

AIR | OBSERVER

the biannual journal of the 137th special operations wing

GLOBAL FORCE

137 SOW'S FIRST AFSOC MISSION MARKS END OF TRANSITION, BEGINNING OF WORLDWIDE OPERATIONS

SILVER FLAG
137 SOCES TRAINS
IN GERMANY

WOMEN IN MILITARY SERVICE
OKNG CELEBRATES
FACES OF COURAGE

VIGILANT GUARD
137 AES READIES
FOR DISASTER

SOONER STRIKE
OKANG BUILDS
BONDS, PREPARES
FOR DEPLOYMENTS

NORTHERN STRIKE 17
146 ASOS LEADS
WAY IN LARGEST
U.S. EXERCISE
OF ITS KIND

BALTIC FURY
146 TACPS PARTNER
WITH ESTONIAN ALLIES

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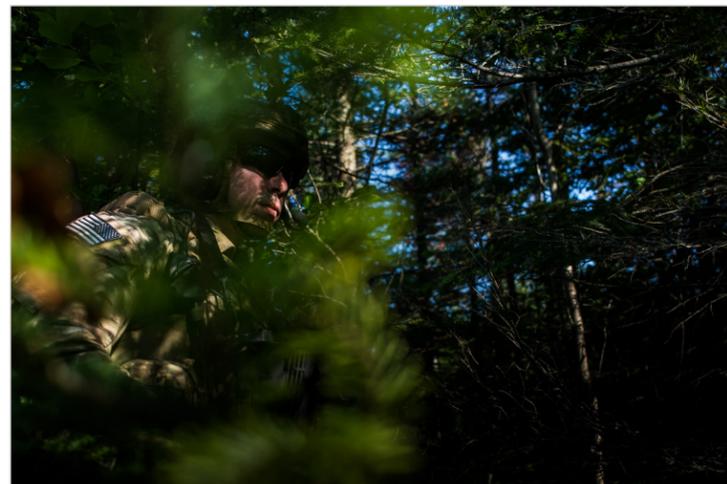
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ON THE COVER

This image shows Staff Sgt. Laurence Paradis, 146th Air Support Operations Squadron tactical air control party specialist, navigating through the dense forest landscape of Camp Grayling Joint Maneuver Training Center, Michigan, while completing a navigation exercise during Northern Strike 17, Aug. 6, 2017. The photographer framed the photograph with the natural environment and waited for the subject to move into the light.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Staff Sgt. Tyler K. Woodward

(Image available on www.dvidshub.net)



137 SOW APP

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JULY 2017 - DECEMBER 2017

Volume 3 Number 2



Willy Wonka and his Oompa Loompas take a break from the chocolate factory to join Airmen and their families at the Will Rogers Air National Guard Trunk or Treat fall festival, Oklahoma City, Oct. 14, 2017. Costumed kiddos enjoyed an endless supply of Halloween treats and activities including hay rides, a bounce house, snow cones, costume contest and 5K run. Pictured (left to right): Staff Sgt. Matthew Fairchild, Senior Master Sgt. Sergio Factuvar, Senior Master Sgt. Andrew LaMoreaux, Master Sgt. Ekarath Lavarn and his daughter, and Master Sgt. Eden Woznick and her daughter. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Trisha K. Shields)

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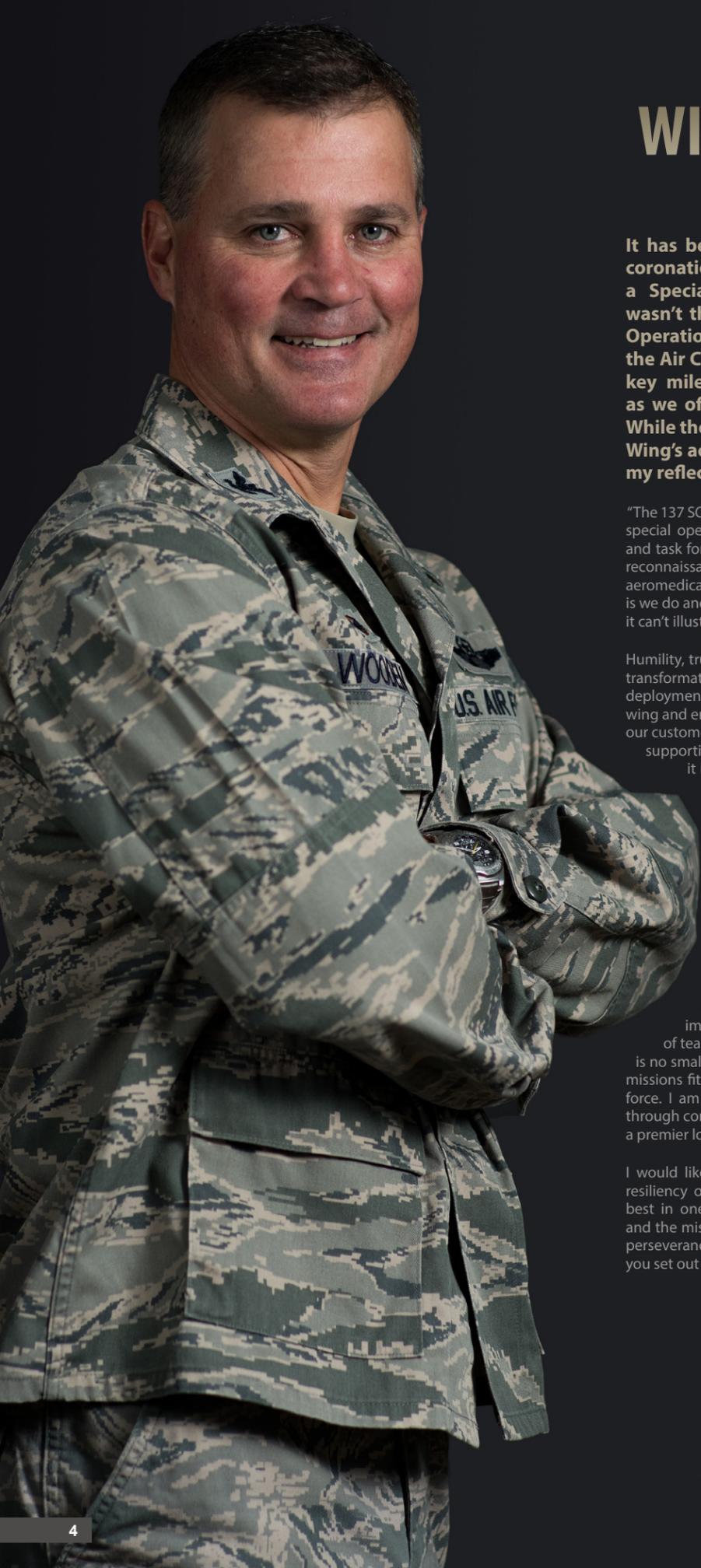
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WING COMMANDER COL. DEVIN R. WOODEN

It has been just over a year since the Wing held its coronation ceremony marking our official status as a Special Operations Wing. Though this certainly wasn't the first step in our transformation to Special Operations, it was a significant milestone in cultivating the Air Commando ethos in all of our Airmen. Another key milestone is rapidly approaching this February as we officially exit our conversion status as a wing. While these events will become an official record of the Wing's accomplishments, I would like to share some of my reflections as I look back on the past year.

"The 137 SOW is a force provider for geographic combatant commanders, special operations command, theater special operations commanders, and task force commanders with manned intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, close air support, agile combat support, cyber, space and aeromedical evacuation." Our mission statement clearly identifies what it is we do and who we support in our federal mission as Guardsmen. What it can't illustrate is how you do it day in and day out ... together!

Humility, trust and discipline have been at the foundation of this wing's transformation. These traits have played a crucial role in enabling our first deployment as a SOW within one year of becoming a special operations wing and enhancing our ability to showcase our collective capabilities to our customers. Your teamwork has blurred the lines of the supported and supporting roles across the Wing in a way that is truly unique. Whether it is our intelligence squadrons supporting our flying squadron providing an unblinking eye to ground forces or the flying squadron supporting our intelligence squadrons providing executable intelligence, each must adapt their respective roles to ensure effective air power. The same can be said for our units providing cyber assurance, preserving unique access to space, or maintaining the "golden hour" with expert airborne medical care. Each unit provides a unique capability that requires unique support.

I am constantly hearing from leadership across the command how well the Airmen of the Wing have embraced this new command and more specifically our new missions. Each of you have played an important role and continue to impress me with how you have fostered an effective chemistry of teamwork between the units in the Wing. This level of teamwork is no small task. It has required everyone to identify how our collective missions fit into the larger picture to create a formidable homogenous force. I am continually amazed with how well each unit has bonded through common interest and complementary talents to make this wing a premier location in generating readiness.

I would like to reiterate just how continually impressed I am by the resiliency of this wing and how you come together to bring out the best in one another. Our wing's transformation to special operations and the missions you are doing, and will continue to do, exemplify your perseverance; and I am confident you will continue to evolve as a team as you set out to cultivate your future in AFSOC.

GUEST CONTRIBUTOR MRS. SHERRY JORDAN EDMOND CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

What does it mean to go through a transformation, and how do we do it effectively? Everyone must face this during their careers and their lives, often more than once. How can you be an effective transformational leader? As President and CEO of the Edmond Area Chamber of Commerce, I could answer that question with multiple definitions. Whether I apply it to the transition into my role of CEO, my family life or my relationship with my staff, it is an essential part of my day-to-day life.

In October of 2016, I was given the opportunity to become President and CEO of the Edmond Area Chamber of Commerce. Through this transformation, I took on the responsibilities of defining and creating goals that establish what it means to be the voice for business in such a great community like Edmond. Having experience as a staff member at the Edmond Chamber before my promotion has driven me to have the best first year as president possible. After serving as the Edmond Chamber's Chief Financial Officer for 12 years, I was able to step into the new role of leadership with confidence in which programs needed to be updated and what new ideas my staff could bring to fruition.

It is extremely important to know how things work from the ground up; therefore, I started my promotion with the reorganization of the backbone of the Chamber – my team. They were given the opportunity to express areas of concern and ideas for improvement within individual work areas and overall Chamber programs. We sat down together to discuss the importance of defining clear lines of communication between teammates. I am proud to say that the team has committed to me the way that I have committed to them and we have stayed intact since I became CEO.

"A genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus."
– Martin Luther King Jr.

Consensus, by definition, means "an agreement or understanding." In a business setting, this can translate to an alignment of purpose. My team understands our purpose in the Edmond community and how to become transformational leaders in all of our programs, events, and committees.

