

CITIZEN AIRMAN

NIAGARA RESERVISTS

THRIVE IN ARCTIC EXERCISE



AFRC WELCOMES NEW DEPUTY COMMANDER

On April 29, Air Force Reserve Command said farewell to Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Pennington and welcomed Maj. Gen. Frank Bradfield III as the new deputy commander. The successful operation of AFRC relies heavily on the deputy commander as he serves as my full-time eyes and ears at the command, executing my priorities.

The DCOM directs and coordinates the activities of the headquarters staff, ensuring adherence to command policies and the synchronization of mission execution between the major command and the Numbered Air Forces. Maj. Gen. Pennington went above and beyond serving in this position and I have no doubt that Maj. Gen. Bradfield will do the same.

As we say goodbye to Maj. Gen. Pennington, we also celebrate the end of his distinguished 36-year long career of service and dedication to our nation. During his time, he held numerous key leadership positions across the Air Force Reserve, excelling at every turn, and culminating as our AFRC DCOM. His leadership, management and oversight guaranteed the Reserve was always ready and our Airmen were cared for. His commitment to excellence ensured the HQ staff operated efficiently and in the best interest of the AFR, its allies and partners.

Thank you, Jeff. You answered the call to serve and always ensured our Air Force Reserve was ready. Your dedication to your job and our Airmen serves as a motivator for us all. Your service in the Air Force is the embodiment of our core values, and I am honored to have had the opportunity to serve with you. I wish you, Lisa, Pierce and Keenan the very best.

With our farewell comes a warm welcome to Maj. Gen. Bradfield, his wife Julie, and their sons, Ben and Tim. Maj. Gen. Bradfield

brings a wealth of experience and expertise to our command. With 11 years in the U.S. Navy and 21 years in the Air Force Reserve, his leadership experience spans a variety of mission areas, including search and rescue, fighters, special operations, strategic airlift, joint strategy, plans and policy, and most recently our Plans, Programs and Requirements Directorate in AF/RE at the Pentagon. His dedication to service and leadership is exemplary, and we are excited to welcome him to our team.

During his recent visit to HQ AFRC in March, Maj. Gen. Bradfield was impressed by the support and camaraderie of our command staff. I am relying on Maj. Gen. Bradfield to continue the spirit of collaboration to set a strong foundation to achieve our priorities. His focus aligns with my TASKORD, ensuring we remain an agile, responsive and combat-capable force in this era of Great Power Competition.

Maj. Gen. Bradfield's proactive leadership, driven by data-backed insights, empowers his full understanding of our mission. He will ensure our command is accomplishing our operational, financial, recruiting, retention and programmatic goals while providing guidance to guarantee we are always ready to execute the mission. He is committed to an environment of growth and well-being for our Airmen and their families, ensuring that each member of our team is capable and ready to execute.

I am confident that under Maj. Gen. Bradfield's leadership, we will continue to excel and uphold the proud legacy of the Air Force Reserve. Please join me in welcoming Maj. Gen. 'Anchor' Bradfield and his family to our command. Anchor, we know you are going to be a tremendous asset to the HQ team – Now let's get to work!

IMPROVEMENTS COMING TO ENLISTED PME DISTANCE LEARNING

Our Chief of Staff of the Air Force, Gen. David W. Allvin, consistently speaks to the time of consequence in which we are currently serving. To maintain our competitive advantage, the strategic environment demands bold and innovative leadership. Despite the close competition for next generation weapon systems, there is no contest in the area in which our team holds a decisive edge – an elite and professional noncommissioned officer corps.

Unfortunately, our competitors have taken note and are currently changing their tactics, techniques and training pipelines to close that gap. Adversaries can look to America's dominance on various battlefields, and the current conflict in Eastern Europe, to see the value of a quality enlisted corps.

In Ukraine, the initial Russian advancement towards Kyiv stalled and was repelled by a much smaller and empowered force. Ukraine's continued success against a larger foe is enabled by their NCO corps' ability to translate and execute leaders' intent, employment of mission command concepts, and their sound strategic and tactical level understanding of the operational environment.

Having a strong and mission-ready enlisted force is no longer lost on our competitors. Russia has adapted their doctrinal approach to modern warfare, while our peer competitor, China, is actively and hastily undergoing massive efforts to boost the quality of its NCO program. This includes a massive endeavor in 2022 to adopt NCO academies at local universities, and ambitious personnel reforms and policy adjustments in the hope of strengthening its enlisted force.

As our adversaries rapidly work to establish militaries centered around a professional NCO corps, we must continue to outpace them. For this reason, we took a hard look at our Enlisted Professional Military Education curriculum. Student feedback and review of the EPME Distance Learning program, tailored for the Air Reserve Component, revealed some hard facts. We discovered that learning outcomes were not fully on-par with in-residence EPME outcomes and funding was inadequate to raise DL curriculum to an optimal level.

When I took the seat, one of my first major engagements was with the Command Chief of the Air National Guard, Chief Master Sgt. Maurice "Mo" Williams, and the Air Education and Training Command Chief, Chief Master Sgt. Chad Bickley. The intent of this forum was to discuss necessary changes to the DL program. In that meeting, the AFR, ANG and AETC spoke with one voice, "We need DL outcomes to be the same as if students physically went to in-residence EPME."

That message was heard, and I am excited to share that extensive funding and improvements are coming to all EPME DL programs. Led by the Global College of PME, enhancements will be implemented in a phased approach starting with the Airman Leadership School, followed by the Non-commissioned Officer and Senior Non-commissioned Officer Academy programs. The revamped ALS DL 2.0 is expected to launch June of 2024, followed by NCOA DL 2.0 in fall of 2024 and SNCOA DL 2.0 in spring of 2025.

EPME DL programs will continue to be self-paced and must be completed within 12-months of enrollment. However, they will look and feel more like familiar collegiate-level online courses. Enrolled Airmen will be required to review the material and participate in discussions with fellow peers, with the intent of facilitating critical thinking and learning through thoughtful student interaction.

One of the most exciting changes is the increase in asynchronous facilitation through instructor-led discussion and interactions. This will culminate in a new individual capstone that affords members the opportunity to demonstrate and apply learned leadership, supervision and professional military concepts in a peer-to-peer environment, while receiving focused instructor feedback.

