

Heartland WARRIOR

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Heartland WARRIOR

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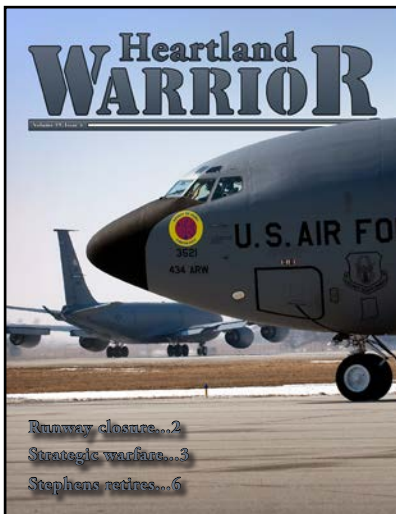
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U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Mark Orders-Woempner

On the cover...

The Spirit of Peru, one of the 434th Air Refueling Wing's 16 KC-135R Stratotankers, waits its turn as another KC-135R takes off from Grissom March 9. The 434th ARW held a strategic warfare exercise, executing various response, mobility, and command and control procedures in response to a simulated global threat, which culminated in 10 Stratotankers taking off in two formations.



U.S. Air Force graphic by Tech. Sgt. Mark Orders-Woempner

The 434th Air Refueling Wing announced March 14 that Grissom's runway will be temporarily closed for planned construction starting June 1. The estimated \$3.2 million project is currently projected to close the runway for 45 days.

Runway repairs start June 1

By Tech. Sgt. Mark Orders-Woempner
Public Affairs staff

The 434th Air Refueling Wing announced today that Grissom's runway will be temporarily closed for planned construction starting June 1.

"We are doing this to prevent buckling of the runway due to thermal expansion," said John Robison, 434th Civil Engineer Squadron chief engineer. "The pavement heaves up during the summer time, so we are going to put in expansion joints in the pavement that allow it to move around and prevent an un-level pavement surface."

Robison added that the estimated \$3.2 million project is currently projected to close Grissom's runway for 45 days.

"When we initially looked at these repairs, the projects were spread out over some length of time," said Col. Bryan Reinhart, 434th ARW commander. "We've worked really hard to consolidate these as much as possible so we limit the time our runway is

closed."

The repairs will allow the 12,500-foot runway to continue to be used by both military and civilian aviation for many years to come, said Robison.

The last time Grissom's runway was closed for repair was in 2004.

The goal, Reinhart said, is to complete these vital repairs as quickly as possible to have as little down time and negative impact as possible to both the military mission and civilian aviation at Grissom.

"We've been working very closely with Jim Tidd, (Miami County Economic Development Authority director), as well as the local aviation entities on Grissom to be as flexible as we possibly can," Reinhart continued. "At the end of the day, these repairs are absolutely necessary and will benefit both military and civilian aviation for years to come."

During the construction, the 434th ARW's 16 KC-135R Stratotanker aircraft will be operating from another Air Force base in the Midwest. As those plans are finalized, additional information will be released.

Wing soars to new heights during mobility exercise



U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Andrew McLaughlin

A KC-135R Stratotanker takes off from Grissom during a strategic warfare exercise March 9., 2014.

By Tech. Sgt. Mark Orders-Woempner
Public Affairs staff

Dusting off a playbook from its old Strategic Air Command days, the 434th Air Refueling Wing soared to new heights during a recent mobility exercise.

During the strategic warfare exercise held March 8-9, the largest KC-135R Stratotanker unit in the Air Force Reserve executed various response, mobility, and command and control procedures in response to a simulated global threat.

"We exercised more processes to a greater extent than we have done in decades," said Lt. Col. Joseph Austin, 434th Operations Support Squadron chief of plans. "We said, 'let's fill the tank full and see where the cracks are so we can fix them,' and when we filled the tank full, we were still able to execute to an outstanding rate.

"We maxed out maintenance, aircrews, support, air traffic control, transportation and logistics," Austin added. "We maxed out everything."

Helping control the complex exercise were 434th ARW command post command and control technicians who processed

emergency action messages, relayed information to aircrews, and kept both wing leadership and higher headquarters in the loop, said Senior Master Sgt. Jeffrey Withrow, 434th ARW command post superintendent.

"We had more evaluators in here than anyone else did on base because we really wanted to test our abilities," said Withrow. "They really dug deep, and so we now have a lot of confidence we can do the job."

Adding to the complexity, the exercise was capped off with a launch of 10 KC-135s in two five-ship formations.

"Nobody here, not even the old SAC warriors who are still around, can recollect launching that many aircraft here in this unit or in the old 305th Air Refu-

eling Wing," said Austin. The 305th ARW was the regular Air Force unit at Grissom until the base realigned as a reserve base in 1994.