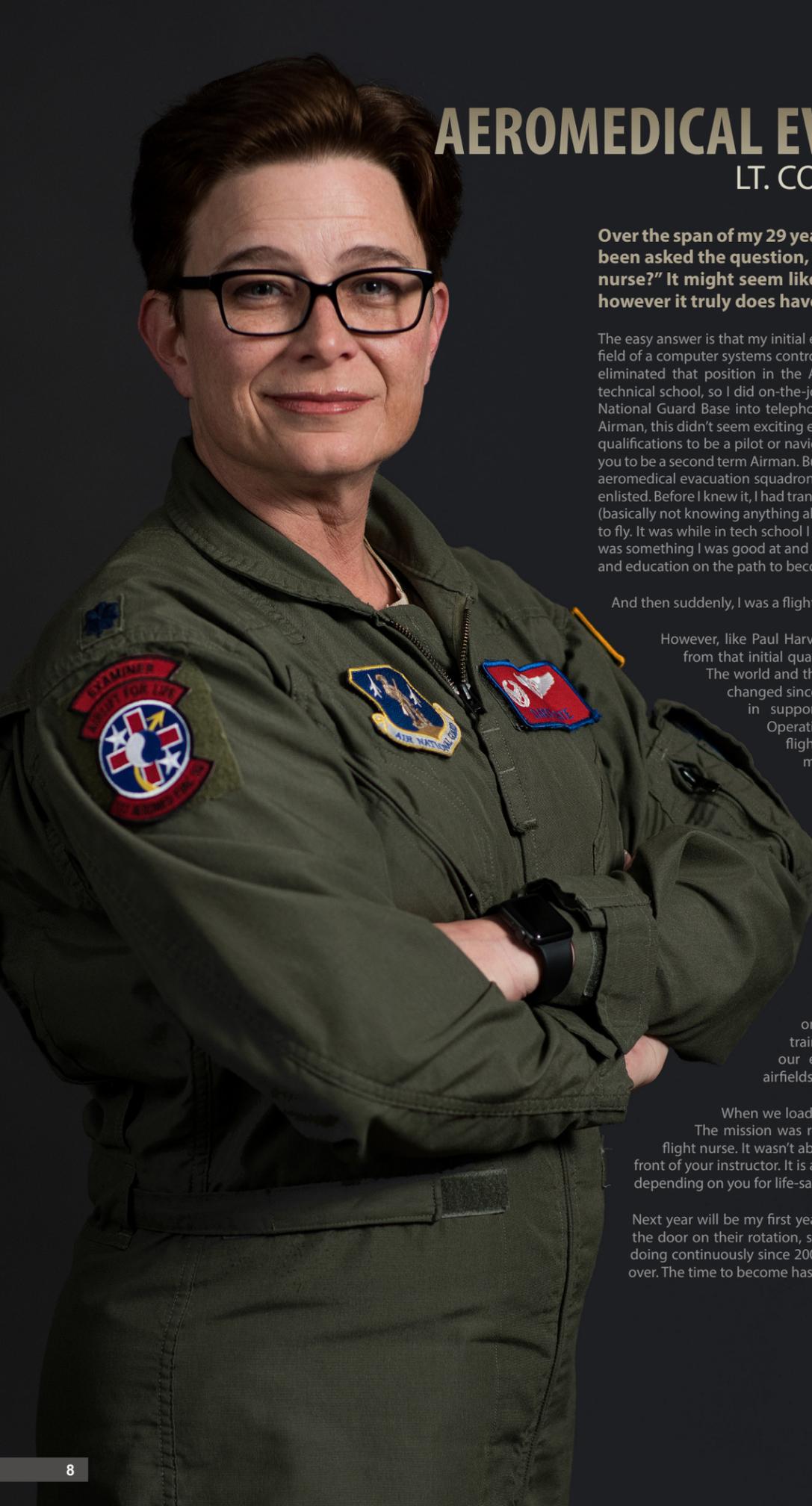
Transformational leadership creates valuable and positive change, with the end goal of developing colleagues into leaders. It is an opportunity that I as the president and CEO of the Edmond Area Chamber of Commerce took and an opportunity that you as individuals of the 137th Special Operations Wing can also take.





JAY-ROT-SEE DOODLE DANDY | Senior Master Sgt. Andrew M. LaMoreaux

An over-sized Uncle Sam leads potential future Airmen in a parade to celebrate our nation's independence. Dressed in both blues and Revolutionary War uniforms, the Edmond North Oklahoma 81st Air Force Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps marched proudly in the LibertyFest 4th of July parade in Edmond, Okla., July 4, 2017. The 137th Special Operations Wing joined the Edmond Chamber of Commerce to foster our shared spirit of volunteerism and our commitment to our country, communities and families.



AEROMEDICAL EVACUATION

LT. COL. DARCY D. TATE

Over the span of my 29 years in the military, I have often been asked the question, “How did you become a flight nurse?” It might seem like an easy question to answer, however it truly does have a two-fold answer.

The easy answer is that my initial enlistment in 1988 put me in the career field of a computer systems control specialist. The National Guard Bureau eliminated that position in the Air National Guard while I was still at technical school, so I did on-the-job training back here at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base into telephone installation and repair. As a young Airman, this didn't seem exciting enough. I wanted to fly. I didn't have the qualifications to be a pilot or navigator, and being a loadmaster required you to be a second term Airman. But, a friend mentioned that there was an aeromedical evacuation squadron on base that might have openings for enlisted. Before I knew it, I had transferred and was off to a new tech school (basically not knowing anything about medical), but I had an opportunity to fly. It was while in tech school I discovered that the medical profession was something I was good at and really enjoyed, which set my civilian life and education on the path to becoming a registered nurse.

And then suddenly, I was a flight nurse.

However, like Paul Harvey said, there is a rest of the story ... from that initial qualification in 1999, fast forward to 2003.

The world and the military's need for AE had drastically changed since Sept. 11, 2001. I deployed to Al Udiad in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. As a fairly new flight nurse, I had never flown a live patient mission. I was expecting to be on a crew of five with an experienced flight nurse that would help guide me into being a fully operational flight nurse. When I arrived, I found out that not only would there not be a full crew, but I would be assigned an alert crew consisting of myself (the only flight nurse) and two aeromedical evacuation technicians I had never met. The first mission my crew and I were alerted for, my fear was real. Could I do the job? Would I fail the patients and my crew? Would our plane be hit or shot down? However, relying on our training, we configured the aircraft, loaded our equipment and took off for various airfields in Iraq.

When we loaded the patients, the patients were real.

The mission was real. It was then that I really became a flight nurse. It wasn't about the best grades or looking good in front of your instructor. It is about performing when 40 patients are depending on you for life-saving care in a hostile environment.

Next year will be my first year as a commander to send people out the door on their rotation, something that our squadron has been doing continuously since 2001. At that point, the time to prepare is over. The time to become has arrived. Be ready!

CHAPLAIN

CAPT. JOSEPH D. BAKER

AND THEY WERE ALL WITH ONE ACCORD... - ACTS 5:12

British Airways is the largest airline in the UK. It was created in 1974 from four other companies — BEA, BOAC, Northeast Airlines, and Cambrian Airlines — taking to the sky with 215 aircraft supported by 50,000 employees, a level of staffing that was, even then, viewed as precariously oversized. In 1981, British Airways brought on Lord King, a new chairperson who noticed that the company was operating very inefficiently and wasting valuable resources. To increase profits, King decided to restructure the entire organization by reducing its workforce from 59,000 to 39,000, eliminating unprofitable routes and modernizing the fleet. He repaired the airline's image by bringing in a new marketing expert. Within 10 years, the airline reported the highest profits in its industry: \$284 million. Before King began, he explained the new organizational structure. Without his transparency, British Airways could have experienced employee backlash and negative press around all the layoffs. But the chairperson always communicated honestly and frequently to manage the change.

We are reminded of a few lessons from this example. They brought in some new people. Lord King created an environment of transparency, which many believed prevented backlash and negative press against the changes. Last but not least, they communicated honestly and frequently each step of the way.

The 137th Special Operations Wing must ask ourselves some tough questions as we persevere through our mission. Like the early Church, we too must perform with one accord. May we be emboldened by Gen. David L. Goldfein who wrote, "Together, we are humbled and privileged to carry this commitment forward as we answer the nation's call."

The question may not be "what are we doing?" but "how well are we doing at this point?"

Let us remember to support each other by putting others first as we accomplish our mission. It's easy to forget our SOF truth of putting people over machines. Let us never forget that our people make us successful with any mission.

This mission is much bigger than each individual Airman, from the wing commander to the newest Airman; we have a whole state and nation relying on our expertise regardless of our title.

Lastly, let us always be transparent and honest. Let us never fail to be open and honest during our mission by communicating respectfully and professionally. This will control any backlash and negative attitudes, which can create chaos in any military organization. Remember Lord King's key for British Airways: communication, communication, and more communication!





COME TOGETHER | Senior Master Sgt. Andrew M. LaMoreaux

Shiny Air Force dress shoes and Army combat boots march together during a joint-force ceremony to honor veterans from all branches of the military at the 45th Infantry Division Museum's annual Veterans Day event in Oklahoma City, Nov. 11, 2017. The 137th Special Operations Wing Honor Guard, along with seven other Honor Guards from around the state, presented the colors during the ceremony.



SECURITY FORCES CAPT. JOSHUA M. ODQUIST

Security forces defenders are found at every Air Force installation across the globe, working in every element, every day of the year. All Defenders have the same mission no matter the location — to protect all personnel and assets.

Defenders of the 137th Special Operations Security Forces Squadron are no different. We are here to protect you and the assets of the 137th Special Operations Wing 365 days a year, and that mission will always be constant. We not only support the Wing, but we have supported operations in the Global War on Terror nearly every year since 2003.

During the transition of the Wing from Air Mobility Command to Air Force Special Operations Command, the Defenders' mission hasn't changed. Opportunities to train with outside agencies have increased and has given the SFS the ability to work with joint units and civilian agencies. This has transformed the unit. These opportunities have put our Defenders in mentally and physically exhausting positions while training to sharpen their skills to achieve a higher state of readiness than at any point in our history.

Though the Defenders' mission is a constant, the demands on the squadron have greatly expanded. While maintaining base security, our requirements have increased with new mission sets both at home and abroad. During the Wing's transition, security forces was challenged with a new full-time requirement, causing a hiring and recruiting challenge. Once we meet the end goal, we will be manned with one of the largest full-time forces in the Air National Guard. This seems very positive, but in reality it is very challenging to go from two full-time military positions to one of the largest forces while still continuing to meet the high standards AFSOC requires from us.

As the defense force commander for the 137 SOSFS, each day is a blessing and a challenge. This mission has stretched each one of us in SF and given us the opportunity to adapt and grow with the new challenges. Every day presents new challenges for us Defenders, but the one thing I want you to know is that we will always be here to protect you and this installation. The people may change, but the mission goes on — no matter what. The people of Security Forces are the most selfless people I have had the opportunity to work with. They don't complain about working long hours, holidays or even in the elements because they know their mission. It is an honor to lead and be part of such a great organization and to be able to call myself a Defender.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY MASTER SGT. NICOLE L. BREWER

My military career started on active duty in August of 2000.