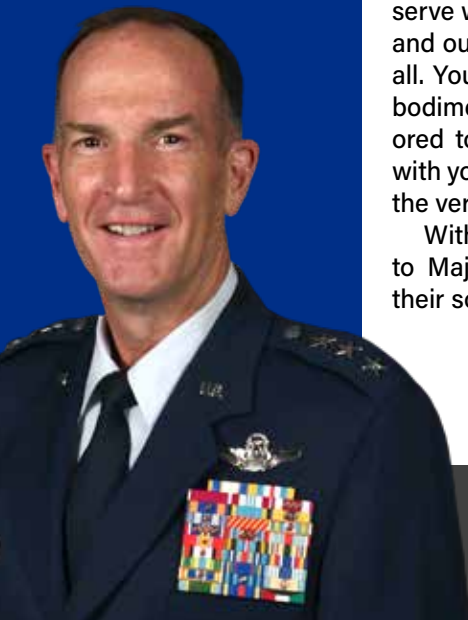
The focus on keeping our enlisted force highly capable, trained and ready across all components is critical for success in an era of Great Power Competition. I am excited for these changes that will keep our enlisted force ready now, while preparing our Airmen to compete, deter and win in the future fight.



ISRAEL NUÑEZ
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Senior Enlisted Advisor to the
Chief of Air Force Reserve
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On the cover: Citizen Airmen from the 914th Air Refueling Wing, Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, New York, spent two weeks in March sharpening their skills in harsh arctic climates and mountainous terrains during Exercise Nordic Response '24. For the story, see page 6. (Senior Master Sgt. Andrew Caya)



STAFF SGT. JESSICA AVALLONE

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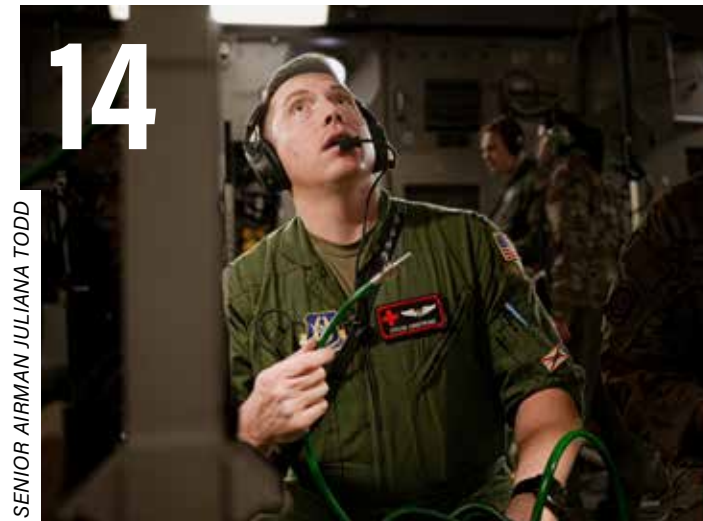
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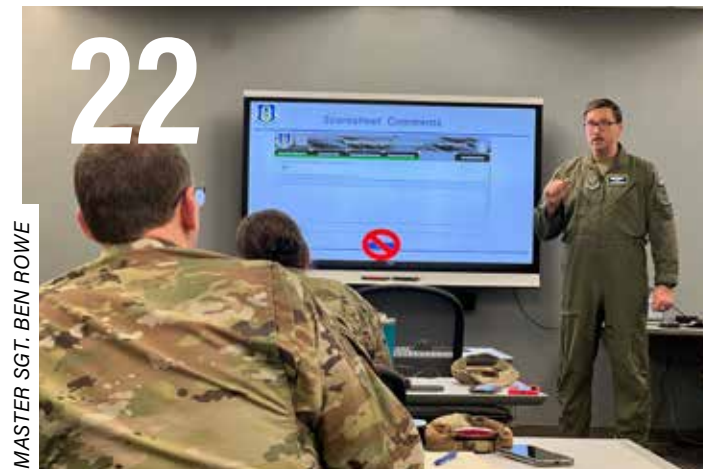
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NIAGARA RESERVISTS PROVE THEY CAN THRIVE IN HARSH ARCTIC CLIMATES

— By Senior Master Sgt. Andrew Caya

For two weeks in March, Citizen Airmen from the 914th Air Refueling Wing, Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, New York, sharpened their skills in harsh arctic climates and mountainous terrains during Exercise Nordic Response '24 – a Norwegian-led NATO military exercise held every other year.

The exercise provided great training opportunities for the Reservists who operate the wing's KC-135 Stratotankers as well as those who maintain them.

“Exercises like Nordic Response are large-scale NATO operations,” said Finland Air Force Maj. Anssi “Commando” Nieminen, flight commander for fighter squadron 11. “We can show the world we can operate in large-scale exercises with the West, and tankers are true force-multipliers.”

When people think of the KC-135 Stratotanker, they may think of the long rigid boom on the tail. However, there is a second way for the Stratotanker to refuel aircraft high above the area of operations.

Probe-drogue refueling involves coupling a probe on a receiver aircraft with a probe receptacle, the drogue, attached to a flexible, fuel hose from the tanker aircraft.

Master Sgt. Corey Palmer, a boom operator with the 914th ARW, said he

welcomed the prospect of utilizing the drogue during NR24.

“It’s a nice opportunity to do something different than a regular boom contact refueling – which is what we do routinely back home,” said Palmer. “A lot of our allies are not equipped to do boom air refueling, so this opens up an array of aircraft to us,” he said.

Allies in the Nordic countries have many aircraft platforms such as the JAS 39 Gripen and F/A-18 Hornet variants that can only receive fuel from the drogue, said Nieminen. “It’s a big deal to have a tanker with a drogue here. It’s a true enabler for us to operate in big exercises and scenarios, like here in Nordic Response,” he said “Without the drogue we couldn’t fulfill our missions and larger-scale operations.”

The ability to change from boom to drogue is paramount to interoperability within ally nations during NR24. Like all airborne operations, maintenance Airmen are key. On the ground, maintenance Airmen swap out parts that allow the drogue to connect to the boom.

“All the maintainers are professionals at doing their job,” said Nieminen. “The capability to change from the boom to the drogue on the tanker; it’s amazing how fast they are able to do that.”

The KC-135 with the drogue configuration is crucial for countries in the High North.

“We do not have a tanker in Finland, so we use the American KC-135 to train in Finnish airspace. It’s the tanker that most of the Finnish pilots start refueling with,” said Nieminen. “We have so many aircraft in the inventory that take the drogue that it is a ‘must-have’ for Allied operations. It’s a true force-multiplier in allied operations and general deterrence as we can stay airborne for a long time and respond to short-notice missions.”

According to both Nieminen and Palmer, it takes less than 10 minutes to refuel most aircraft that take the drogue, meaning the fighters can rapidly return to the battlespace and enforce deterrence.