"The Air Force stopped exercising this in the 1990s, and since then I don't think the Air Force Reserve has ever launched that many jets in formation at once for something like this," he continued.

And, launching 10 aircraft in rapid fashion with a miniscule margin of error is no easy task, said Chief Master Sgt. Tony Hoffman, 434th Maintenance Group superintendent.

"It took a 100 percent effort from all personnel to execute at that level," Hoffman explained. "We've never gone to this latitude; we've exercised it up to that point, but we never pushed them like we did during this last exercise."

For their part, the operators were extremely grateful for the effort displayed by the maintainers.

"I have to give it up to maintenance as they took jets that are all over 50 years old and launched them at a mission capability rate much higher than required and much higher than anyone expected," remarked Austin. "It wasn't like a normal day-to day

mission here where if something small was broke we could take 10 minutes to fix it; we had to be 100 percent ready to go, and if they jets weren't ready to go on engine start, they didn't go."

Outside of maintenance, Austin said both aircrews and support functions performed admirably.

"Once again ops proved they can get the job done," he said, adding that they intentionally put their most inexperienced crews on the jets to give them a chance to learn. "We put them out there so they could learn, but we also put an older, more experienced crew member who had gone through this years ago, as an extra crew member so they could watch over them and offer helpful tips on the jet."

While there were plenty of positives to go around, Austin said there is still room for improvement, especially when it comes to communication.

"If there was anything to learn it was that the first rule of battle, which is if you don't have communications, you don't have a cohesive force, holds true," he explained. "We'll be working on that as we prepare for the next inspection."



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Mark Orders-Woempner

Five 434th Air Refueling Wing KC-135R Stratotankers head down a Grissom taxiway March 9.

CSAF: Budget cuts will affect combatant commands

By Army Sgt. 1st Class
Tyrone C. Marshall Jr
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON -- Painful budget reductions will reduce the future capabilities of combatant commanders, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III told Congress here March 26.

Testifying alongside Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James at a hearing of the House Appropriations Committee's defense subcommittee, Welsh discussed the difficult decisions budget constraints have presented and will continue to present to the Air Force's role in defending national security.

"Every major decision reflected in this budget proposal hurts," he said. "Each of them reduces the capabilities our combatant commanders would love to have and believe they need. Your Air Force is the finest in the world, and we need to keep it that way. We built this budget to ensure that Air Force combat power remains unequalled, but that does not mean it will remain unaffected."

There are no more easy cuts, the general said.

"We simply can't ignore the fact that the law is currently written [to return] us to sequestered funding levels in [fiscal year 2016]," Welsh said.

Because the Air Force needed to cut billions rather than millions of dollars out of its budget, "the normal trimming around the edges just wasn't going to get it done," he said.

"So we looked at cutting fleets of aircraft as a way to get to the significant savings that are required," he added.

Welsh explained the logic of "very tough decisions" that had to be made.

"In our air superiority mission area, we already have reductions in our proposal," he said. "But eliminating an entire fleet would leave us unable to provide air superiority for an entire theater of operations. We are the only service that can do so."

Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance constitute the No. 1 shortfall of the combatant commanders year after year, Welsh noted.



U.S. Air Force photo by Scott Ash

Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James and Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III testify on the Air Force posture for fiscal year 2015 before the House Appropriations subcommittee on defense in Washington, D.C., March 26.

"They would never support even more cuts than we already have in our budget proposal," he said.

Noting the Air Force has "several aircraft" in the global mobility mission area, Welsh said he spoke with Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno to get his thoughts on reducing the airlift fleet.

"His view was that a smaller Army would need to be more responsive and able to move quicker," Welsh said. "He did not think that reducing airlift assets further was a good idea, and the [Air Force] secretary and I agree. We looked at our air refueling fleets and considered divesting the KC-10 as an option.

Just one example, but the analysis showed us that the mission impact was too significant."

Welsh echoed testimony from James, who told the panel that a return to sequester funding levels in fiscal 2016 would put the mobility fleet back on the table.

"We looked at the KC-135 fleet, but we would have to cut many more KC-135s than KC-10s to achieve the same savings," he said. "And with that many KC-135s out of the fleet, we simply can't meet our worldwide mission requirement."

In the strike mission area, Welsh said, cutting the A-10 fleet would save \$3.7 billion across the future-year defense program and another \$500 million in cost avoidance for upgrades that wouldn't be necessary. "To get that same savings would require a much higher number of F15-E's or F-16s [to be cut], but we also looked at those options," he added.

Air Force officials ran a detailed operational analysis, Welsh said, comparing divestiture of the A-10 fleet to divestiture of the B-1 fleet, reduction of the F-16 and F-15E fleet, and to deferring procurement of a large number of F-35s, as well as to decreasing readiness by standing down a number of fighter squadrons and just parking them on the ramp.