I still remember getting off the bus in that sweltering Texas heat at Lackland Air Force Base, being yelled at and moved quickly into a building. I recall thinking, "What have I gotten myself into?" What a roller coaster basic training was! After basic and technical school, I was stationed at Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma City, and what a joy it was to be back home.

It was then as an airman first class way back in 2001, that I told myself I wanted to retire as a master sergeant one day. At the time, I'm not sure I even believed that one day was possible.

During my eight years on active duty, I experienced many things that could have deterred me from reaching that goal: the inexperienced supervisor, the overbearing supervisor, being the only Airman that was given "additional duties" because I was the responsible one, experiencing almost daily what I now know to be sexual harassment, working for a captain that thought it was okay to make racist comments about a certain demographic of people, and finally deploying three times in three years and leaving behind my daughter each time. I very well could have said, "If this is what the Air Force is about, I'm done."

But I didn't allow those things to be a hindrance to achieving the goal I set before myself. Instead, I used them, as well as the awesome experiences I had, as fuel to keep going, keep developing, and keep my head up.

Keep my head up is exactly what I did at the end of those eight years. I had the opportunity to say goodbye to the uniform and put all the craziness behind me, but I knew there was more to see, more to do and more to be.

I made the transition to the Oklahoma Air National Guard nine years ago. So much has changed since I got lost trying to come through the old gate by the Metro Technology Center back when it was open. The landscape has been enhanced. The 146th Air Support Operations Squadron building is new. The gym moved from the fire department to its own building. The mission has been upgraded. We've added new units, welcomed new faces and said goodbye to familiar ones. Personally, I'm well on my way to achieving that goal I set for myself oh so many years ago.

I came here as a staff sergeant and worked my way to master sergeant. Retirement is now on the horizon. If you don't get a single thing out of my reminiscing and rambling, take this with you: nothing stays the same, and neither should you! Take it all in — the good, the bad, and the ugly. Use it to live, to grow and to continuously develop a better YOU.





IN THE AIR TONIGHT | Staff Sgt. Tyler K. Woodward

The stadium-like lights of Will Rogers Air National Guard Base flood the flightline as an MC-12W and its aircrew wait to take off for its first downrange deployment. Anticipation filled the air as the aircraft's wheels left the runway, and the 137th Special Operations Wing's first deployment under the Air Force Special Operations Command began, marking the end of the transition from an air refueling wing and the beginning of special operations.

GLOBAL FORCE

The 137th Special Operations Wing's first Air Force Special Operations Command mission downrange marks the end of the transition to a special operations wing and the beginning of worldwide operations in support of its partners and allies.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS HAPPEN AT NIGHT.

In the hours between dusk and dawn, under just the glow of the flight line's orange lights, aircrews strode to their aircraft with A-bags in hand. Commanders followed behind their Airmen, both proud and watchful as the MC-12W aircrews prepared themselves and their aircraft for the deployment ahead.

Flashlights painstakingly illuminated each part of the aircraft during pre-flight inspections and light-hearted chatter full of anticipation enveloped the crew before they disappeared into the tight space of the aircraft.

As the engines started and the props began to spin one at a time, the wash of exhaust and wind ripped at the uniforms and hair of those witnessing the momentous occasion. With a flash of the landing lights, the aircraft began to drift towards the beckoning and glowing marshalling wands.

The wheels lifted from the runway, and the commanders stayed around long enough to watch the aircraft lights fade into the dark sky. With this flight, the 137th Special Operations Wing's first mission for the U.S. Special Operations Command had only just begun.

For many of the 137 SOW Airmen and their families, the flight marked the official end of the transition, even more so than the ceremonial ribbon cutting more than two years ago.

The small aircraft on its way downrange reminded the Wing and its Airmen that they are no longer part of Air Mobility Command. Instead, they are the Air Force Special Operations Command's newest operational Air Commandos.

"This deployment is our debut into special operations and is preceded by many long days and nights of constructing, not only a new

story STAFF SGT. KASEY M. PHIPPS
photography STAFF SGT. TYLER K. WOODWARD



An explosive lights up a building from the inside during nighttime training at Fort Sill, Okla., Nov. 15, 2017, that allowed 137th Special Operations Wing Airmen from various units to see the MC-12W and the special operations mission in action.



Airmen from the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron, Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, lead the largest ground-to-air strike exercise in North America and work with allied countries during Northern Strike 17 at Camp Grayling, Mich., Aug. 8, 2017.



The 137th Air Support Element, Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, coordinated with several units, including the Oklahoma Army National Guard, to create a realistic training environment for special tactics Airmen, Nov. 15, 2017, at Fort Sill, Okla.

mission for the U.S. Air Force, but also a new unit here at Will Rogers," said Col. Kelly Cobble, 137th Special Operations Group commander. "As the only unit in the Air Force to fly MC-12Ws, our personnel were responsible for creating training syllabi, writing new AFIs and training every single crew member for this new mission."

Echoes of this can be seen throughout Will Rogers, including the very landscape of base.

A 60-foot-tall communications tower supports direct communication with MC-12W aircrews, eight new aircraft shelters protect the MC-12Ws and a hardened vehicle structure shelters military vehicles used in the field.

On the sidewalks, new faces add to the familiar ones, and new uniforms dot the base. Inside the buildings, doors are getting new security measures built in and the red glow of "classified" signs are filling more hallways.

Under the surface, changes have already occurred to support this deployment and the assuredly many to come. The 137 SOW is no longer a transitional force. It's an operational one.

"This new mission is one that will require our people to be deployed

on a continuous basis," said Cobble. "This is referred to as an 'enduring mission,' with 137 SOW members deployed 365 days a year. It's a first for the Air National Guard."

This fully-operational, never-ceasing pace demands a kind of support in all sectors of base that is just as steadfast and constant.

"It's easy for us to see the front side of deployment, like out-processing, equipment preparation and accountability, as unnecessary to putting boots on the ground in country," said Col. Rick Mutchler, 137th Mission Support Group commander. "However, without the front-side preparation, the deployment in country is often hampered when the lack of preparation leads to a slow stand-up of operations. The support organizations are driven to ensure the members and their families are both processed, accounted for, informed, educated and assisted throughout the entire deployment process."

Units across base have beefed up their pace, working harder and smarter to make deployments like this happen. New units on base, like the three new intelligence squadrons that have been stood up in support of the mission, are now fully functioning and have smoothly integrated with day-to-day base operations.

Apart from that, the 137th not only has an obligation downrange,

but also must continue to fulfill its responsibilities stateside in domestic operations and abroad as an Air National Guard unit. Legacy missions such as those of the 137th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron and 205th Engineering and Installation Squadron are in full swing as well.

"Historically, this base has always had an operational focus," said Col. Doug Hayworth, 137 SOW vice wing commander. "Now, we're looked at to participate in more missions than we ever had before. These are federal missions and domestic missions. Tornadoes don't go away, ice storms don't go away, and we're going to have hurricanes. Those things don't quit because we're busy in some other part of the world on a federal mission."

Even now, the change is far from over. It is the only assured constant in this newly operational equation. In order to remain ready, relevant and resilient, the 137th must continue to operate within this change.

Basewide, Will Rogers units have been seeking knowledge on state-of-the-art equipment, most current downrange tactics and day-to-day procedures, both in their military lives and civilian lives, from other special operations affiliates and military organizations.

"We can't do everything by ourselves, even within our own base,"

said Hayworth. "Relationships between our units on base are more important than they ever have been. A relationship with our major command is more important now than it ever has been. We have found over the course of the last 10 years that the relationship with our surrounding community is important for the knowledge and resources they can provide us. There is tremendous value in those relationships."

Lt. Gen. Bradley A. Heithold, the former AFSOC commander, said this at the ribbon cutting more than two years ago:

"The whole reason we're standing up this wing here is so we can provide more intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance to combatant commanders," he said. "It's vitally important to the success of our mission on the battlefield."

Twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year, 137th Air Commandos do their mission. Whether their mission is making sure Airmen get paid, ensuring members are healthy or providing valuable information to a commander in the thick of battle, they are a part of the 19,500 fellow Air Commandos across the nation.

ANY PLACE. ANY TIME. ANY WHERE. DAY AND NIGHT. A0

HELD HOSTAGE | Staff Sgt. Tyler K. Woodward

A mash-up of military and civilian police personnel run a hostage rescue scenario together during the Oklahoma County Sheriff's Office Special Weapons and Tactics school in Spencer, Okla., Nov. 2, 2017. Airmen from the 137th Special Operations Security Forces Squadron worked alongside fellow Oklahoma law enforcement agencies sharing training tips and techniques that could help the all organizations provide succinct responses during potential real-world domestic operations. No hostages were harmed during this exercise.



SILVER FLAG

Oklahoma Civil Engineers Practice Contingency Exercise Overseas

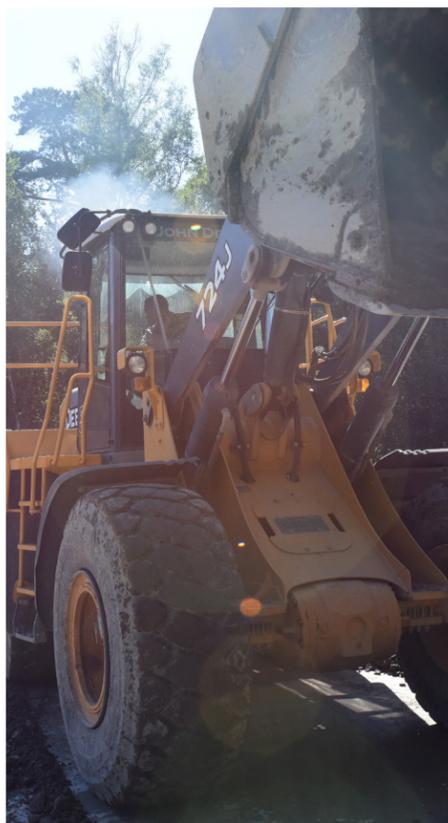
story CAPT. MICAH D. CAMPBELL

LEFT: A civil engineering Airman uses heavy equipment to repair a simulated crater at the Silver Flag training site at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, Aug. 6, 2017. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Capt. Micah D. Campbell)

TOP RIGHT: Structural specialists Tech. Sgt. Gary Elliott and Staff Sgt. Ryan Leath from the 137th Civil Engineering Squadron construct a medium-sized tent during a Silver Flag exercise at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, Aug. 5, 2017. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Capt. Micah D. Campbell)

MIDDLE RIGHT: Water and fuels systems maintenance specialists Senior Airman Jeff Huhn, 101st Air Refueling Wing, and Staff Sgt. Kyle Ferguson, 137th Civil Engineering Squadron, complete construction of a lavatory assembly as part of a Silver Flag exercise at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, Aug. 5, 2017. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Caitlin G. Carnes)

RIGHT: Air National Guard firefighters practice combating aircraft fires at the Silver Flag training site at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, Aug. 8, 2017. The training was part of an exercise that allowed Oklahoma Air National Guardsmen from the 137th Special Operations Wing, Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, and the 138th Fighter Wing, Tulsa Air National Guard Base, Tulsa, Oklahoma, to integrate with different career fields and units for a realistic contingency environment. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Capt. Micah D. Campbell)



Few Air Force specialties contribute more directly to the mission of delivering air power anyplace, anytime, than Civil Engineers. Sure, we all think of the fighter aircraft roaring to the fight with after-burners lit, or the pararescue Airman jumping out of an airplane, but these actions are not possible without a base of operations and a runway.