“The KC-135 has been flying forever...to have it capable with the boom and the drogue, it’s capable of refueling any aircraft and I think that’s important for our adversaries to realize,” said Palmer. “There is unlimited capability with the tanker. We are flexible and adaptable to refuel pretty much any aircraft.”

Throughout NR24, Airmen from the 914th Maintenance Group were put to the test, and they overcame numerous challenges.

— Continued on next page



Clockwise from left: Tech Sgt. Coty Ocke and Staff Sgt. Mikaela Swanson, 914th Maintenance Group crew chiefs, remove a drogue from a KC-135 Stratotanker at Luleå-Kallax Air Base, Sweden. (Senior Master Sgt. Andrew Caya); A Norwegian F-35 Lightning II prepares to receive fuel from a 914th Air Refueling Wing KC-135 Stratotanker over the High North during Nordic Response '24. (Staff Sgt. Jessica Avallone); Swanson works on removing the drogue from a KC-135 Stratotanker. (Senior Master Sgt. Andrew Caya); a KC-135 from the 914th Air Refueling Wing taxis on a runway at Luleå-Kallax Air Base, Sweden. (Staff Sgt. Jessica Avallone)





Clockwise from above: Master Sgt. Anthony Lewandowski, a 914th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron airframe and powerplant general flight chief, inspects a drogue installation on a KC-135 Stratotanker. (Senior Master Sgt. Andrew Caya); TSgt. Jared Rogosienski checks instruments on a KC-135 flight deck for an engine run. (Senior Master Sgt. Andrew Caya); Tech. Sgt. Coty Ocke prepares the auxiliary power unit on a KC-135. (Senior Master Sgt. Andrew Caya); Ocke leads a drogue installation on a KC-135. (Senior Master Sgt. Andrew Caya); Tech. Sgt. Michael Randolph and Master Sgt. Moe Shivers, boom operators with the 914th Air Refueling Wing, refuel a Norwegian F-35 Lightning II from a KC-135. (Staff Sgt. Jessica Avallone); Airmen from the 914th Maintenance Group work on their KC-135 Stratotanker during Nordic Response '24. (Senior Master Sgt. Andrew Caya); A Norwegian F-35 Lightning II receives fuel from a 914th Air Refueling Wing KC-135. (Staff Sgt. Jessica Avallone); Randolph checks his instruments before refueling a Norwegian F-35. (Staff Sgt. Jessica Avallone)



“This exercise specifically has tested us in regards to what we can all accomplish,” said Master Sgt. Anthony Lewandowski, 914th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron airframe and powerplant general flight chief. “We landed here without requested support equipment and we had to make it work during a time when we were very low on resources,” he added.

The Swedish Air Force stepped in to assist with the issues.

“The Swedish Air Force has been a phenomenal partner with us,” said Lewandowski, “They were able to obtain support equipment for our maintenance mission. However, the equipment was just different enough from our requirements,” he added. “Despite that hitch, the Swedes were able to guide us in their community to obtain parts and pieces for us to get the mission done.”

After facing the hurdle of finding required equipment, the maintainers needed to do some heavy maintenance on the Stratotanker because an engine’s exhaust temperature was not reading on a flight-deck display.

“This is not the kind of maintenance you want to do on the road,” said Lewandowski. “However, it’s been awesome to be tested with limited resources. Our Airmen are multi-Air Force Specialty Coded, so they have been tested on their specialties.”

The Airmen troubleshooted the engine issue throughout the day, took time to install a drogue refueling system on the boom so the tanker could refuel U.S. Marine aircraft, and then went back to resolving the engine issue. The situation allowed them to combine their technical and practical savvy for a solution, according to a maintainer.

“There’s a lot in the job which can get technical and boring, such as pouring over manuals and wiring diagrams,” said Tech. Sgt. Connor Hennessy, 914th AMXS avionics technician. “This issue allowed us to use our brain and troubleshoot in the moment – and it’s fun because it’s a good way to learn.” said Hennessy. “We swapped wiring between engines to pinpoint the malfunction and were able to reset the system,” he added.

The maintainers worked late into the night with the temperature hovering near the single digits. However, the environment was not a hindrance for the Reservists.


“It’s business as usual for us,” said 914th AMXS Senior Enlisted Leader Chief Master Sgt. Jenn Hilton. “Our Niagara Airmen are very experienced in dealing with cold weather operations, so it’s not a distraction for them, as opposed to other units.”

After they were in agreement on the fix, the maintainers were able to successfully execute an engine run with no issues, therefore greenlighting the aircraft to fly a refueling mission the next day.

NR24 has been the cold weather training that the Reservists thrive in, said Hilton. “We always go into exercises expecting to be stressed and tested; these guys have stood up to every challenge that the exercise and aircraft has thrown at them and they’ve mostly done it with a smile on their face,” she added.

“It’s been incredible what we can do with a small amount of people, with little equipment in sub-freezing temperatures,” said Lewandowski. “You get to see what they can accomplish working safely to make the mission happen,” he added.

The efforts of the 914th AMXS have allowed the U.S. aircraft to fly and provide aerial refueling to allied and joint aircraft during NR24.

“We’ve participated in exercises in the past, but this is definitely a first for us as it encompasses a good majority of NATO countries,” said Lewandowski. “Being a part of a large, joint exercise like this is definitely something special, and to be the ones from America as part of it, that’s pretty awesome.” 

(Caya is assigned to the 914th Air Refueling Wing public affairs office.)



RESERVE UNIT PROVIDES UNIQUE SUPPORT TO EDWARDS MISSION

— By Giancarlo Casem

While the active-duty 412th Test Wing at Edwards Air Force Base, California, has been known to fly some unique aircraft throughout the years, it has also relied on a unique unit to help accomplish the ever-changing flight test mission: the Air Force Reserve's 370th Flight Test Squadron.

The 412th Test Wing is charged with planning, conducting, analyzing and reporting on all flight and ground testing of aircraft, weapon systems, software and components for the Air Force. The 370th Flight Test Squadron supports the 412th Test Wing by providing vital aerial refueling operations during test flights and by embedding seasoned Reserve pilots into 412th flight test squadrons.

"In a typical F-35 test mission, we'll get maybe two hours of flight testing without a tanker," said Lt. Col. Jonathan Bearce, a Reserve pilot assigned to the 370th FLTS. "If we have tankers, we can extend that to three to three and a half hours, sometimes even five hours."

Flying the KC-135 Stratotanker, Reservists assigned to the 370th FLTS help extend the length of critical test flights. The 370th also bridges the gap between active-duty and Reserve pilots, ensuring collaboration and understanding between units.