"The results very clearly showed that cutting the A-10 fleet was the lowest-risk option, from an operational perspective, of a bunch of bad options."

The U.S. military must modernize, Welsh said, but today's declining budgets place limits on that.

"And we must maintain the proper balance across our mission areas," he added, "because that's what the combatant commanders expect from us." (AFNS)

Loggie named wing's officer of the year

By Tech. Sgt. Mark Orders-Woempner
Public Affairs staff

From the day they pin on gold bars, Air Force officers are expected to lead Airmen to the highest of standards, and for exhibiting such leadership one Grissom lieutenant earned high accolades.

2nd Lt. John Pedro, 434th Logistics Readiness Squadron fuels flight commander, was recently named the 434th Air Refueling Wing Company Grade Officer of the Year for 2013.

"This is such a huge honor for me," said Pedro, who said he doesn't normally like a lot of attention. "I wanted to be a logistics readiness officer because I like to work behind the scenes, so I don't need recognition, but this really is a huge personal honor for me."

Pedro, who was a prior enlisted aircraft maintainer and recently completed training to be an LRO, said the Air Force has also given him significant opportunities he wouldn't normally have had.

"Going from just a farm kid to working on jet aircraft to writing technical publications to deploying troops, it's something I never thought I'd do," he remarked. "The biggest thing I've enjoyed was training to be an installation deployment officer while working on real-world deployments."

During that training, Pedro watched and learned as Christy Shives, 434th LRS IDO, deployed two rotations of aircraft and Airmen to the Middle



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Mark Orders-Woempner

2nd Lt. John Pedro

East before he oversaw the deployment of a third.

"It was amazing to watch Christy work in that position as I shadowed her first for the second rotation, and then I ran the third rotation," he recalled. "That position is amazing in the fact that you're representing the wing commander, and especially for me being a butter bar in that position, it was overwhelming."

Despite that challenge, the new lieutenant said he appreciated the opportunity.

"That was my Mount Kilimanjaro, and once I got done with it I went 'whew,'" he remarked. "One of my goals when I did it was to remain calm but also be upbeat, and I've taken that lesson

back with me to fuels."

On top of being trained as an IDO, Pedro said he's also been trained on a host of other duties, as his position requires him to be an Air Force jack-of-all-trades.

"We are IDOs, but we can also manage logistics plans, vehicle ops, [petroleum, oils and lubricants], and supply," he explained. "One of the great things, of all the LROs I've talked to, everyone loves us because we are like the sticky glue they can put in any area, especially in joint environments."

On top of learning his job and deploying troops around the globe, Pedro was lauded by Lt. Col. Bryan Runion, 434th LRS commander, for several of his contributions that had

significant impacts.

"He was hand-picked despite his junior rank to be the fuels flight commander, and had an immediate positive impact on quality assurance and safety," said Runion, who added that Pedro "re-blued the flight" with his leadership.

Re-bluing is a term often used in the Air Force to mean bolstering morale and unit pride.

Helping to build that morale, Pedro led an effort to create a 434th LRS crest and saw the project all the way through its approval by the Army's Institute of Heraldry, which is the approval authority for all Air Force unit insignias and crests.

"He succeeded where others failed," said Runion of the 8-month long project.

Pedro also showed his tenacity and attention to detail as he corrected errors in fuel reporting to the Air Force Reserve Command.

"Our fuel hydrant utilization rate was showing at 30 percent, which was under AFRC's goal," he explained. "I started researching in the [Air Force instructions] and found out everything we were doing was compliant; we were just calculating it incorrectly."

While a simple calculation error of utilization may seem insignificant, Pedro said it had big impacts.

"We were on the cusp of getting a whole new hydrant system, and having that is a lifeblood for

See 'Pedro' page 11

Stephens retires with 37 years, many experiences

By Senior Airman Jami Lancette
Public Affairs staff

In 1977, Jimmy Carter became President of the United States, the first Apple computers had just hit store shelves and a young Air Force lieutenant was beginning his career.

That lieutenant, now Col. William Stephens, concluded his 37-year career as the 434th Mission Support Group commander and was surrounded by family and friends for his retirement ceremony recently.

Stephens referred to his entire career as a highlight reel full of amazing experiences.

"This job has unintentionally by design allowed me to do things and meet people that I would have otherwise had the opportunity to do and meet and go places that I could never alone," said Stephens. "It's been an incredible journey."

Stephens began his career as a KC-135 Stratotanker navigator, but served in a variety of positions along the way including executive officer, chief of civilian personnel, weapons controller, combat crew commander, safety officer, squadron commander and group commander.

