SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX

AT THE TURNING POINT

Commentary: **Staff Sgt. Ericka L. Costin**



Life happens. At least that's what people like to say about down times. Grief, anxiety, depression, anger; all symptoms of "life" when things seem to go downhill. What happens when it becomes too much, when your vehicle of life coasts downhill so fast that the brakes are just burnt out? Where is your break, so to speak? Where is that point in the road that evens out? Flip a u-turn and trudge back up the hill and try again, keep moving forward in hopes of a stopping point, or just give up and let that life engine explode and you're just another scrap to be thrown away and forgotten? Each point seems so extreme. But, each one of those points leads to somewhere. It's just which route you are willing to take to get there.

My road started early in life. I learned to take the wheel at a very early age. Some like to call this the childhood trauma that leads to the long-term effects of a broken adulthood. Twisting down paths of some great times and sometimes driving ahead blindly in hopes of finding that sunrise over the hill. Adolescent roads full of speed bumps, traffic warnings and violations, minor dings and head-on collisions all leading to the rocky road of adulthood where that adolescent road seemed like a joyride in the long run. Sure there are some amazing journeys taken, great memories made and people met along the way. But that ugly, beat-up vehicle is still there — those dings and damages glaring back at me every day. I can't stare them out. Painting over them seemed like a great idea. Paint on that smile, act like it's not there, no one will notice. Eventually that paint cracks and then I'm back staring at the ugly, worn-out heap again.

At this point in my life I was trudging back up the hill in hopes of a start-over down a less bumpy hill, still holding my breath at every bump that my heap didn't fall apart. The loom of impending divorce, dealing with the grief of untimely deaths of close family members, the stresses of work, the self-criticism of parenthood, and the ever constant thoughts of "Why me?", "Why can't one thing just go my way?", "I'm just not good enough." Maybe if I drown out the noise of the engine and the ugliness that I have to look at every day, I won't have to feel so bad. Here is where the substance abuse begins. The first roads are great! Coasting in neutral. Neutral and numb. Numb and dumb is what I would eventually find out during my journey. Life can go on a long time like this, I discovered. More bumpy roads, minor dings, and head-on collisions of course, but none of that mattered as long as the numbness was there. I could tackle any hill, any accident, and any violation that came along. Or so I thought.

My turning point came about six months ago. A road that started early and the hits just kept piling up and piling up. The never-ending road of self-destruction. Broken with grief, riddled with anxiety, controlled with substance abuse and inner turmoil, I was staring down the bottle and headed toward a deadly collision that I couldn't numb, paint, or talk my way out of. I had lost all control. In our military careers it is engrained in us; awareness, awareness, awareness, resources, hotlines. The endless boring classes that are left with a box checked and a trifold or card of some sort to be lost in your desk, in your gear, or the back of your notebook. The ole line "this doesn't pertain to me", "I would NEVER let it get that far", or "yep, that's a sure fire career ender". That last statement is all I could think about wanting to reach out for help, but knowing with that even more sinking feeling that the rumors, the stigmas, and the black cloud of ending a career that I have worked hard to maintain would be over if I reached out for the help they so willingly seemed to want to give. Wasn't it easier to just end it all? Put myself out of the misery of keeping up the maintenance of an engine ready to explode, or face the humiliation of everyone knowing I'm a failure at life and just couldn't handle my life. Two full bottles pleading with me to end it all and just go to sleep. Or facing the consequences of reaching out.

I had my hands on the wheel. Swerve right and drive off the cliff, never to be seen again, or coast around that corner to help, maintenance, and the small undamaged scrap of faith that I had left that maybe it could all be ok. Well, now as I am writing this you know what path I chose. That awareness engrained in me by the career I still maintain has SAVED MY LIFE. The outpouring of support I received by just making a phone call and turning to the very people that have made the same moral oath I have to protect and defend our brothers and sisters in arms has led me to an even, smoother path. I now am behind the wheel of a new life vehicle on a newly paved road to recovery. I am now a driving testimony for a system of support that works. It really works. I now have the tools I need to make it up any hill, through inclement weather, and even collisions in my life course. The end of your road can start with a new road to travel. In this fight of life we all have the wheel. You just have to follow the map provided. **AO**

THE JOURNEY

Response to Commentary: Ms. Charlene White

It is true that every Airman has a story, yet most are too afraid to share it with strangers, mental health professionals, friends, family or even those closest to them. They do this for many reasons: possible rejection, judgment, shame, loss of career, or fear of the unknown. The stigma associated with seeking mental health is much greater than their desire to get help — especially within the military. Therefore, they continue to suffer in silence, day after day, with emotional pain, repeating the cycle of unhealthy patterns and toxic behaviors that could eventually lead to suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Suicide doesn't discriminate. It doesn't matter who you are or what you have. It doesn't matter how loved you are.

The current Air Force suicide rate is at an alarming high, despite efforts to tackle the problem. As former Secretary of the Air Force Heather Wilson stated, "We need an Air Force culture where it is more common to seek help than to try to go at it alone." In my opinion, not only does the culture need to shift to encourage more help-seeking, but suicide prevention can't be seen solely a mental health professional's problem. Every single one of us can save a life. We all possess the ability to reach out, to listen, to empathize, and to be present for those we love and strangers in need. Building trust and connectedness are two ways to encourage help-seeking and break down barriers. Human connection is a powerful thing. When it seems there is no one who understands, a hand reaching out is sometimes the one thing that begins the journey towards seeking help. Some suggestions for building trust and connectedness are:

1. Walk to an individual's office to make a request versus sending an email. In doing so, it opens the door for communication and allows you to lay eyes on the person.