Bearce, for example, is an F-35 and F-16 test pilot who falls administratively under the 370th FLTS but flies predominantly with the active-duty 461st Flight Test Squadron.

"That's what makes us very unique," Bearce said. "We have boom operators for the refuelers, we have the KC-135 pilots, and then we have the test pilots to augment into that squadron who fly the opposite of the KC-135 and fly a lot of the fighter units."

The variety of missions and the squadron's diverse responsibilities, including providing support for other airframes on base conducting their own testing has been a highlight for Master Sgt. Brittany Garland, a boom operator with the 370th.

"Aerial refueling is something that is very necessary for a lot of the different smaller fighter jets or bombers that need to be airborne for an extended period of time," she said. "They're unable to do that unless they get fuel while they're orbiting around in the sky waiting to do their next mission or in between missions."



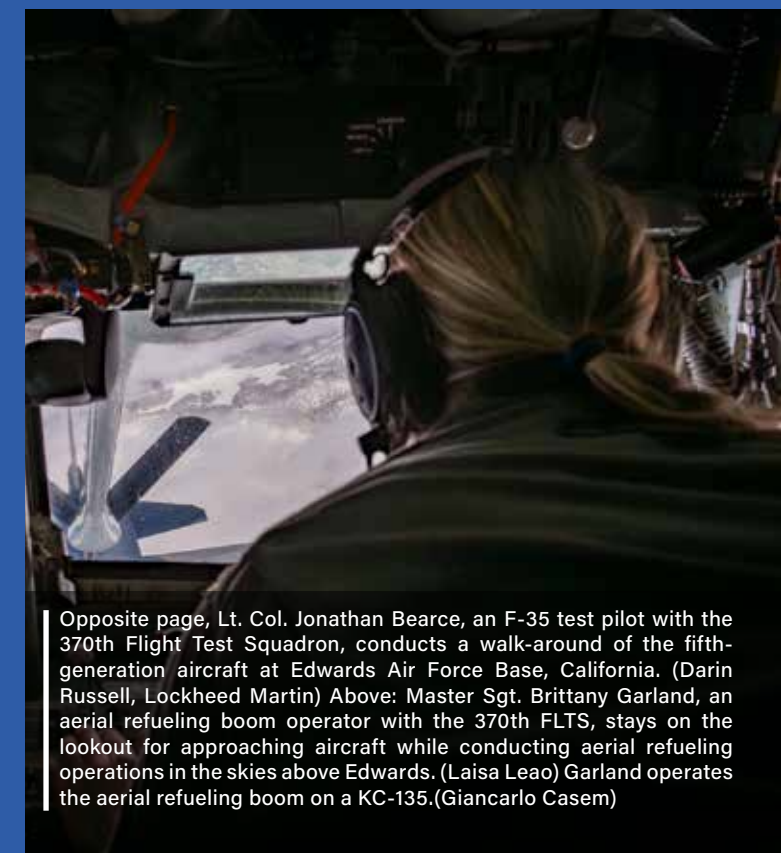
Garland's dual expertise as an air traffic controller in her civilian career enables her to provide valuable support to pilots and gain a comprehensive understanding of aviation operations.

She added that the 370th's mission variety provides a challenging, yet rewarding experience.

"The other bases I've been to have a very small handful of aircraft you get to refuel, but here it's something different every single day," Garland said. "If you want more of a variety, this is where you would want to be because it's unlike anywhere. It's something different all the time, and it's exciting."

Both Bearce and Garland emphasize the importance of balancing military service with civilian careers, showcasing the versatility and commitment of military Reservists. They are just two members of the 370th FLTS, however their stories show a commonality with the rest of the squadron, and that is the professionalism needed to provide support for the various test missions and requirements on Edwards.

(Casem is assigned to the 412th Test Wing public affairs office.)



Opposite page, Lt. Col. Jonathan Bearce, an F-35 test pilot with the 370th Flight Test Squadron, conducts a walk-around of the fifth-generation aircraft at Edwards Air Force Base, California. (Darin Russell, Lockheed Martin) Above: Master Sgt. Brittany Garland, an aerial refueling boom operator with the 370th FLTS, stays on the lookout for approaching aircraft while conducting aerial refueling operations in the skies above Edwards. (Laisa Leao) Garland operates the aerial refueling boom on a KC-135. (Giancarlo Casem)



BARKSDALE BOMB SQUADRON LEADS INNOVATIVE TOTAL FORCE INTEGRATION EFFORT

— By Senior Master Sgt. Ted Daigle



Top: Airmen assigned to the 307th Bomb Wing and 2nd BW prepare for a B-52H Stratofortress sortie in support of Exercise Southern Edge '24. Col. Michael Pontius, 307th Operations Group commander, conducts a pre-flight inspection of a B-52H Stratofortress. Pontius was one of several active-duty and Air Force Reserve members participating in Exercise Southern Edge '24. (All photos by Staff Sgt. Tambri Cason)

No one can accuse the 343rd Bomb Squadron of losing its edge.

The squadron, part of the Air Force Reserve's 307th Bomb Wing at Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana, created an exercise called Southern Edge last year and used lessons learned to implement it again in February and March of this year.

Southern Edge '24 provided realistic training to enhance coordination between B-52 Stratofortress aircrews and Special Forces troops from the United States, the Netherlands, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom.

"We are figuring out what Special Operations Forces of the future look like," said Capt. Sarah Brandenburg, 343rd weapon systems officer and lead planner for the exercise. "The focus is on using digital messaging targeting to call in long-range strikes."

According to Lt. Col. Corey Hancock, 343rd BS commander, digital messaging between B-52 aircrew and Special Operations Forces ground teams is a more effective means of communication.

"As a B-52 community, we are moving toward digital targeting and messaging because it has a higher level of encryption and is faster and more accurate than current methods," he said.

Southern Edge '24, although led by an Air Force Reserve unit, helped broaden that community by bringing active-duty units from the 2nd Bomb Wing to participate for the first time in the young effort's history.

"We're a Total Force Integration unit, so we don't do anything in isolation," said Hancock. "When we saw the potential of last year's effort, we advertised it early this year and got everyone involved."


Brandenburg said this year's TFI effort benefited from lessons learned in Southern Edge '23.

"The first Southern Edge was a crawl phase; this iteration is a walk phase, and we're hoping that the next will be the run phase," she said. "Last year's lessons have been taken into account, and we are testing ways to mitigate them."