Civil Engineers from all across the globe converged at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, to learn the skills necessary to set up a base from scratch and to recover vital infrastructure such as a runway post-attack as part of a Silver Flag exercise, August 2-12, 2017.

Of the 150 Airmen participating in the training, 66 were from the Oklahoma Air National Guard. Airmen from the 137th Special Operations Wing and the 138th Fighter Wing, representing 14 different Air Force specialties from both civil engineering and support squadrons, experienced first-hand the importance of total force integration in a training environment and had the distinction of leading in various positions.

"Nobody works in a vacuum," said Lt. Col. Jason Ives, 138th Civil Engineer Support Squadron commander. "It is important to understand the roles required to carry out the mission. This exercise helps us develop relationships inside and outside of CE and teaches us how to function together."

Ives, who was designated as the deployment commander for the exercise, underscored the interoperability emphasis of Silver Flag, which has persisted since its inception in 1979. This point was especially pertinent for Airmen from the 137th Special Operations Civil Engineering Squadron who recently returned from a deployment to Southwest Asia and participated in the Silver Flag exercise.

"While we were overseas, we had an incident where Emergency Management came out," said Staff Sgt. Christopher Wooden, a fire protection specialist from the 137 Special Operations Civil Engineering Squadron. "We had to coordinate with active duty and Department of Defense personnel, which led to a coordination with the host-nation fire department as well as the Australian and British fire departments."

For Wooden and others, the training received at Silver Flag reinforced lessons that were learned through experience and provided a vital opportunity for new Airmen to practice in a simulated contingency environment and gain similar experience.

Though much of Silver Flag has remained consistent, some pieces had evolved to meet new challenges and were presented to Oklahoma Guardsmen in a developmental form.

Historically, Silver Flag exercises focused mainly on base recovery operations following an attack. As threats changed, Silver Flag and CE functions, evolved to focus more on "bed-down," or cantonment training, which covers standing up a fully functioning deployed airfield and base infrastructure. Training on runway repair, called Rapid Runway Repair, was included but focused on large-scale attacks from munitions that produce craters approximately 30 feet in diameter, or larger. Eventually, the RRR training piece evolved to be called Airfield Damage Repair, but still focused on large crater damage.

"During the ADR process, pavement and construction equipment Airmen, or 'Dirt Boys,' are on the crater," said Michael Thomas, Air Force Civil Engineering Center contingency training program manager for scheduling and registration. "While this is going on, the rest of the airfield is being set up by the other specialties, but no one but the Dirt Boys are in the area of the crater until ADR is done."

The major change experienced by Oklahoma Guardsmen involved a new process for runway repair called Rapid Airfield Damage Recovery, which focused on damage caused by multiple impacts of small munitions versus limited but severe impacts causing large craters.

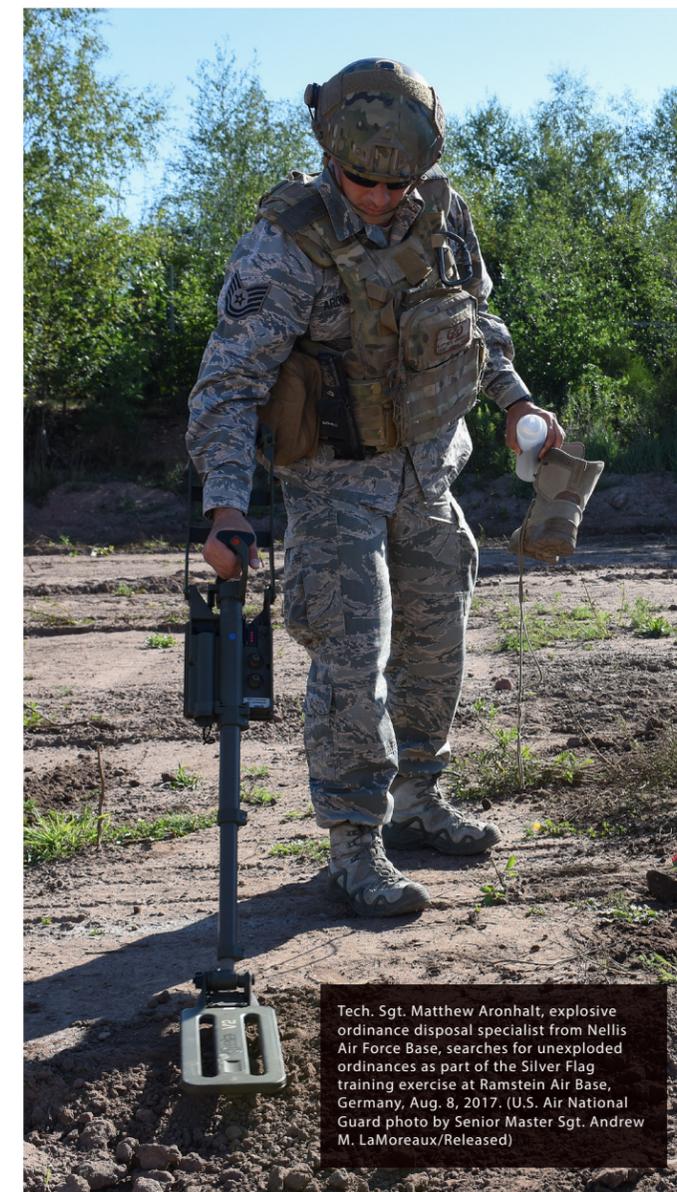
"The RADR process is a technological leap involving scalable equipment packages designed to respond to differing threat conditions," said Senior Master Sgt. Joseph Lamberti, 435th Construction Training superintendent, Ramstein Air Base, Germany.

Silver Flag participants continued to learn and practice the techniques involved in cantonment and ADR operations as part of the traditional seven-day training process, but were also taught RADR during an additional three days of hands-on exercises.

"The key to decreasing repair time is use of everyone, including Air Force specialties from the entire operations group," said Lamberti. "Using RADR, Air Force specialties that would typically be sitting around waiting on CE to restore base infrastructure can take part in the reconstruction activities."

For exercise participants, this provided an increased sense of responsibility and involvement in the process of infrastructure restoration. Tasks such as construction material movement, debris removal, concrete setting, and other logistics-based tasks were evenly distributed among all Airmen, not just specific CE specialties.

"The benefit of Silver Flag training overall is that it gives us an opportunity to put our hands on equipment that we can't get at home station," said Ives. "This has been a great opportunity for the 137th and 138th to partner together to build lasting relationships that we can use at home station and abroad. It can be difficult to get up and down the turnpike, so we are building those relationships around the globe." AO



Tech. Sgt. Matthew Aronhalt, explosive ordnance disposal specialist from Nellis Air Force Base, searches for unexploded ordnance as part of the Silver Flag training exercise at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, Aug. 8, 2017. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Andrew M. LaMoreaux/Released)



CHANGING THE FACE OF COURAGE

Oklahoma Women Celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Women in Military Service for America Memorial



story and photography STAFF SGT. KASEY M. PHIPPS

Women toss rose petals into the reflecting pool of the Women in Military Service for America Memorial during a ceremony that honored the 15 fallen women of the U.S. Armed Forces since 2012, Oct. 21, 2017, in Washington D.C. Nearly 40 Oklahoma Air and Army National Guard women gathered with hundreds of active-duty, retired and reserve servicewomen from all branches of the military to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the dedication of the Women in Military Service for America Memorial to honor the women who came before them and celebrate the opportunities that are still to come.

A host of women pushed past the crowds as they spilled through the doors of the D.C. metro car. As they waited to change metro lines, the diversity in race, age and appearance was striking – brunettes, blondes, redheads, short, tall, thin, athletic, talkative, quiet ... Their entrance brought a slight hush wherever they went, not because of the variety or sheer size of the group, which was nearly 40 strong, but because of the one thing that united them – the uniform.

Donned head-to-toe in Army and Air Force service dress, the women traveled as a group to the Women in Military Service for America Memorial, a memorial that is oftentimes overlooked among the regimented white stones of Arlington National Cemetery and the other reverent memorials that sit across the Potomac River.

On an unseasonably warm October weekend, women from all branches of military service, from all eras of conflict and from all walks of life, gathered, Oct. 21, 2017, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the original dedication of the memorial. The memorial, which was created by and for women, is the only one in the world to specifically honor the women who served and are serving with the U.S. Armed Forces.

"I think the memorial is important because it gives women from the past an opportunity to share with their families and women in the future an explanation of how we got to this point and where we (women) started in this journey," said Air Force Staff Sgt. Jaimie Haase, a 137th Special Operations Security Forces Squadron Airman who attended the weekend. "To have a ceremony for the memorial like this is so amazing because it gives the younger generation, like me, an opportunity to hear stories from women who have served before me."

The unofficial theme of the weekend, "changing the face of courage," summarized the goal of both the memorial and the celebration – to capture the collective and individual stories of the courage of women in the U.S. Armed Forces.

For Haase, who has been in the U.S. Air Force for six years – four years active duty and the remaining two in the Oklahoma Air National Guard – the experience was inspirational.

"I would say it was very empowering," she said. "There was such a feeling of awe. I have a better understanding of what women had to work for to get where we are at now, and that makes me feel very grateful."

Army Col. Cynthia Tinkham, director of personnel for the Oklahoma National Guard, had a similar experience at the original dedication of the memorial 20 years ago.

"I was a young captain and really didn't have any idea of what it was going to be like," she recalled. "I knew we were coming here to see the museum, the memorial and the dedication. It ended up being just an awesome experience once we got here."

Unlike the 70-degree weather this year, the dedication was chilly in 1997, Tinkham remembered. There was a variety of women there, some of whom have died in that 20-year span.

"All of the people, thousands of people, lined up in the street to the gateway ... I mean some of them were still wearing the uniforms they wore 50, 60 years ago," she said. "We had World War I and World War II veterans."

and everything else that was previously open to only men."

Since that announcement, two women became the first to graduate Army Ranger school in 2016, and just shy of a month before the WIMSA 20th anniversary, the first woman graduated the U.S. Marine Corps infantry officer course.

"So now, 20 years later, I'm here and a colonel," Tinkham said returning to the memorial. "I've done a lot of things with the Oklahoma National Guard – deployment, different assignments and getting to see the progress of women. Now they're leaving their own legacy."