Prior to his assignment at Grissom, he served as the 315th Mission Support Group commander at Charleston Air Force Base, S.C. He's also deployed in support of Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn.

"My career has given me the opportunity to hold numerous [military jobs], and as a result, I have had numerous experiences," Stephens recalled. "Probably my most unique experience was when I was a security forces commander.

"At that time, my unit had a different mission than most security



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Jami Lancette

Col. William Stephens, 434th Mission Support Group commander, right, accepts his certificate of retirement from Col. Paul Weimer, former 434th Maintenance Group commander, during his retirement ceremony at Grissom March 8.

force units because we had an air base ground defense mission, which meant our job was to protect the perimeter of the base outside the wire from basically the base perimeter to about five miles out," he added.

"So, we trained much like the army infantry in terms of combat tactics."

It wasn't just the jobs Stephens held that were unique. During his career he had the opportunity to meet and work with several historic figures.

"When I was a young lieutenant at Castle Air Force Base in California, I was assigned to escort a World War II dignitary during a B-25

Mitchell fly-in for a museum opening," Stephens recalled. "On that B-25 was the Strategic Air Command commander and a fellow by the name of Jimmy Doolittle."

Retired Gen. James Doolittle lead

an attack of 16 B-25 medium bombers from the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Hornet, with targets in Japan.

And, if meeting a famed World War II general wasn't enough, as a major on a temporary assignment to England for the 75th International Air Show, Stephens said he found himself face-to-face with both Britain's Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh and Jordan's King Hussein.

"It was quite an experience for a young major," he remarked.

With a multitude of such experiences, Stephens offered some advice as he took a retrospective look back at his career.

"For many, especially when you're younger, impatience is a hard personality trait to overcome and you don't think things are going fast enough," he said. "My best advice would be to continue to focus on the immediate job that you're trained to do and do it well.

"Become the go-to expert who exhibits reasonable advice and counsel and be dependable," he continued. "A career in the best Air Force in the history of all the air forces in the world is the best career an individual can have, and I would say stick with it and give our country all you got.

"A career in the best Air Force in the history of all the air forces in the world is the best career an individual can have..."

- Col. William Stephens

434th ARW Civilian of the Year keeps Grissom secure

By Staff Sgt. Andrew McLaughlin
Public Affairs staff

While entering Grissom's gates, it's not surprising to see uniformed security forces officers on guard, but one of the base's protectors wears no uniform.

Terry Bodkin, 434th Security Forces Squadron police services manager, keeps the base under his watchful eye, and for his diligent efforts in 2013, he was named the 434th Air Refueling Wing Civilian of the Year.

In his position, Bodkin said he performs numerous functions vital to base security including managing resource protection, crime prevention, police services, reports and analysis, and investigation programs. He also provides oversight and monitoring of all Grissom Visitor Center functions.

"I love this job as no day is the same," he said. "Each phone call and case is different, and I learn something new each day."

While Bodkin loves his job, his superiors said they love the job he's doing.

"He's an animal when it comes to work," said Lt. Col. Christopher Witter, 434th SFS commander. "He's a dynamo in getting his work done, and really digs into the details."

Part of that work in 2013, included Bodkin authoring six sections of the base's installation defense plan as well as



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Mark Orders-Woempner

Terry Bodkin

participating in numerous investigations and other activities aimed at keeping the north central Indiana base safe.

"The last thing I want on my watch is for something bad to happen to an individual at Grissom because I did not give 100 percent that day," he said.

While giving that 100 percent last year, Bodkin has focused a lot of his efforts on the investigation portion of his job, which is relatively new in the Air Force Reserve, explained Witter.

"As far as the police services program, that position as it stands, has only been around for about five years," the

colonel elaborated. "He's rebuilt the investigative section for us, digging deep into the [Air Force instructions], tirelessly working and asking tough questions.

"He's going to be the one to define how it really exists it for Grissom," he added.

Helping him build the investigative program are his numerous experiences as a former Air Force Office of Special Investigations special agent.

Bodkin retired in 2011 after 22 years of service in the regular Air Force, 10 of which he spend in OSI.

"His prior background gives him the ability to function independently

- it's like that Patton quote, 'You don't tell them how to do it, you tell them what needs to be done and let them surprise you, you just tell him what needs to be done, and he does it," said Witter. "It also allows him to build a program where the patrolmen are confident in what they're doing, and they understand the investigative process."

And, his skills aren't all in program management and training.

"Terry is one of the best interviewers I've ever met," Witter said, adding that Bodkin is always looking for new and better ways to accomplish the mission.

"He's very much against the idea of 'we've always done it that way,'" the colonel continued. "He likes to push the envelope and find new ways to do things; and he never accepts the status quo."