In addition to improving on last year's efforts, Southern Edge '24 is trying to demonstrate proof-of-concept in other areas to prepare for future contingencies.

"There's a famous saying that the last war you fought is never the same as the next war, but that's the one you train for because you don't know any better," said Hancock. "This training will help us avoid that by showing us where the gaps are in potential conflicts with a peer adversary."

Both Brandenburg and Hancock said the likelihood of Southern Edge becoming an annual event is high due to the quality of the training and the impact it has on the next generation of B-52 aviators.

"The 343rd is made up mostly of seasoned B-52 evaluators with thousands of hours in the jet, so this exercise is a huge training opportunity," said Hancock. "It allows us to pass on knowledge so the next generation can shape the future of B-52 warfare and be keepers of that knowledge." 

(Daigle is assigned to the 307th Bomb Wing public affairs office.)



FLIGHT NURSES: SAVING LIVES AT 30,000 FEET

— By Maj. John T. Stamm

When severely injured, wounded or sick service members require transportation via airlift, medical care can't stop mid-flight.

As senior members of aeromedical evacuation teams, it's the responsibility of U.S. Air Force flight nurses, Air Force specialty code 46N0F, to provide life-saving emergency and pre-hospital care to servicemembers up to 30,000 feet in the sky.

From planning a mission to disembarking the aircraft, flight nurses function as members of a critical care transport team and provide comprehensive care during aeromedical evacuation missions. Their responsibilities include patient assessment and triage, stabilization, critical care intervention techniques, intensive care monitoring and advanced surgical skill procedures that include neonatal through geriatric age groups.

Flight nurses may also be expected to execute independent judgment to deliver appropriate care when contact with a medical command physician is not possible.

"It's like you are in a flying emergency room, but you don't have the same resources," said Capt. Christopher Bennett, a flight nurse assigned to the 908th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. "You've got to be very resourceful and find innovative ways to compensate."

Responsible for advanced emergency care patient management during air transport of the critically ill or injured from the scene or outlying sites to participating secondary and tertiary care institutions, becoming a flight nurse requires experience and education beyond that of a typical registered nurse.

"You can't just take an ER nurse and put them on an aircraft; it's a bit more complicated than that," said Capt. Kristian Taylor, 908th AES flight nurse. "It all starts with having a four-year degree, and then it's a two-to-three-year process [of additional military training] after that."

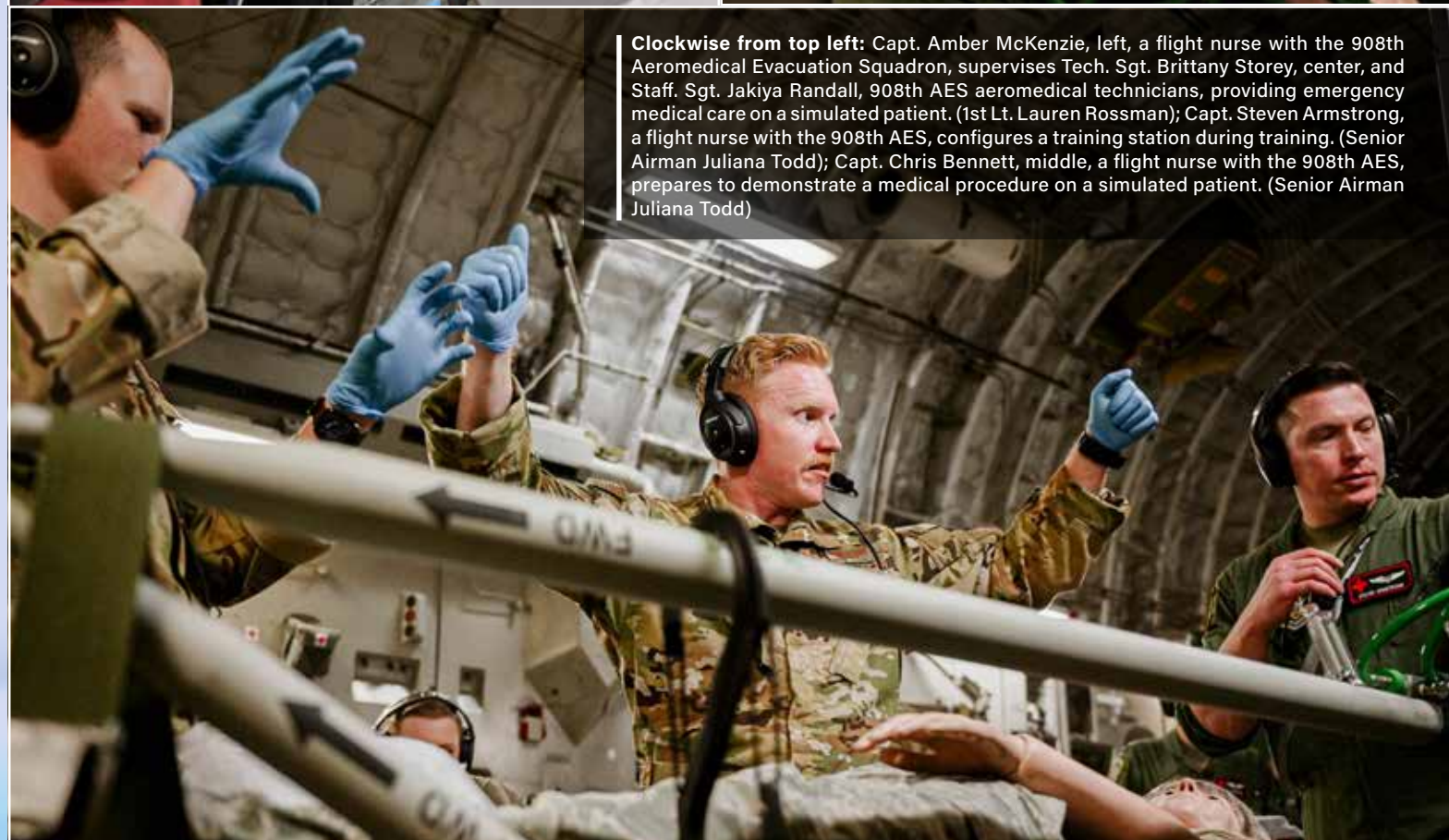
It also is a physically and emotionally demanding profession that has more elements of danger than working in a traditional stationary hospital.

"That's why, when we conduct our training missions, we throw in increasing levels of stress where we can control it, so we know our limits and what we're capable of before we go operational," Bennett added.