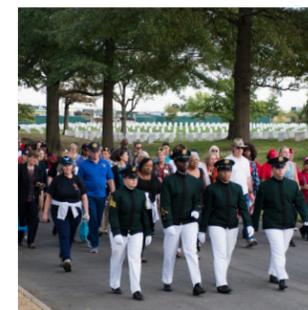
Haase saw the importance of the stories and legacies left behind by the women before her and is proud of her own ongoing story.

"I think women's stories are important because it gives them a voice to tell where all of this began," she said. "Women want to serve this country alongside men, and they proved that. I think my story is important now, because in the beginning, women could only be nurses. Now I am a security forces Airman with many other women who are also proud to wear this uniform and want to serve."

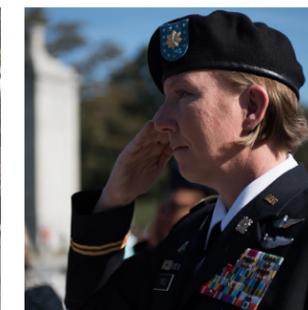
Haase, who is a Florida native, deployed once to various locations in Africa for six months and has lived in Turkey and Germany. Joining the military was something she had wanted to do for a while, and it provided her with something that is more than just a story.



Crowds begin to gather in the morning light at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial, the ceremonial entrance to Arlington National Cemetery in Washington D.C. for the 20th anniversary ceremony, Oct. 21, 2017.



Men and women participate in a half-mile honor walk through Arlington National Cemetery to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the dedication of the Women in Military Service for America Memorial in Washington D.C., Oct. 21, 2017.



Oklahoma Army National Guard Maj. Richelle Treece, OKNG Officer Candidate School Commander, salutes the U.S. Flag during the 20th anniversary ceremony at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial, the ceremonial entrance to Arlington National Cemetery in Washington D.C., Oct. 21, 2017.



Women from the Oklahoma Air and Army National Guard read quotes by and for military women that are etched into glass panels on the upper terrace of the Women in Military Service for America Memorial, the ceremonial entrance to Arlington National Cemetery in Washington D.C., Oct. 20, 2017.

Though serving before as nurses, cooks, laundresses, spies and even disguised as men, women weren't officially allowed to join the military until the last two years of World War I. It wasn't until 1948 that Congress passed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, which granted women permanent status in the military, subject to military authority and regulations and entitled to veteran benefits. However, it capped the number of women in the military to 2 percent and restricted women from combat and the rank of colonel and above.

In 1967, the 2-percent cap and rank restrictions were lifted. Also in 1967, Congress passed a law allowing women to serve in the National Guard, and the first Air Force woman was sworn into the Air National Guard in 1968. Shortly after, in 1971, women were allowed to serve in the Army National Guard and the U.S. Air Force's Security Forces.

More recently, Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter announced that all military roles were open to women, after more than 300,000 women had already served in war zones during Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"There will be no exceptions," Carter said at a news conference, Dec. 3, 2015. "They'll be allowed to drive tanks, fire mortars, and lead infantry soldiers into combat. They'll be able to serve as Army Rangers and Green Berets, Navy SEALs, Marine Corps infantry, Air Force parajumpers

"I have wanted to be in the military since my sophomore year in high school, so to see myself accomplish that goal has meant a lot to me," she said. "It has helped me provide for my family in ways people struggle with, like healthcare. It has also provided me the ability to see the world and experience different cultures."

Now, Haase lives near Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma City, where her active-duty husband is stationed with the Air Force. They have two children, a four-year-old son, Mason, and a two-year-old daughter, Ily.

Haase hopes that, like the stories embodied by the memorial, her legacy of service and courage passes to her children, but especially Ily.

"I hope she sees and learns that there are no boundaries for her," said Haase. "The whole world is hers, and she can do whatever she puts her mind to. A lot of my family doubted me and still are hesitant on women being in the military. I want her never to listen to anyone's negativity, to always be her own person and to use doubt as a motivation to prove people wrong, like I think I have." AO

Staff Sgt. Avery Keller, aeromedical evacuation technician from the 137th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, measures the heart rate of a simulated burn victim, Senior Airman Ashleigh Duncan from the 137th Special Operations Logistics Readiness Squadron, while transporting simulated patients aboard a C-17 Globemaster III from the 105th Airlift Wing, Stewart Air National Guard Base, N.Y., en route to Altus Air Force Base, Altus, Okla., Oct. 30, 2017. The flight was part of a wildfire scenario during Vigilant Guard, a North American Command-sponsored, state-wide emergency response exercise held Oct. 30 to Nov. 2, 2017.

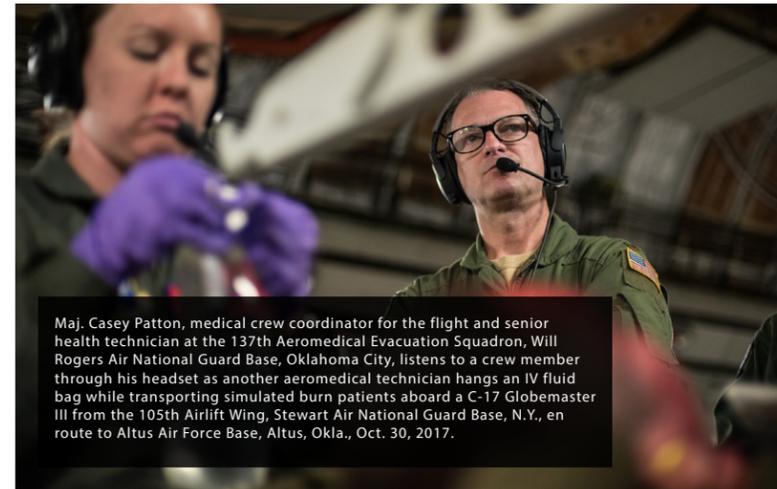
VIGILANT GUARD



story and photography STAFF SGT. KASEY M. PHIPPS



Capt. Sam Lingle (left), flight nurse, and Maj. Jeff Harley (right), medical crew director, both from the 137th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, don oxygen masks during a simulated in-flight emergency while transporting patients aboard a C-17 Globemaster III from the 105th Airlift Wing, Stewart Air National Guard Base, N.Y., en route to Altus Air Force Base, Altus, Okla., Oct. 30, 2017.



Maj. Casey Patton, medical crew coordinator for the flight and senior health technician at the 137th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, listens to a crew member through his headset as another aeromedical technician hangs an IV fluid bag while transporting simulated burn patients aboard a C-17 Globemaster III from the 105th Airlift Wing, Stewart Air National Guard Base, N.Y., en route to Altus Air Force Base, Altus, Okla., Oct. 30, 2017.

Hurricanes off the U.S. coast and in the Caribbean, wildfires in and near California, earthquakes in Mexico, droughts in Africa, flooding in India, landslides in South America – this year has been a relentless series of natural disasters.

A nation can never be fully prepared for the dark moments when Mother Nature strikes, but they can prepare to respond to her.

Vigilant Guard, a federally organized North American Command-sponsored and statewide exercise that focuses on the emergency response capabilities of a state, was held in Oklahoma, Oct. 30 - Nov. 2, 2017. It sought to test how the Oklahoma Army and Air National Guard coordinate with local, state and federal agencies for a timely and direct joint response to several disaster scenarios.

“With things that have been going on, like hurricanes near the Gulf and wildfires in California, there are a lot of natural disasters this year, and they seem to be happening more often,” said Maj. Casey Patton, senior health technician at the 137th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City. “I think our training has certainly given us the edge to be able to answer the call of the Governor or the President to assist in any way we can.”

In the exercise, the state was hit with simulated tornadoes, wildfires, earthquakes and floods – all of which require different response techniques. During the wildfire scenario, the 137 AES was activated, which required the unit to put together an aeromedical flight crew who cared for burn patients during their flight to a safer area.

“I, personally, had not been a part of a wildfire scenario before,” said Staff Sgt. Jennifer Paradis, 137 AES aeromedical evacuation technician. “But with burn patients, like almost any other patient we may see, you have to take into account the stresses of flight and how those stressors add difficulty to the situation.”

These stressors can include the decreased amount of oxygen at higher altitudes, the cooler temperatures and the movement of the plane, added Paradis. For burn patients with inhalation, a decreased ability to regulate body temperature due to skin damage and a tendency for pain and nausea during movement, the flight can be particularly difficult.

Though no real burn victims were transported during the exercise, Airmen from several Will Rogers Air National Guard Base units underwent extensive moulage, or application of mock injuries for training purposes, to simulate patients with open burn wounds, bone injuries and missing appendages.

“With having real people wearing moulage, you get the chance to actually interact with a person, as opposed to using a mannequin,” said Paradis. “We can take a real set of vital signs, ask clarifying questions about symptoms and practice building rapport with a person ... Each type of patient gives us something that the other may not be able to.”

The scenario, guided by Patton who acted as the medical crew coordinator for the flight, strove to be as realistic as possible while still covering the training objectives of each crew member.

“In a disaster, there are so many variables that you can’t plan for,” said Patton. “We just try to make it as austere as possible in a contingency environment. We try to plan scenarios with unpredictability and chaos thrown in, maybe even some unanswered questions that force the aircrews to think outside the box.”

Each aeromedical evacuation Airman has to meet annual training requirements before treating and caring for real patients. These requirements can range from exiting the aircraft in an emergency to responding to a psychological patient response.

During both training and real world operations, the aeromedical crews are composed of a medical crew director, flight nurses and aeromedical evacuation technicians, each with unique training requirements.

With so many annual requirements, exercises like this allow the crews to remain current, which proved to be especially important this year during the late August Hurricane Harvey response.

“We were lead over the June, July and August disaster response cycle,” said Lt. Col. Darcy Tate, 137 AES commander. “That’s why, when they called us on the Friday, we were able to immediately go to the list of our volunteer response teams and start calling people to show up the next day. If it were three days later, it would have been September, and we wouldn’t have been the lead anymore.”

The disaster cycle response finds its origins in Hurricane Katrina and

affects all nine Air National Guard aeromedical evacuation squadrons.

“When we did the response for Katrina, the need for everything out there was so vast that the aeromedical evacuation response was put together piece by piece by piece,” said Tate. “During the hot wash, the National Guard Bureau aeromedical evacuation component decided to create a disaster response cycle. Between the nine aeromedical evacuation Guard units we have, they divided the year into 3-month blocks with a lead squadron and a backup squadron. That now allows us to plan ahead of time.”

In 2005, the 137 AES was the first aeromedical evacuation crew on the ground immediately after Katrina. This year, in late August, five 137th aeromedical evacuation crews and other medical personnel, about 40 Airmen in total, were activated to aid in the recovery after Hurricane Harvey. They are part of the more than 450,000 Army and Air National Guardsmen in every zip code across the nation that are available to support domestic response efforts to events like Harvey and Katrina.