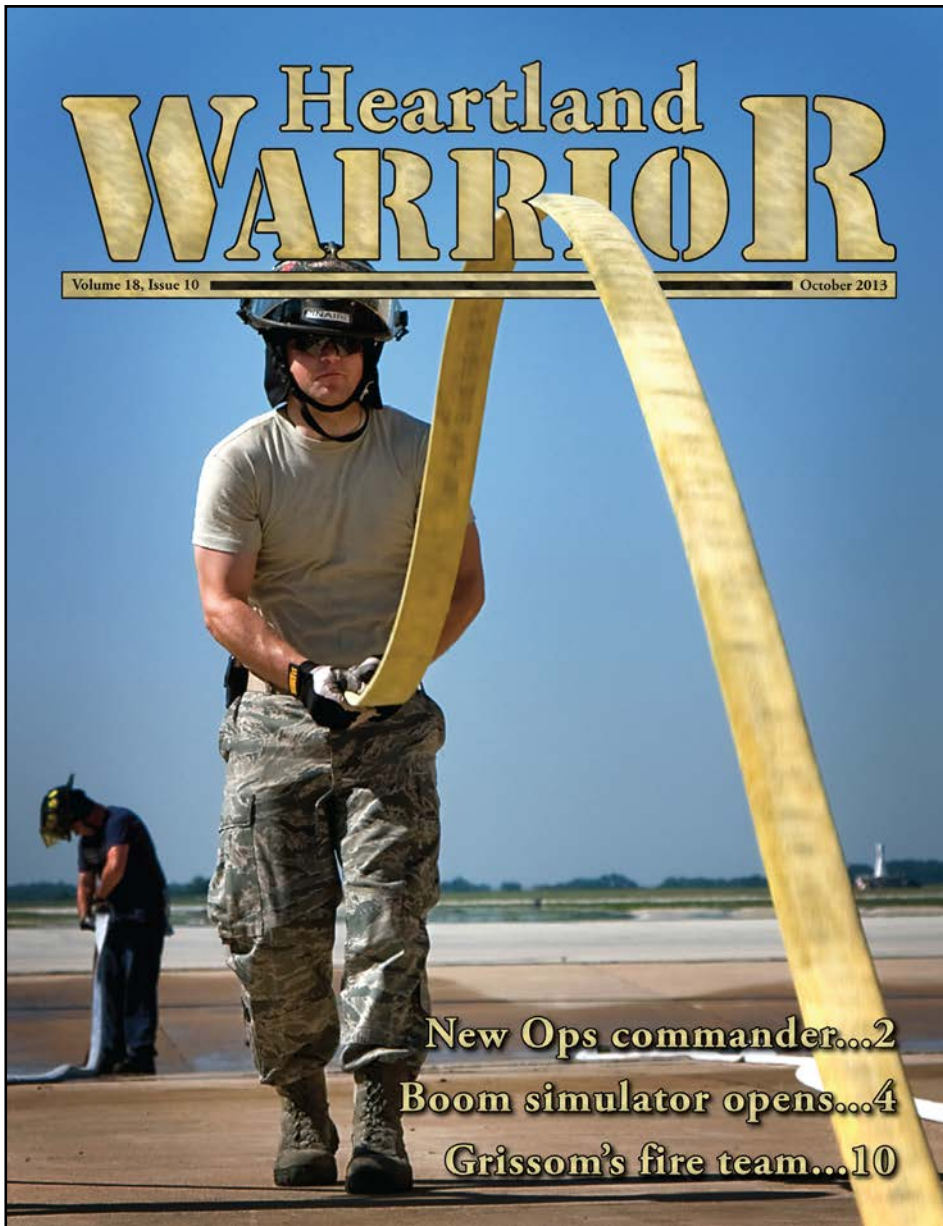
As a former special agent and now civilian clothes wearing member of law enforcement, Bodkin said he's not used to the spotlight.

"For those who do police work, it can sometimes feel like the work they do goes unnoticed, but this award is a reminder that this isn't the case," Bodkin explained, while giving much of the credit for the award to those with whom he works.

"I must say that I can't do my job without the assistance of so many individuals at Grissom," Bodkin concluded.

"This award took a team effort."

Grissom PA wins top command media contest honors



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Staff Sgt. Andy McLaughlin

In the Air Force Reserve Command media contest, the October Heartland Warrior was named best web-based publication and overall best command publication.

By Tech. Sgt. Douglas Hays
Public Affairs staff

In the Air Force Reserve Command's version of journalism Olympics, the 434th Air Refueling Wing's public affairs staff took four gold medals, three silvers and a bronze.

The top entries were announced March 11 by Lt. Gen. James Jackson, AFRC commander. The public affairs competition featured 317 web, print, graphic, still photo and broadcasting entries from 30

organizations.