Candidates for this career field must be between the ages of 18 and 47, possess a bachelor's degree in nursing from an accredited school and a valid U.S. or U.S. territory registered nurse license. They must also be medically cleared for flight, understand the principles of drug therapy and the effects of altitude, and be accepted by the medical unit commander and Air Force Reserve Surgeon General.

"It's worth noting that the Air Force Reserve and the Air National Guard execute 80% of all aeromedical evacuations for the Department of Defense around the world," said Bennett. "So, we get exceptional leadership opportunities and develop skills you won't learn in the civilian sector, which makes us even better civilian practitioners."

(Stamm is assigned to the 908th Airlift Wing public affairs office.)



Clockwise from top left: Capt. Amber McKenzie, left, a flight nurse with the 908th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, supervises Tech. Sgt. Brittany Storey, center, and Staff. Sgt. Jakiya Randall, 908th AES aeromedical technicians, providing emergency medical care on a simulated patient. (1st Lt. Lauren Rossman); Capt. Steven Armstrong, a flight nurse with the 908th AES, configures a training station during training. (Senior Airman Juliana Todd); Capt. Chris Bennett, middle, a flight nurse with the 908th AES, prepares to demonstrate a medical procedure on a simulated patient. (Senior Airman Juliana Todd)



ARIZONA RESERVISTS TAKE TRAINING TO A NEW LEVEL



— Story and Photos by
Tech. Sgt. Tyler J. Bolken

In the sprawling expanse of military training, where preparation meets purpose, a new era of readiness is being written. Citizen Airmen, traditionally seen hovering over computer-based training, are now gearing up, rifles in hand, en route to an unfamiliar, remote location. Their mission: to transcend the boundaries of their usual roles and embrace the unpredictability of combat through a rigorous training regimen designed to mirror the complexities of modern warfare.

This iteration of training for more than 75 Citizen Airmen of the 944th Fighter Wing, along with 10 Airmen from the 56th Fighter Wing, was Field Training Exercise Desert Anvil, the first of its kind conducted by the 944th Mission Support Group and the 944th Aeromedical Staging Squadron at Florence Military Reservation in Florence, Arizona in April.

The intent of this training was not a matter of choice but a necessity, driven by the evolving landscape of global threats and the realization that the battlefield does not discriminate by job specialty.

“I tasked my planning team to build a field training exercise where our agile combat support and our medical Airmen formed into a Combat Service Support Team, or CSST, to deploy to a bare-base location,” explained Col. Reginald Trujillo Jr., 944th MSG commander. “Once there, they were to secure and defend the site as we prepped to support and enable a follow-on mission from four A-10s and 120 maintenance personnel.”

The Airmen deployed armed and ready to engage armed opposing forces as a key scenario of the training.

“The first time you hear a weapon go off in your direction shouldn’t be in the real world,” said Trujillo. “We want our Airmen to get those reps in now.”

Planning for this initiative began in January of this year and signifies a strategic shift toward more integrated and comprehensive combat readiness training centered on warrior ethos and being ready now ahead of emerging threats.

“It’s all about battlefield contingency skills,” said Master Sgt. Khrystal Fleming, the lead planner for this training. “It doesn’t matter what the person next to you does, we all have each other’s back and we’re in it together.”

In the training scenario, the Reserve Citizen Airmen were deployed to what was simulated to be a potentially hostile environment and tasked to secure and defend the perimeter while ensuring the capability to readily support follow-on combat forces.

“The priority for our members is to be able to successfully engage the

enemy and defend their territory,” said Fleming. “The idea for the planning side is to make this training sustainable, repeatable, efficient and effective.”

“Desert Anvil” aimed to bridge the gap between traditional training methods and the demand for high-level combat readiness against peer threats in a realistic environment. One of the ways this was achieved was through using the U.S. Army’s realistic MILES (Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System) equipment, which uses lasers and blank cartridges to simulate actual firing. Additionally, there was an increased emphasis on weapons handling and use, ensuring Airmen treat their rifles as indispensable life-saving tools.

“They’re wearing equipment that lets them know if they would have been shot,” said Trujillo. “I want our Airmen to get comfortable carrying and operating their weapons when needed. Today’s environment demands it.”

Trujillo also emphasized the importance of using this training to optimize the resilient mindset of the Airmen by incorporating other variables such as limited communication, unexpected injury response through TCCC (Tactical Combat Casualty Care), and the unknowns of an unfamiliar environment.

Florence Military Reservation, otherwise known as Camp Florence, was selected for its similarity to real-world, remote combat scenarios, focusing on enhancing interoperability and team cohesion among various Air Force Specialty Codes and other joint forces. The location is an Arizona Army National Guard training site in the Sonoran Desert about 70 miles southeast of Phoenix.

“When we deploy down range, it’s a total force integration between the active duty, Guard and Reserve,” explained Trujillo. “Today, you can’t tell who’s a Guardsman, who’s a Reservist or who’s active duty, which is how it should be.”


The integration of diverse military units and the sharing of knowledge and resources is pivotal in enhancing the overall readiness, effectiveness and success of this training, explained Fleming.

The journey from the classroom to the combat zone, from apprehension to proficiency, is a testament to the enduring spirit of readiness that defines the Citizen Airman.

“It felt like going back to the roots of what it means to be an Airman,” said Senior Airman Jose Juan Huerta Ascencio, a services journeyman with the 944th Force Support Squadron. “What stood out to me most is it wasn’t just combat Airmen that were put into this training, but it was everyone.”

The forward-looking approach of the 944th FW, through training events like Desert Anvil, showcases the Air Force’s commitment to preparing its Airmen for the multifaceted challenges of modern warfare and this era of Great Power Competition. By fostering a culture of readiness that adapts to evolving military challenges, the Air Force ensures that its personnel are not just trained but proficient and ready to face any adversary.

“We have to get in the reps and start building muscle memory,” said Trujillo.

As the global security environment continues to change, the Air Force’s dedication to innovative training and operational readiness remains a cornerstone of its strategy to protect and serve the nation effectively. 

(Bolken is assigned to the 944th Fighter Wing public affairs office.)



More than 75 Reserve Citizen Airmen of the 944th Fighter Wing, along with 10 Airmen from the 56th Fighter Wing, conducted ‘Ready Airmen Training’ during what was dubbed ‘Field Training Exercise Desert Anvil,’ the first of its kind hosted by the 944th Mission Support Group with the 944th Aeromedical Staging Squadron at Florence Military Reservation in Florence, Arizona, in April. The mission of this training was for Airmen to transcend the boundaries of their usual roles and embrace the unpredictability of combat through a rigorous training regimen designed to mirror the complexities of modern warfare.