2. Share your own personal stories of struggle and adversity.

3. Dispel the myth that seeking help will have a negative career-impact.

4. Encourage seeking help early.

5. Genuinely make mental health a part of regular discussions, meetings and roll calls.

I personally have seen how small steps can save lives and change a culture. A simple "hello" or a warm smile can change the entire atmosphere at home or in the office.

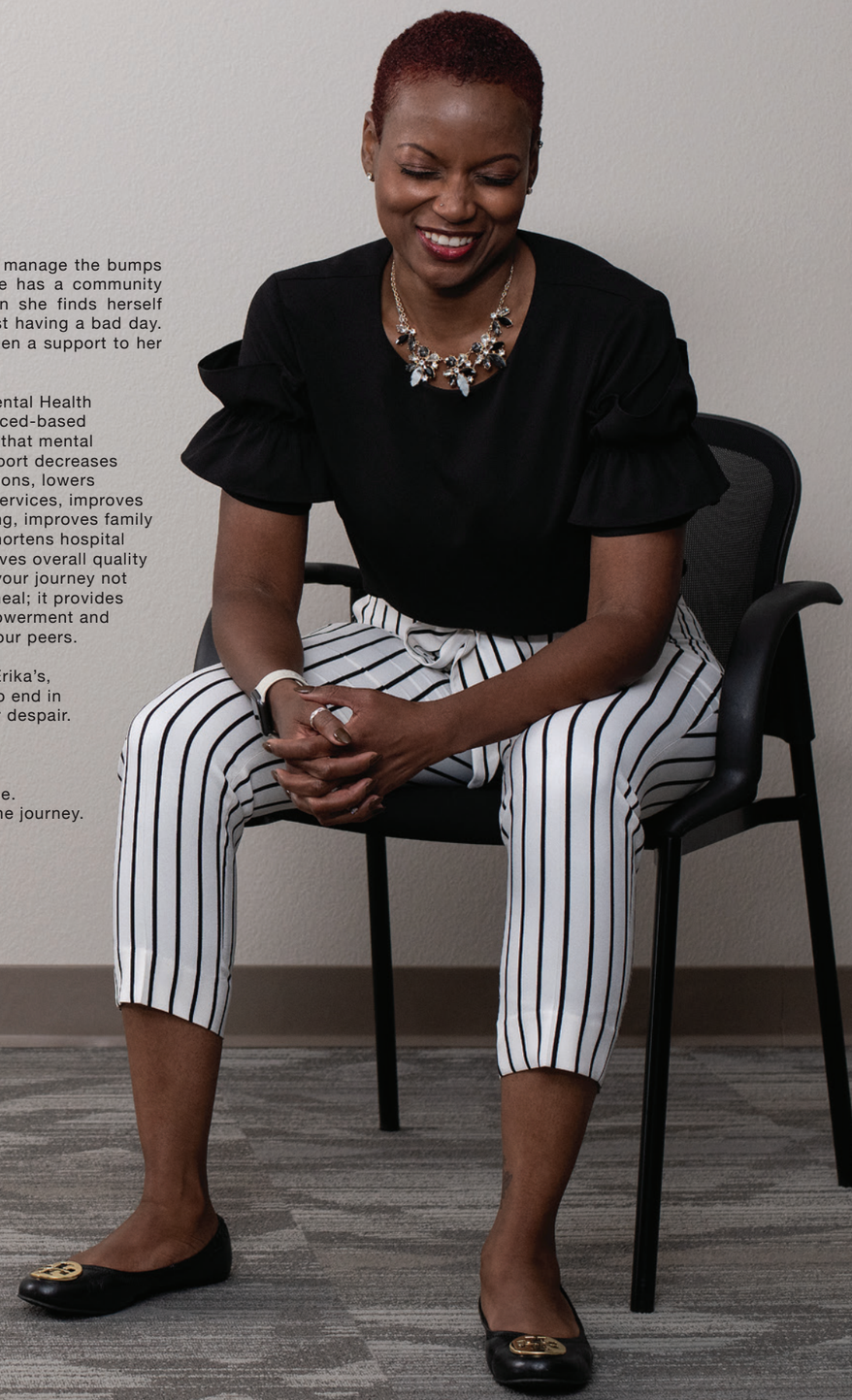
As you can see from Staff. Sgt. Ericka Costin's personal journey, she chose to stop living behind her facade and her false reality that she "would never let it get that far." She chose to no longer perpetuate the stigma associated with seeking mental health. She made the courageous decision to turn right on that unsteady road instead of left. She trusted the process and the professionals to guide her to the new paved road of recovery and emotional healing. It is apparent her road to recovery wasn't easy; it required work, commitment, patience and facing some ugly truths. As she traveled along that road, she began to slowly chisel away at the cracks and chips that led her down a path of self-medicating, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Today, Erika will tell you she had to go down the hill and through the valley to find freedom and peace within herself. She now has healthy tools to manage the bumps in the road. She has a community of support when she finds herself struggling or just having a bad day. She has also been a support to her peers.

According to Mental Health America, evidenced-based research shows that mental health peer support decreases hospital admissions, lowers overall cost of services, improves social functioning, improves family relationships, shortens hospital stays and improves overall quality of life. Sharing your journey not only helps you heal; it provides a sense of empowerment and confidence to your peers.

Your road, like Erika's, does not have to end in hopelessness or despair.

There is help.
There is hope.
You are not alone.
There is joy in the journey.

AO



AIR OBSERVER

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