Though disaster brings destruction, confusion, chaos and darkness, the estimated 4,000 Guard members that conduct operations on any given day are training and preparing for those exact scenarios. So when Mother Nature does strike, the Department of Defense’s primary domestic response option – the Oklahoma Army and Air National Guard – will be there, ready. **AO**



story SENIOR AIRMAN BRIGETTE A. WALTERMIRE

SOONER STRIKE

Oklahoma Forces Converge at Razorback Range

Great minds are said to think alike, and a squadron from each of the two wings in the Oklahoma Air National Guard have capitalized on their similar mindsets to establish a continuing joint training partnership.

The 146th Air Support Operations Squadron from Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City and the 138th Operations Group from Tulsa Air National Guard Base in Tulsa, spent five hot July days at Razorback Range, Fort Chaffee Maneuver Training Center, Fort Smith, Arkansas, for a local joint training event called Sooner Strike.

This was the first time both the F-16 Fighting Falcons from Tulsa and 146 ASOS tactical air control party specialists conducted close air support training together. The partnership was seamless and long overdue.

"What I realized when I went into ASOS is that they have the same mentality and drive and outlook that fighter pilots do," recalled Col. Bruce Hamilton, 138 OG commander. "They're just working on the ground instead of flying airplanes."

Hamilton was the first squadron commander for the 146 ASOS from its inception in 2008 through 2013. Even back then, he wanted to build a relationship that would allow joint training with the Tulsa fighter wing. Since becoming the commander of the 138 OG, Hamilton was able to bring the idea together for the first time.

During the exercise, the Tulsa F-16s provided realistic close air support for the TACPs on the ground who coordinated and controlled the simulated battle space.

"We wanted to build the trust level, build the relationship, and build familiarity," said Master Sgt. Larry Mansell, 146 ASOS joint tactical air controller instructor. "That's what we wanted to do, so in the future, the 138th knows we can help them complete their desired learning objectives."

Building that trust meant starting "simple." It meant mixing aircraft attacks while the TACPs controlled multiple aircraft in the same air space. It also meant adding more aircraft and making the scenarios more complicated by including A-10 Thunderbolt IIs from the 442nd Fighter Wing, Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, and smoke-filled rockets to obscure attack runs.

"It really matters, because there's actually someone up there flying this mission," Mansell said. "Knowing there's an asset up there enhances the level of the training."

The 138 OG plans to continue these five-day exercises with the 146 ASOS during their close air support training phase, which is three times a year for about a month. The ASOS can help the fighter pilots consistently build on their CAS skills and qualifications. This allows the 138 OG to stay current while not solely relying on other squadrons that could be in different training sequences or timetables.

"That is priceless when it comes to keeping us proficient," said Maj. Robert Vaccariello, 138 OG weapons officer. "In the past, they would coordinate, and we'd be done and fly home. There was no avenue to talk about, 'Hey, this was wrong, this would be better' ... There was no way to offer perspectives."

This level of training is necessary to ensure both squadrons will be practicing with the latest and up-to-date methods that are being used downrange.

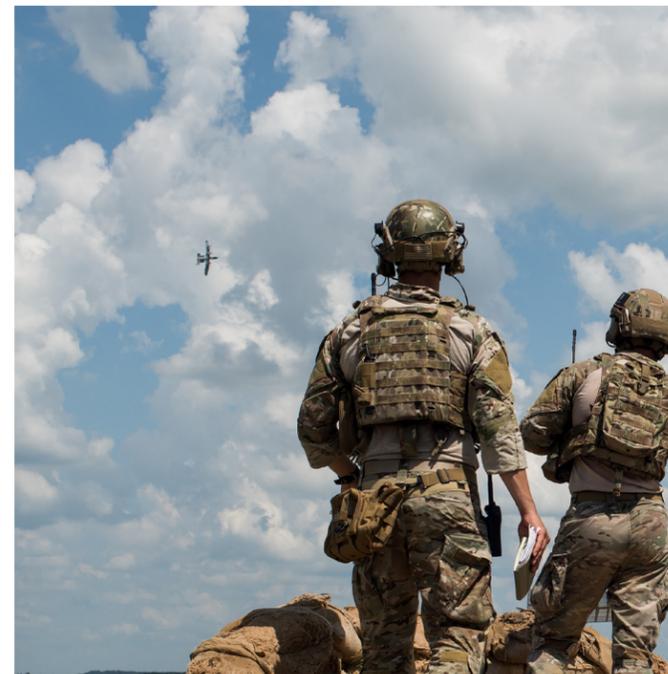
"We just needed to form a conduit to have the TACPs pass that on to us, and our pilots overseas bring tactics back," said Vaccariello. "No one person has all the answers. The more we rely on each other, the better the whole is."

This partnership will allow the ASOS to use a growing variety of skills during scenarios for the F-16s during their CAS phase, instead of going over the same training repeatedly.

"Next time we need to do CAS, the ASOS is perfect," exclaimed Hamilton. "They're really excited to step up the game during the next opportunity we have to work together."

Having these Oklahoma squadrons working together was important to Hamilton when he transitioned to Tulsa, because he knew that the ASOS could add to the quality of their training.

"I think they have realized my dream from when I was ASOS commander to become the best overall tactical and warfighter ASOS," said Hamilton. "You can work with the best, and they're right down the road." **AO**



Tactical air control party specialists from the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, make visual contact with an A-10 Thunderbolt II from the 442nd Fighter Wing, Whiteman Air Force Base, Knob Noster, Mo., during a training event at Razorback Range, Fort Chaffee Maneuver Training Center in Fort Smith, Ark., and Hog Military Operating Area, Mansfield, Ark., July 11, 2017. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Brigette A. Waltermire)



Capt. Christopher Cadieux, a 146th Air Support Operations Squadron air liaison officer from Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, calls in coordinates during a training event at Razorback Range, Fort Chaffee Maneuver Training Center in Fort Smith, Ark., and Hog Military Operating Area, Mansfield, Ark., July 11, 2017. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Andrew M. LaMoreaux)



Master Sgt. Larry Mansell, a 146th Air Support Operations Squadron tactical air control party specialist from Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, observes and provides feedback to Airman 1st Class Shelby Williams, also a TACP specialist from the 146 ASOS, during a training event at Razorback Range, Fort Chaffee Maneuver Training Center in Fort Smith, Ark., and Hog Military Operating Area, Mansfield, Ark., July 11, 2017. The close air support training event, called Sooner Strike, was coordinated by the 146 ASOS and enabled Airmen in the air and on the ground to share techniques and accomplish both mission qualification training and continuation training with several aircraft common to TACP missions. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Andrew M. LaMoreaux)

NORTHERN STRIKE

story and photography STAFF SGT. TYLER K. WOODWARD



Tactical air control party specialists from the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City await transportation on a U.S. Navy SH-60 Seahawk to a nearby range for an airborne controlling scenario at Camp Grayling, Mich., Aug. 6, 2017. The 146 ASOS members utilized the range to conduct close air support exercises at night while integrating with sister services.

A convoy of military vehicles rolled over gravel roads and splashed dust into the cool air. Polish 18th Airborne Battalion infantrymen exited their vehicles and began preparing their equipment.

Nearby, U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Sam Salcedo, 146th Air Support Operations Squadron tactical air control party specialist from Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, was also prepping his gear. He was mentoring Airman 1st Class Jonathan Moran, 146 ASOS tactical air control party specialist, who recently graduated one of the first stages of TACP technical training.

Moran was double-checking his lists and following instruction from Salcedo when the 18th Airborne Battalion ground commander emerged from the cloud of settling dust.

Salcedo reached towards the ground commander, and they shook hands.

"I'll be your main JTAC (joint terminal attack controller)," Salcedo said to the ground commander.

"Okay, we're going live tonight," he replied with a smile.

Although there was a slight communication barrier, both buzzed with excitement for the scenario.

The 146 ASOS TACPs fell into one of the two foot patrols, and

another night mission at Northern Strike 17 began.

Northern Strike is a massive, one-of-a-kind joint terminal air attack controller-centric exercise that spans more than 100 miles across the northern region of Michigan.

Since its creation in 2011, the exercise has grown from 500 participants to attracting more than 5,500 in 2017. The intention of the exercise is to prepare military personnel for a deployed environment, which means working alongside joint and integrated forces.

So far, it's proven successful.

In 2017, Northern Strike became one of 43 programs worldwide to receive Joint National Training Capability accreditation. JNTC is a program of the Department of Defense working to better prepare military personnel in realistic joint environments with other services. Receiving the accreditation validates not only the importance of Northern Strike, but also the quality of training for the participants.

At the heart of the exercise, Master Sgt. Ben Lake, 146 ASOS standards and evaluations evaluator, and Maj. Karl Hurdle, 146 ASOS air liaison officer, worked tirelessly months before and during NS17 coordinating schedules.

Lake had to fill more than 540 flying hours of close air support for the exercise. With more than 70 TACPs to choose from, he hand-picked them based on skill level and experience to best fulfill the needs of



Staff Sgt. Sam Salcedo and Airman 1st Class Jonathan Moran, tactical air control party specialists with the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron in Oklahoma City, prepare for a live-fire exercise with the Polish 18th Airborne Battalion at Northern Strike 17, Camp Grayling, Michigan, Aug. 8, 2017.



Polish paratroopers with the 18th Airborne Battalion prepare for a live-fire exercise while training at Northern Strike 17 at Camp Grayling, Michigan, Aug. 8, 2017.



Senior Airman Brandon Hobbs, a member of the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron in Oklahoma City, controls air space after dismounting a Bravo Company, 4th Amphibious Assault Battalion, 4th Marine Division, Marine Forces Reserve amphibious assault vehicle during a dry fire exercise at Camp Grayling Joint Maneuver Training Center, Michigan, during exercise Northern Strike 17, Aug 4, 2017.



Airman 1st Class Matthew Clouse, a 146th Air Support Operations Squadron tactical air control party specialist at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base in Oklahoma City, secures a vantage point during an exercise near Alpena, Michigan, Aug 6, 2017. Clouse assisted other TACP members with simulated air-to-ground strikes from an overhead F-16 Fighting Falcon from the 148th Fighter Wing, Duluth, Minnesota.

the mission set.

"I was very happy to know that my guys got the training I provided for them," Lake said. "This type of training has further prepared them to save someone else's life, save their own life and be combat ready when they deploy."

There were 22 TACPs with the 146 ASOS at NS17. They made up the largest TACP contingent of the exercise, and all of them experienced live-fire scenarios, many with multi-national partners.

Each qualified TACP specialist was able to communicate with the involved ground commanders and pilots before each scenario began. The real-world experience of serving as a liaison between the aircraft and the ground commanders benefitted both seasoned TACP specialists and newcomers.

"The exercise encompasses everything you would find downrange, minus getting shot at," said Staff Sgt. Zach Scheffler, 146 ASOS TACP instructor. "You know, it's overwhelming at first. But, seeing stuff like this at Northern Strike is only going to make our guys more prepared for a deployment."