NEW AFRC DIVISION TO FOCUS ON SYNCHRONIZING RECRUITING AND RETENTION

— By Bo Joyner



Members of Air Force Reserve Command's new Recruiting and Retention Division discuss details of the Reserve Bonus Incentive Guide and planning for fiscal year 2025 at the 367th Recruiting Group, Robins Air Force Base, Georgia. (Master Sgt. Bobby Pilch) Opposite page: AFRC Wing Talent Management Consultants join for a group photo during a workshop at Robins in March. During the workshop, the TMCs trained, collaborated and shared best practices aimed to encourage Airmen to continue service in the Air Force Reserve. (Roger Parsons)

Ask anyone within Air Force Reserve Command what the main challenges facing the command are today and “recruiting and retention” are sure to come up high on the list. That’s why AFRC recently stood up a new Recruiting and Retention Division (AIY) to manage, synchronize and improve component recruiting and retention programs in support of mission requirements.

Col. James Rigsbee was selected as the first director of AIY, which is minimally manned now, but is expected to grow to up to 20 people in the future.

“Of course, recruiting and retention have been points of emphasis for a long time in AFRC, but they always existed within their own silos,” said Maj. Jesse

Gilbert, the chief of the AIY Retention Branch. “The idea behind AIY was to bring everyone together under one umbrella to manage AFRC’s Human Capital Management strategy by aligning recruiting and retention efforts.”

Gilbert and the rest of the AIY team know they have their work cut out for them.

Like other military services, the Air Force Reserve is facing many recruiting challenges – a decreasing propensity to serve, cultural headwinds and a competitive employment market – that are expected to persist over the next several years.

The Reserve last made end-strength in fiscal 2021. Since that time, losses have out-paced gains, eroding as-

signed strength and Reserve experience levels.

In fiscal 2023, the Reserve retained 88.3% of its military members, which was in line with the command’s 10-year average. The Human Capital Management specialists in AIY know that even small gains in retention can reap huge benefits for the Reserve.

“Just a 1% improvement in retention eliminates the requirement for 700 new accessions,” said Chief Master Sgt. Brandy Buscaglio, the functional manager for Recruiting within AIY. “That’s huge for our recruiters who are working so hard to bring in new members.” In addition to reducing the need for new accessions, a 1% improvement in retention also saves the command \$13 million annually in

Basic Military Training and technical training costs.

The command is currently looking at several initiatives to improve retention, including expanded Inactive Duty Training travel reimbursement, expanded retention bonuses, improved retention tracking and accountability, Talent Management Consultant sales and retention training, and several policy reviews, including Reserve service commitments, assignments, and Mandatory Separation Dates and High Year Tenures.

Specifically, the Reserve has initiated a tiered retention bonus to retain enlisted Airmen with between five and 10 years of service, historically the command’s lowest retention segment, and expanded the IDT travel reimbursement program to all enlisted Reservists up to the rank of master sergeant required to commute 150 miles or more (one-way) for drill duty. This expanded the program to 3,000 additional Reservists to bolster continued service.

AIY will keep a close eye on how these initiatives impact retention and how they might ultimately affect recruiting.

“I think the aim of AIY is to look at the entire lifecycle of the Human Capital Management process,” Buscaglio said. “If you don’t realize that your most valuable asset is your human capital, it doesn’t matter how many planes you have on the flight line or how many computers you have. You have to take care of your Airmen.”

One of AIY’s first priorities, after it was formed in December, was to take a close look at the Reserve’s various bonus programs.

“One of the first things we did was have a Continuous Process Improvement event about the bonus program in February,” said Rebekah McLaughlin, who works in the AIY Retention

Branch. “It was completely focused and dedicated to executing, tracking and managing the bonus program.”

“It’s so important that we follow through on things like paying bonuses that our Reservists are eligible for,” Buscaglio added. “Say we offered 700 bonuses, but only 150 have paid out ... at some point that is going to absolutely start negatively impacting your retention. With AIY, we now have all of the right people together to figure out where the problem might be with us not upholding our end of the contract with our human capital.”

One of McLaughlin’s main objectives is to help manage the command’s Cube program and ensure that wing Cubes are operating as designed. Cubes are comprised of the manpower analyst, recruiting flight chief, force support officer, civilian personnel liaison, wing Talent Management Consultant (former career advisors) and squadron commanders at each wing.

“The Cubes are designed to really get after manning and retention and to update the wing commander on how the wing is really doing in these critical areas,” she said.

Chief Master Sgt. Laura Wilson is currently assigned to A1KK and is working as the liaison with AIY to help transition programs over, particularly the wing Talent Management Consultant program.



AFRC currently has 42 full-time TMCs who are in place to help ensure Reservists know everything about re-enlistments, extensions, retirements, bonus and incentive programs, and much more.

“The TMCs are our boots on the ground at the units and can help us really get after retention,” Wilson said. “The TMCs are vital to helping us keep our Airmen in the Reserve and helping us know why our Airmen are ultimately leaving the service.”

Wilson said she is excited about the new AIY division and is confident the right people are in place to help AFRC manage and synchronize the recruiting and retention relationship.

“I can tell you that the people in AIY really care about the mission,” she said. “They care about our Airmen and they want them to stay in the Reserve. For the first time ever, we have the right people working recruiting and retention together under one umbrella. It’s a great thing for the Air Force Reserve.”

Gilbert agreed.

“Prioritizing retention and continuum of service is just smart business for the Air Force Reserve because it decreases training costs and keeps our experienced people in uniform,” he said. “AIY is changing the way the command looks at the balance between recruiting and retention.”





44TH FIGHTER GROUP RETURNS TO THE TYNDALL SKIES

— Story and Photos by Airman 1st Class Zeeshan Naeem

In April, the Air Force Reserve's 44th Fighter Group conducted its first flying Unit Training Assembly at Tyndall Air Force, Florida, since it was displaced by Hurricane Michael in 2018.

The 44th FG is an associate unit of the active-duty 325th Fighter Wing at Tyndall.

The UTA proved valuable for the Reserve pilots and maintainers by giving them hands-on experience with F-35A Lightning IIs. The 44th FG and the 325th FW are transitioning to become a fully capable fifth-generation aircraft combat unit, and these training experiences provide the framework needed to produce unrivaled combat airpower through mission-ready Airmen.

"Today was our first step toward being the fully capable unit that we have been in the past," said Master Sgt. Brian Posey, 44th Maintenance Squadron airframe powerplant general sec-

tion chief. "It showed how resilient we have been since the hurricane. Finally having the opportunity for our guys to go up and train is nice."