The Heartland Warrior took top honors in the web-based publication category and won overall as the best command publication. It was the third consecutive year Grissom's online magazine took top spot in the web category.

Staff Sgt. Ben Mota, 434th ARW public affairs specialist, was awarded for his journalistic abilities in the news writing category for his story on Grissom Soldiers deploying in January 2013.

Tech. Sgt. Mark Orders-Woempner, 434th ARW public affairs

deputy chief, also took home a first place in the feature photo category with a photo of a 434th Civil Engineer Squadron explosive ordnance technician during an exercise.

All of the first-place entries advanced to the Air Force Media Contest at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas.

While they Hoosier Wing PA warriors didn't finish first in every category, they did manage to pull out three second-place and one third place award.

The office overall was voted to have the second best website in the command, finishing only second to the 507th Air Refueling Wing's site, which won first place throughout all of the Air Force.

In the photojournalism category, Tech. Sgt. Mark Orders-Woempner claimed second place for his story on a joint exercise held at Grissom in August 2013. Judges reviewed both the quality of the story and his supporting photos.

Orders-Woempner was also the runner up for the military print journalist of the year competition. This category required five separate entries that highlight the writing and photography skills across a variety of news and feature categories.

His entries included two news entries, one about Grissom's new boom operator weapons system trainer, and how the wing took flight in Bold Quest to improve battlefield communications.

He also had two feature stories judged. They were about psychological operation soldiers training as combat life savers and another about base employees uniting against domestic violence.

The final entry in the category was for photojournalism where he outlined the EOD unit here and the 'long walk' they must make to do their jobs.

Rounding out the awards was a third place finish for Orders-Woempner in the graphic illustration category for a winter safety graphic he created.

Sixteen Grissom Airmen awarded medals

By Tech. Sgt. Douglas Hays
Public Affairs staff

For their meritorious service in the Air Force, 16 Grissom Airmen were recently awarded medals.

Meritorious Service Medal

Five 434th Air Refueling Wing Airmen were recently presented with Meritorious Service Medals. President Lyndon Johnson established the MSM by Executive Order 11448 on Jan. 16, 1969, as the counterpart of the Bronze Star Medal for the recognition of meritorious noncombatant service. Those who received MSMs are listed below:

- Therese Kern, 434th Aerospace Medicine Squadron
- Senior Master Sgt. Joseph Allen, 434th Air Refueling Wing
- Chief Master Sgt. Kenneth Hal-lam, 434th ARW
- Lt. Col. David Schmitt, 434th Operations Support Squadron
- Lt. Col. David Fitschen, 74th Air Refueling Squadron

Air Medal

Three aviators were presented with Air Medals. The Air Medal was established by May 11, 1942 and is awarded to U.S. military and civilian personnel for single acts



U.S. Air Force graphic by Tech. Sgt. Mark Orders-Woempner

of heroism or meritorious achievements while participating in aerial flight and foreign military personnel in actual combat in support of operations. Below are those who received Air Medals:

- Lt. Col. Erik Thorell, 72nd Air Refueling Squadron
- Maj. William Schneider, 434th OSS
- Lt. Col. Victor Verboncoeur, 72nd ARS

Air Force Commendation Medal

One officer and three Airmen received Air Force Commendation Medals. This medal was authorized by the Secretary of the Air Force

on March 28, 1958, for award to members of the Armed Forces of the United States who distinguished themselves by meritorious achievement and service. Below are those who received commendation medals:

- Capt. Jason Baldwin, 434th AMDS
- Master Sgt. Todd Moore, 434th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Staff Sgt. Michael Graham, 434th AMSX
- Master Sgt. Billy Dotson, Jr., 49th Aerial Port Flight

Air Force Achievement Medal

One officer and three Grissom Airmen were awarded the Air Force Achievement Medal. This medal was authorized by the Secretary of the Air Force on Oct. 20, 1980, and is awarded to Air Force personnel for outstanding achievement or meritorious service rendered specifically on behalf of the Air Force. Below are those who received achievement medals:

- Staff Sgt. Richard Barrett IV, 434th Security Forces Squadron
- 2nd Lt. John Pedro II, 434th Logistics Readiness Squadron
- Tech. Sgt. Kevin Mortier, 434th Maintenance Squadron
- Senior Airman Chris Whittamore, 49th APF

AF Military Athlete of the year nominations due April 30

By Staff Sgt. Ian
Hoachlander
AFPC Public Affairs

JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO-RANDOLPH, Texas -- Nominations for the Air Force Military Athlete of the Year are due April 30, said Air Force Personnel Center officials.

The program allows the Air Force to recognize outstanding male and female athletes and highlight their athletic performance and accomplishments throughout the last year.