The training scenarios had virtually endless possibilities. On some ranges, JTACs were able to integrate with large U.S. Army National Guard maneuver elements during live-fire scenarios. On others, they integrated with U.S. Marines Forces Reserve and controlled airspace from amphibious assault vehicles.

These mission sets also created multiple opportunities for experienced TACPs to work with younger Airmen on facing challenges that may arise when deployed.

"This was crucial for our younger Airman to be here at Northern Strike," said Salcedo. "It's easy to train in a classroom environment when there is air conditioning, and we're sitting down. But it's so much harder to do things when we are actually in the field, like following a combat maneuver team with live close air support flying and live bullets flying around. It's crucial for these young guys to get thrown into environments like this."

NS 17 benefited the 146 ASOS on several levels. The exercise provided incredibly rare training experiences, the opportunity to integrate with joint forces and a vessel for mentorship.

After the night mission with the Polish 18th Airborne Battalion, Salcedo and Moran sat under a starry Michigan sky for a few minutes to talk about improving on their next mission set.

Both of them are at different skill levels, and both of them are ready for the next challenge. For one, that means the next phase of training and for the other, a probable deployment.

Whatever comes next, whatever the call may be, Northern Strike 17 has only made them more ready for the challenges ahead. **AO**

TOP RIGHT: An Estonian tactical air control party specialist looks up from the top of a 250-foot tower to help spot an A-10 Thunderbolt II from the 175th Wing, Warfield Air National Guard Base, Middle River, Md., while controlling the air space at Tapa Range, Estonia, Aug. 18, 2017. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Andrew M. LaMoreaux)



BALTIC FURY

146 ASOS join the 175 WG and Estonian Air Force to practice interoperability and readiness

story STAFF SGT. KASEY M. PHIPPS

MIDDLE TOP: Estonian tactical air control party specialists study a portable monitor that displays the view from an overhead A-10 Thunderbolt II from the 175th Wing, Warfield Air National Guard Base, Middle River, Md., while on the side of the road in Rakvere, Estonia, Aug. 14, 2017. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Andrew M. LaMoreaux)



MIDDLE BOTTOM: Tech. Sgt. Christopher Vaughan, a 146th Air Support Operations Squadron tactical air control party specialist from Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, observes an Estonian TACP preparing to exercise command and control in airspace near Rakvere, Estonia using A-10 Thunderbolt IIs from the 175th Wing, Warfield Air National Guard Base, Middle River, Md., Aug. 15, 2017. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Kasey M. Phipps)



BOTTOM: Tech. Sgt. Christopher Vaughan, a 146th Air Support Operations Squadron tactical air control party specialist from Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Oklahoma City, briefs four Estonian tactical air control party specialist before heading out for a scenario in the MOA, or Military Owned Airspace, over Rakvere, Estonia, Aug. 15, 2017. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Kasey M. Phipps)



Sitting on a metal-grated floor, a group of men chatted about the differences between the orange-flavored Fanta found in the U.S. and that found in Estonia. The one in the U.S. was found to be “more orange in color” than the one in Estonia, with quite a bit of difference in taste.

The only thing about the conversation that would make it out of the ordinary lies in its context – at the top of a 250-foot tower in Tapa Range, Estonia while waiting for a pair of American A-10 Thunderbolt IIs to check into the surrounding airspace.

Though hidden among pines, spruces, birches and aspens, the range was being used for what the 146th Air Support Operations Squadron in Oklahoma City calls Baltic Fury.

“We’re out here (in Estonia) to be tactical air control party

specialists, specifically to help support the 104th Fighter Squadron and the Maryland National Guard,” explained Capt. Christopher Cadieux, 146 ASOS air liaison officer. “Maryland doesn’t currently have a Joint Terminal Attack Controller program, so we’re out here filling in the gaps for them while working with the Estonians to help train and mentor their JTACs. Baltic Fury is just a training integration piece to work with TACPs while the A-10s can actually fly sorties for them and other Baltic JTACs.”

As qualified and accredited joint tactical air controllers and instructors, the 146th Airmen were invited by the 175th Wing to facilitate the A-10 Thunderbolt IIs’ capabilities during the Wing’s annual tour to Estonia for Maryland’s state partnership with the country. The 146th Airmen acted as ground training facilitators and liaisons for service members from other allied countries.

The Aug. 3-18, 2017 Estonian piece of Baltic Fury was split between two types of training for the Estonians. One was on top of the tower at Tapa Range and the other was in the streets of Rakvere, Estonia, population 15,000.

The tower offered procedural practice in a complicated, restrictive range that tested the TACPs attention-to-detail and knowledge of tactics, techniques and procedures (or TTPs), while the military owned airspace (or MOA) in Rakvere tested proficiency in a real-time, dynamically changing environment within real civilian populations.

“The range out at Tapa allows the A-10s to actually deploy live ordnance, specifically with guns and inert bombs, whereas in the MOA, we’re obviously not allowed to deploy or use lasers because civilians live and work there,” Cadieux said. “But the MOA does allow us to go dynamic with targets, meaning we can create more of a realistic scenario on the ground for both the JTACs and the air crew.”

Though the orange soda talk seems out of place in the presence of bomb-dropping and strafing runs, it is a window into the growing partnership between the 146th JTACs and the Estonian TACPs.

“They bring with them a lot of experience from downrange and from working with U.S. aircraft and various other allies throughout Europe,” said Estonian Air Force Maj. Omari Koppel, commander of the TACP program. “This experience greatly enhanced our training. They have the knowledge to set up scenarios and have an in-depth understanding of procedures. By cooperating with them, we can share that knowledge.”

Re-established in 1994, the Estonian Air Force is like the rest of the Estonian Defence Forces in that it relies on the about 6,000 Estonian Regular Forces, of whom about half are conscripts, and 15,000 members from the Voluntary Defence League during peacetime. With the relatively new force, resources and equipment can be limited compared to those of older forces.

“I think the biggest challenge we face with the Estonians is identifying where they’re at in their training, what assets they have at their disposal, and overcoming some of the limitations they may have by way of equipment and experience,” said Cadieux.

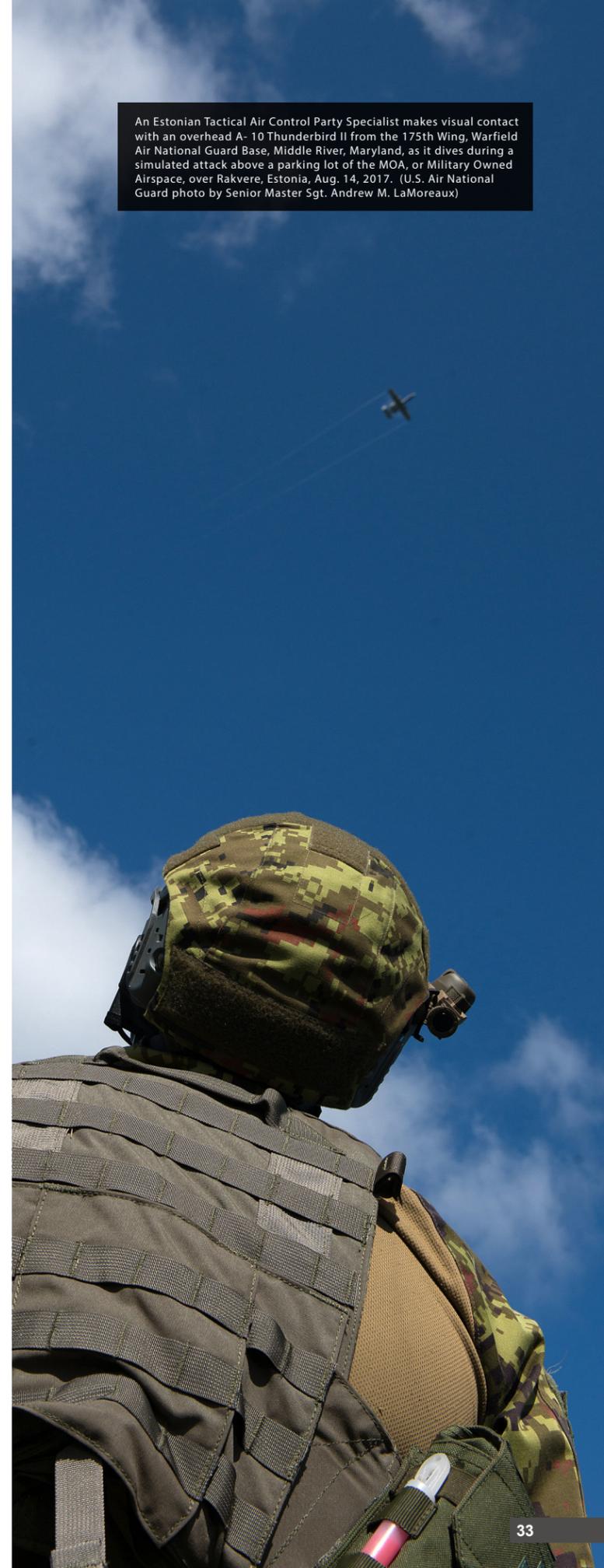
But in sharing their training, equipment and experience, the 146 ASOS can better understand the functional assets of the Estonian program, how to best utilize those assets and also learn from and standardize tactical procedures.

“It allows us to bolster the capabilities of our NATO allies, specifically here in Estonia with the TACP and JTAC program,” said Cadieux.

Whether discussing soda preferences or teaching the intricacies of coordinating a two-ship attack, the working partnership with the Estonians mirrors the 146 ASOS’ cooperation and interoperability with other NATO allies.

“It shows the Estonians and other allies that we’re willing to come over here and willing to help provide resources for them,” concluded Cadieux. “The time and value put into the program are the biggest takeaways.” **AO**

An Estonian Tactical Air Control Party Specialist makes visual contact with an overhead A-10 Thunderbird II from the 175th Wing, Warfield Air National Guard Base, Middle River, Maryland, as it dives during a simulated attack above a parking lot of the MOA, or Military Owned Airspace, over Rakvere, Estonia, Aug. 14, 2017. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Andrew M. LaMoreaux)





THERE'S A SNAKE IN MY BOOT! | Staff Sgt. Tyler K. Woodward

In the foothills of the Wichita Mountains, two special tactics Airmen jump up as quick as a rattle snake "n' swoop down t'wards a no-man's land" objective during a full mission profile culmination training as part of Gunslinger 17 at Fort Sill, Okla., Nov. 7, 2017.

COVERT COMMUNICATIONS

HOW A SPECIALIZED COMMUNICATIONS FLIGHT SUPPORTS THE SPECIAL OPERATIONS INTELLIGENCE MISSION

story SENIOR AIRMAN BRIGETTE A. WALTERMIRE
photography STAFF SGT. TYLER K. WOODWARD
illustration SENIOR MASTER SGT. ANDREW M. LAMOREAUX



The 189th Intelligence Squadron and the 285th Special Operations Intelligence Squadron are vital, mission-ready assets that gather and analyze the information used in almost every sphere of battle space.