"The Military Athlete of the Year program promotes recognition of Air Force athletes who go above and beyond at the local, state, regional, national and international levels at each installation," said Steve Brown, Air Force Sports chief.

"Participation in installation Air Force sports program team sports promotes unit cohesion, leadership and morale, and Air Force success in individual sports promotes service

pride throughout the Air Force," he added.

Nomination packets must include background information on each candidate, as well as full name, military address, home address, home phone number, work phone number and a photograph of the member.

Nomination packets can be picked up at installation fitness centers.

Each installation is limited to one male and one female candidate. The force support squadron

will submit the top contenders from their base to the Air Force Personnel Center Directorate of Services.

Air Force Military Athlete of the Year results will be announced this summer.

For more information about the Air Force Military Athlete of the Year program visit www.USAFsports.com or email sports@myairforcelife.com. For information about other quality of life programs visit <https://mypers.af.mil>. (AFNS)

Airmen must revalidate dependents

By Capt. Erika Yepsen

Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs

WASHINGTON -- By Dec. 31, every Airman will be required to provide their servicing finance office with documentation for all dependents as part of Air Force audit readiness efforts.

This one-time, Air Force-wide recertification process will allow the Air Force to validate Airmen's basic allowance for housing entitlements, ensuring every dollar of the \$5.4 billion the Air Force spends annually on BAH is fully auditable.

"When we say the Air Force is not audit compliant, that doesn't mean that money is missing or being mis-spent," said Doug Bennett, the deputy assistant secretary of the Air Force for financial operations. "Generally, it means that we lack the required documentation for our spending to be considered auditable. In the case of BAH, we need Airmen's marriage certificates, birth certificates for children and divorce decrees that require child support properly documented by our finance offices to ensure we can audit \$5.4 billion in Air Force spending."

Beginning this month and continuing through December, Air Force finance offices will contact Airmen across the total force by email to notify them of their responsibility to provide dependent documentation. Their finance office will tell them exactly which documents are required. Additionally, Airmen who recently provided documentation may not be required to do so again. Airmen should wait to be notified by their finance offices rather than bringing in documentation unsolicited, Bennett said. Waiting to receive notification will eliminate unnecessary duplication of effort for some Airmen.

Once notified, Airmen will have 30 days to provide

the required documents to their servicing finance office or have their housing allowance status reduced to single-rate. Deployed Airmen and those on extended leave or temporary duty will be given special consideration in meeting the 30-day deadline.

The push for revalidation of dependent documentation comes as the Air Force prepares to meet financial improvement and audit readiness requirements laid out in the 2010 National Defense Authorization Act. The Air Force currently retains dependent documentation for six years, which is insufficient to meet audit readiness requirements. This one-time revalidation will ensure Air Force compliance with audit requirements, Bennett said.

"America entrusts the Air Force not only to spend taxpayer dollars wisely and efficiently, but also to account and justify that expenditure," said Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III in a recent memo. "Preparation for this important and legislatively-mandated effort rests in the hands of every Airman, not just the financial community."

Although revalidation of Airmen's dependents will be a one-time recertification, Airmen will continue to play a vital role in the Air Force's audit readiness. Starting in 2015, independent auditors will visit work stations for Airmen to review processes, procedures and transactions that directly impact the Air Force's financial statements.

"Ensuring we have the proper documentation to account for every expenditure in a very large budget is a difficult but essential effort," said Dr. Jamie Morin, the assistant secretary of the Air Force for Financial Management and Comptroller. "Becoming audit ready will help us demonstrate to the American public that we are responsible stewards of taxpayer money at a time when we must make every dollar count." (AFNS)

Grissom announces enlisted Airman promotions

By Tech. Sgt. Mark

Orders-Woempner

Public Affairs staff

From their first to their last, America's Airmen earn each stripe of rank.

Such was the case for 25 Airmen from the 434th Air Refueling Wing here as they were recently to the next highest rank.

Their names are as follows:

To senior master sergeant:

- Ernest Connell, 434th Air Refueling Wing

To master sergeant:

- Jamie Blount, 434th Aerospace Medicine Squadron

- Bradley Frank, 49th Aerial Port Flight

- Joseph Meyer, 434th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron

To technical sergeant:

- Steven Bartee, 434th AMXS

- hane Enderle, 434th Maintenance Squadron

- Leon Howard, 434th ARW

To staff sergeant:

- Devin Catellier, 434th AMXS

- Jason Coombs, 434th MXS

- Anthony McClure, 434th MXS

- Jacob Ross, 434th AMXS

To senior airman:

- Chelsey Burkus, 434th Logistics Readiness Squadron

- Miguel Esquivel, 434th MXS

- Jesse Flagle, 434th Civil

Engineer Squadron

- Touacha Her, 434th LRS

- Paige Mize, 434th Security

Forces Squadron

- Terrell Nunnery, 434t SFS

- Whitney Smith, 434th Force

Support Squadron

- Joshua Snyder, 434th CES

- Daniel Von Moser, 434th ARW

- Alexis Wilson, 434th FSS

To airman 1st class:

- Beth Kolb, 434th AMDS

- James Miller, 434th LRS

- Pamela Milton, 434th SFS

To airman:

- Ashley Bowman, 434th AMXS

Disability claims backlog reduced by 44 percent

One year after the backlog of pending disability compensation claims peaked at over 611,000 in March 2013, the Department of Veterans Affairs has reduced that number by approximately 44 percent to 344,000 claims -- a reduction of more than 267,000.