Behind the closed doors and vaulted rooms of these squadrons, there is a small team of communication experts who maintain the often-classified equipment and systems used to process the constant flow of that information.

The Intelligence Communications Flight, composed of six Airmen, maintains every basic communication need commonly associated with a communications flight, such as maintaining and supporting client systems, printers, workstations and networks. However, they also directly support the specialized systems used in collecting and applying reconnaissance and surveillance data for both the tactical systems operators in the air and the commanders on the ground.

"We provide on-site communications support and administration for the networks that are specific to intelligence," said Tech. Sgt. Ragan Crossland, intelligence communications support specialist. "If we don't exist, intel can't accomplish their mission as effectively. Ultimately, they have to have communications support because their missions are very communications heavy. All of their equipment has to be continuously updated and monitored."

Knowing the requirements of these systems and the security restrictions around them is an ever-evolving process for this new

tasking on base. Having been established recently, its Airmen constantly train, work and add to their capabilities to continue growing for future developments.

"We deal with technology, which is ever-changing, and we're supporting a unit that is fighting enemies who are using that changing technology," said Senior Master Sgt. David Morris, intelligence communication superintendent. "We always have to be ahead of that."

Part of keeping ahead involves proprietary training through civilian agencies who work with every branch of the U.S. Armed Forces.

"When we train, we're receiving the same training as every other branch," said Morris. "We're all fighting with the same knowledge on the same platforms."

The intelligence communication flight ensures all equipment used by the intelligence squadron is operational throughout daily mission operations, but can also set up and maintain theater-deployable equipment that is used to support missions downrange in real time.

"The biggest difference between intel communications and the base communications flight is the mission," said Crossland. "We provide more support to the mission-specific assets that intel requires."

Crossland worked in the base communications flight before going in the Intelligence Communications Flight. He said as a member of the

intelligence communications team, he gets to learn every facet of the communication career field, no matter the specialty, specific position or classification.

"One of the things I like the most as a part of intel communications is the opportunity to grow and work on new and evolving systems," Crossland said.

Over half of the Intelligence Communications Flight are new to the career field, and are embracing the unique opportunities not found in other Air Force career fields.

"This is my third career field, but this one has broadened my whole scope," Morris said. "It's a great thing working with this technology. It's the first time I've worked so directly with the battlefield."

Also different from other career fields is the direct impact the flight has on overall missions. The systems reflect their own real-time impact during operations.

"We work with these systems directly, and it can affect the mission both downrange and here," said Staff Sgt. Marquiss Swanson, intelligence communications support specialist. "What we learn here makes the systems better utilized downrange."

Because of the demand and particular functions of the intelligence systems, the flight's structure is also unique. The flight itself belongs

to two different units and two different major commands.

"We all have different specialties," said Crossland. "But we blend together so that we can work more cohesively ... I think our knowledge and ability to work together with such small manning are our biggest strengths."

Located in the same building as the intelligence squadrons, Crossland also said that the Intelligence Communications Flight is physically and functionally separate from the already task-saturated base communication flight for good reason.

"The systems that we support are directly used in the mission, real-time," he said. "So, the things that we're working on are vital to the success of the mission. If those systems go down, there's a possibility the mission could fail right then."

As such a small, hidden away shop, the intelligence communications flight agreed that it has its work cut out for them. But their overall goal is a relatively simple one.

"We are a one-stop communications shop," said Crossland. "That's the idea behind it. We want to do everything that base communications does, and also specialize in the intelligence systems." AO

LOOK ME IN THE EYE

The 137th Special Operations Medical Group keeps its "eye on the ball" with a Non-Mydriatic Retinal Camera

This is my eyeball. There are many like it, but this one is mine. I must see straighter than my enemy who is trying to see straighter than me.

The "eye"ronic eye puns could go on forever, but I had better get to the eye of the story. If you have never seen a picture like this before, it can certainly be something to stare at. This is what the inside of an eye looks like. It may look gross or cool, depending on who you talk to, but no one can debate its importance.

"Once your eye gets damaged, it's too late because you can't reverse it," said Maj. Chris Freeman, 137th Special Operations Medical Group chief of optometry. "For us, prevention is key. A picture like this is so important for monitoring your eye health."

This round, weird-looking picture is a magnified image of the inside of my eye called a retinal scan, taken by a fundus camera. The word "fundus" describes the inside or back of the eyeball.

I first laid my eyes on this digital image in the medical squadron examination room. Surrounded by state-of-the-art examination equipment and posters of eyeballs staring back at me, I was completing a portion of the visual screening process that all flying members of the Air National Guard go through as part of the Laser Eye Safety Program.

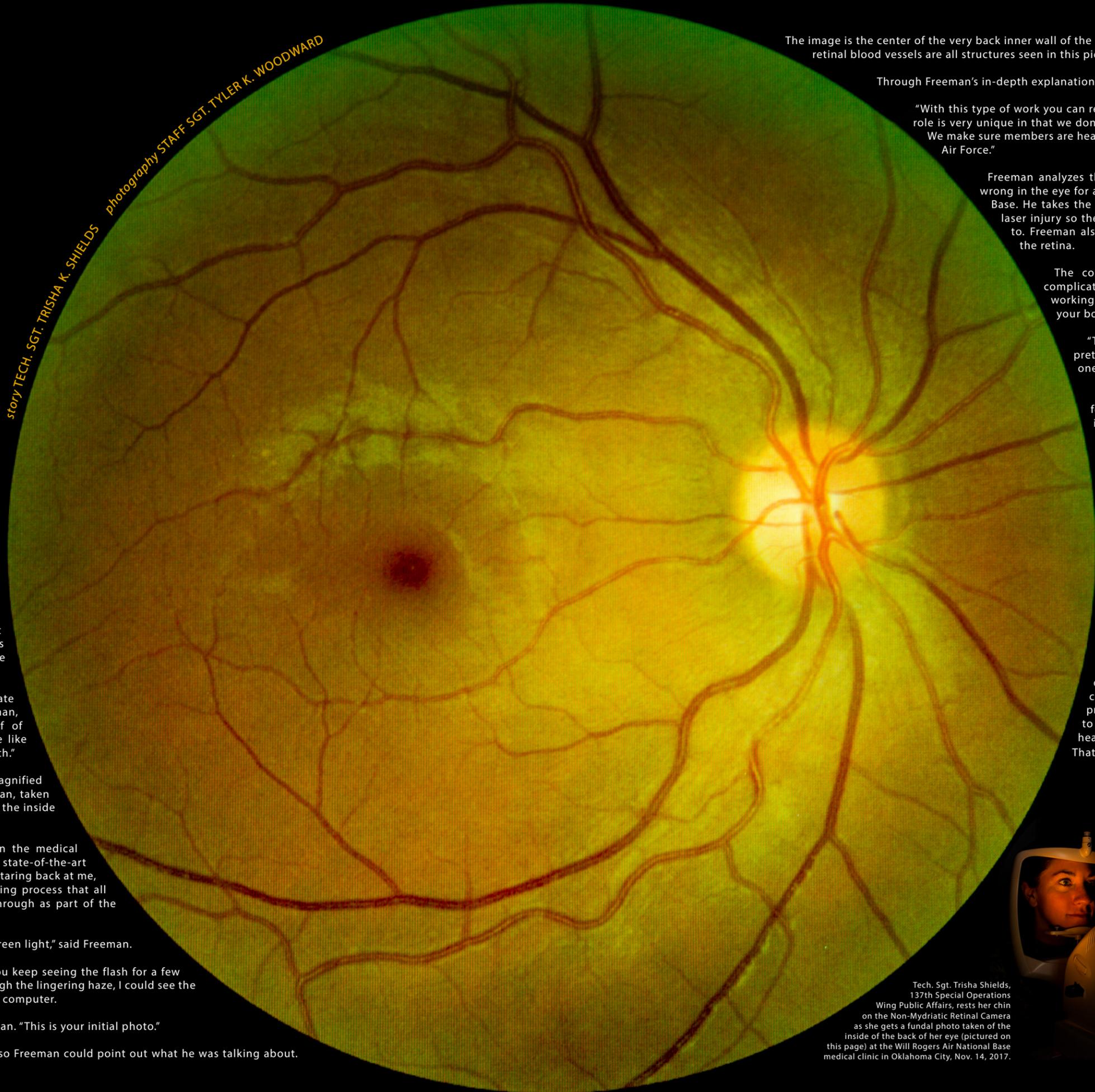
"Place your chin on the bar, and look at the green light," said Freeman.

I saw a bright flash. It was the kind where you keep seeing the flash for a few minutes when you blink your eyes. Looking through the lingering haze, I could see the complex picture instantly pop up on the doctor's computer.

"We are looking behind your lens," said Freeman. "This is your initial photo."

We walked over to the diagrams on the wall so Freeman could point out what he was talking about.

story TECH. SGT. TRISHA K. SHIELDS photography STAFF SGT. TYLER K. WOODWARD



The image is the center of the very back inner wall of the eye — the retina. The optic nerve, macula and main retinal blood vessels are all structures seen in this picture.

Through Freeman's in-depth explanation I could tell optometry is his life's work and passion.

"With this type of work you can really have an impact on people," said Freeman. "Our role is very unique in that we don't do yearly eye examinations out here at this base. We make sure members are healthy enough to serve, be retained and deploy in the Air Force."

Freeman analyzes the retinal scans for signs of disease or something wrong in the eye for all flying members at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base. He takes the first baseline photo incase a flying member gets a laser injury so they have an original picture to compare the damage to. Freeman also uses this photo to monitor change over time in the retina.

The complex living tissues in your eye are about as complicated as this picture looks. Comprised of over 2 million working parts, eyes are the second most complex organ in your body after the brain.

"There's a lot going on in the eye," said Freeman "It is pretty complex. That's why we have specialties for this one little organ."

Sometimes a retinal scan is the first line of defense for your overall vision health. Capturing these images is a good way to monitor your eye health and improve your chances of catching potentially vision-threatening conditions at an early stage — the time when they are the most treatable. If Freeman discovers a problem, he refers the member to their regular doctor.

My curiosity got the best of me, and I had to ask if he had caught problems with any Airmen out here who didn't know they had something wrong. He had. It makes you think about how important eye exams are, even if you can see fine. Freeman recommended everyone, healthy or not, get an eye exam and a retinal scan about every two years.

A lot of times we take technology for granted, but it is remarkable Freeman could snap a picture inside the back of my eye and see it immediately on his computer to analyze the image. The fundus camera is an integral part of the eye screening process at WRANGB, especially for our flyers. Thanks to this machine and a great doctor, you can know your health status in ... the blink of an eye. I couldn't resist. That was definitely the last one. **AO**



Tech. Sgt. Trisha Shields, 137th Special Operations Wing Public Affairs, rests her chin on the Non-Mydriatic Retinal Camera as she gets a fundal photo taken of the inside of the back of her eye (pictured on this page) at the Will Rogers Air National Base medical clinic in Oklahoma City, Nov. 14, 2017.



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