At the same time officials have improved the accuracy of the decisions being made on veterans' disability claims. Additionally, on average, veterans are waiting 119 days less for a decision than they were at this time last year.

"No veteran should have to wait to receive earned benefits," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki. "Through a combination of transformation initiatives and the hard work of our employees, we are making significant progress toward our goal of eliminating the claims backlog in 2015."

The current backlog, defined as claims pending more than 125 days, is at its lowest point since March 2011, when the backlog spiked in part because of the need to readjudicate 150,000 previously decided cases involving exposure to the Vietnam-era defoliant, Agent Orange. The readjudication of these claims was mandated under the Nehmer court decision and followed the secretary's decision to add ischemic heart disease, certain leukemias, and Parkinson's disease to the list of conditions presumed to be related to exposure to Agent Orange. During this same time period, VA also received and processed over 100,000 new claims for these three conditions from Vietnam veterans and survivors newly eligible for VA benefits as a result of this decision.

"We knew taking care of this 'unfinished business' for veterans of previous wars would initially drive up the number of claims in our system," Shinseki said. "But it was the right thing to do."

Since establishing the goal in 2010 of processing all disability claims within 125 days at a 98-percent ac-

curacy level, VA developed and is implementing a plan that transforms the decades-old, manual paper claim approach into a state-of-the-art electronic process that leverages digital data transfer and automated calculators to reduce processing time and input errors.

VA has also increased the productivity of its claims processing workforce through enhanced training, streamlined processes and other initiatives such as mandating overtime and prioritizing the oldest claims.

At the same time, the accuracy of rating decisions continues to improve. VA's national "claim-level" accuracy rate, determined by dividing the total number of cases that are error-free by the total number of cases reviewed, is currently 91 percent -- an eight-percentage-point improvement since 2011. When measuring the accuracy of rating individual medical conditions inside each claim, the three-month accuracy level is 96.5 percent. VA's accuracy measures are statistically valid and the process has been independently verified by the Institute for Defense Analyses.

VA claims processors continue to prioritize disability claims for homeless veterans, those experiencing extreme financial hardship, the terminally ill, former Prisoners of War, Medal of Honor recipients, and veterans filing Fully Developed Claims. Filing an electronic FDC is the quickest way for a veteran to receive a decision on their compensation claim (<http://www.benefits.va.gov/fdc/>).

Regardless of the status of their compensation claims, veterans who have served in combat since Nov. 11, 1998, are eligible for five years of free medical care from VA for any illness associated with their service.

Veterans can learn more about disability and other Veterans benefits on the joint Department of Defense/VA Web portal eBenefits at www.ebenefits.va.gov.

(Courtesy of U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs)

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heavy airframes, because in the big world of planning if you ever want to rapidly move in heavy airframes, a hydrant system is the way to do it," he explained. "If you don't have a hydrant system, everything has to be trucked which blows your worst-case scenario for war planning out the door."

Grissom will begin installation of the new hydrant system June 1.

It wasn't just for his job proficiency and attention to detail that garnered

Pedro the annual award. He was also evaluated on his self-improvement and base and community involvement.

To improve himself, Runion said the lieutenant took the initiative to complete course in logistics QA, aircraft load planning, physical training and hazardous material handling.

Through that training, Runion said Pedro aided the squadron in 100 percent on-time reports, increased cargo planning depth, developed a unit

fitness program and ensured access to the latest technical orders.

For his efforts around Grissom and off-duty, Pedro was lauded in his award package for being the lead point of contact for a 434th Mission Support Group assumption of command ceremony, leading more than 40 workers to set up for Grissom's Family Day event and for helping fellow 434th LRS personnel build wheelchair ramps for handicapped veterans.

When asked if he had

advice for fellow Airmen, Pedro said the keys to his success revolved around his agility and willingness to step outside his comfort zone.

"You can foresee so many things and you can go off experience, but you need to remain agile," he elaborated. "The more you know what's going on around you, the better prepared you'll be. You want to get out of the stove pipe mentality, so when you do have problems you know where to get help."