The 44th FG, assigned to the 301st Fighter Wing at Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base, Fort Worth, Texas, became an associate unit of the 325th FW in 2014. However, in 2018, the impact of Hurricane Michael forced the group to relocate to Eglin AFB, Florida. The 44th FG operated the F-22 Raptor air frame until Tyndall's transition to the F-35A was finalized. Soon thereafter, the 44th FG returned to Tyndall in April 2023.

"As a Reserve member, after the storm, we went through some ups and downs," Posey said. "We were unclear if we were going back to Tyndall or potentially getting shut down. From after the hurricane until April 2023, we integrated with the 33rd Fighter Wing at Eglin to begin training for our eventual return to Tyndall."

The re-commencement of the group's participation in hands-on training at Tyndall serves as another milestone for the 325th FW. Tyndall's total-force maintainers and pilots built rapport and worked together to set the standard for future UTAs. Successful cooperation throughout the training also set the tone for future interoperability and integration with the 325th FW mission of projecting unrivaled combat airpower for America.

"The more you know who's maintaining what you're flying, the more confidence you have," said Staff Sgt. Michael Benvenuto, 301st Fighter Squadron aircrew flight equipment craftsman. "Today boosted our morale and showcased how our hard work, through the adversity we've faced in the past couple of years, has come to fruition. Overall, I'm excited for our future as we continue to grow into a fully combat-coded wing."

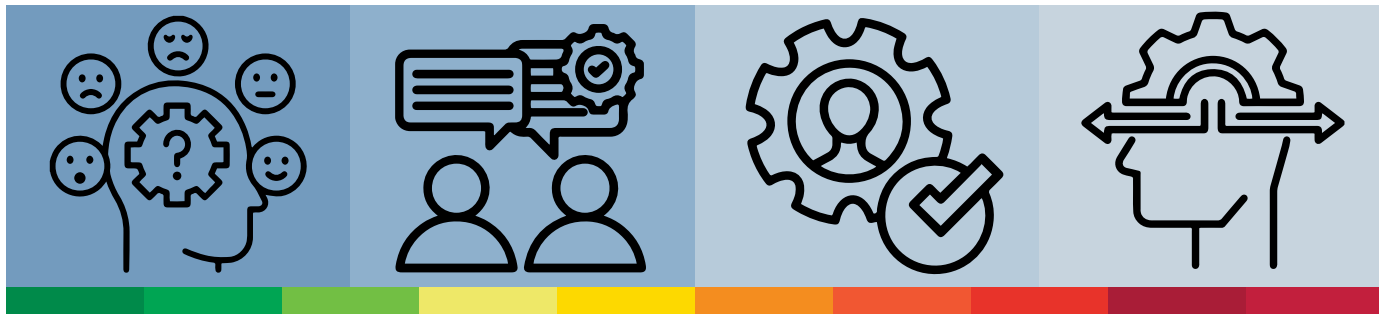
(Naeem is assigned to the 325th FW public affairs office.)



Opposite page: Airmen prepare to launch multiple F-35A Lightning II aircraft from the Tyndall Air Force Base flight line, Florida, during the April Unit Training Assembly. Clockwise from top on this page: AnF-35A Lightning II assigned to the 95th Fighter Squadron flies over Tyndall, April 6. Senior Airman Colten McCormick, 44th Maintenance Squadron assistant crew chief, performs preflight checks on an F-35A. Lt. Col. Kirk Wanner, 58th Fighter Squadron pilot from Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, assisted the 44th Fighter Group with F-35A Lightning II proficiency training during the April UTA. Senior Airman Jared Barrett, 44th Maintenance Squadron assistant crew chief, pulls a cable during preflight operations.



AFRC INCREASES REALISM BY ADDING



STRESS INOCULATION TO TRAINING SCENARIOS

— By Bo Joyner

Using a technique called Stress Inoculation, Air Force Reserve Command is changing the way it trains its Citizen Airmen to better prepare them for the high-end fight.

“Stress Inoculation is not a separate, new training course, but it’s an overall shift in how we train,” said Lt. Col. John Rolsen, AFRC’s lead Stress Inoculation instructor and curriculum developer. “We’re getting away from simple task proficiency and trying to move towards developing the whole person – everything from emotional intelligence, communication skills, task proficiency and decision-making skills.”

“In a lot of ways, Stress Inoculation is similar to medical inoculation against biological diseases in that individuals are exposed to just enough stress to arouse defenses,

which are their coping skills,” said Chief Master Sgt. Christina Bicknell, the command’s Stress Inoculation program manager.

Rolsen gave this example of how Stress Inoculation might be introduced into an existing AFRC training course: A training scenario calls for four aerial porters to build a pallet of medical supplies that are needed in a nearby area following an earthquake. Lives are at stake and the supplies are desperately needed in the disaster area. The plane transporting the pallet is leaving in 45 minutes, so the aerial porters have 30 minutes to build the pallet and deliver it to the aircraft.

Fifteen minutes into the training, one of the aerial porters, who is actually a role player, announces that he has

cut his hand badly and has to leave for medical treatment. Five minutes later, a senior NCO role player comes on-scene and says that one of the remaining three aerial porters has to report immediately to see the commander. The remaining two aerial porters have to decide if they should continue to build the pallet on their own, which violates safety protocols, push back on losing the third aerial porter, try to recruit more people to help with the task, try to find some other solution to accomplish the mission or simply give up on the task.

“We want to train like we fight, and we know stressors like these are common in real-world situations,” Bicknell said. “Our hope is that through appropriate exposure to stressors like these and training on ways to deal with stress, Reservists will develop the confidence to handle even greater levels of stress in the future.”

The chief went on to say that tailored and deliberate feedback immediately after the training scenario is a key part of Stress Inoculation.

“What’s really cool is the evaluators don’t come in after the scenario and say, ‘this is what you did right, this is what you did wrong,’ or ‘this is what you should have done differently.’ They let the participants work through what just happened and how they possibly could have handled the scenario better.”

Bicknell and Rolsen are currently involved in training trainers who will help introduce Stress Inoculation into training scenarios across the command.

Rolsen recently led a day-long training session at Duke Field, Florida, and said he was impressed with how well

the Reservists in attendance embraced the shift in the command’s approach to training.

“Members from the 919th Special Operations Wing were inquisitive and invested in the development of their Airmen,” Rolsen said. “Additionally, we had a squadron commander attend with several of her Airmen. That level of interest in ensuring her people have access to all tools for developing their unit is exciting to see.”

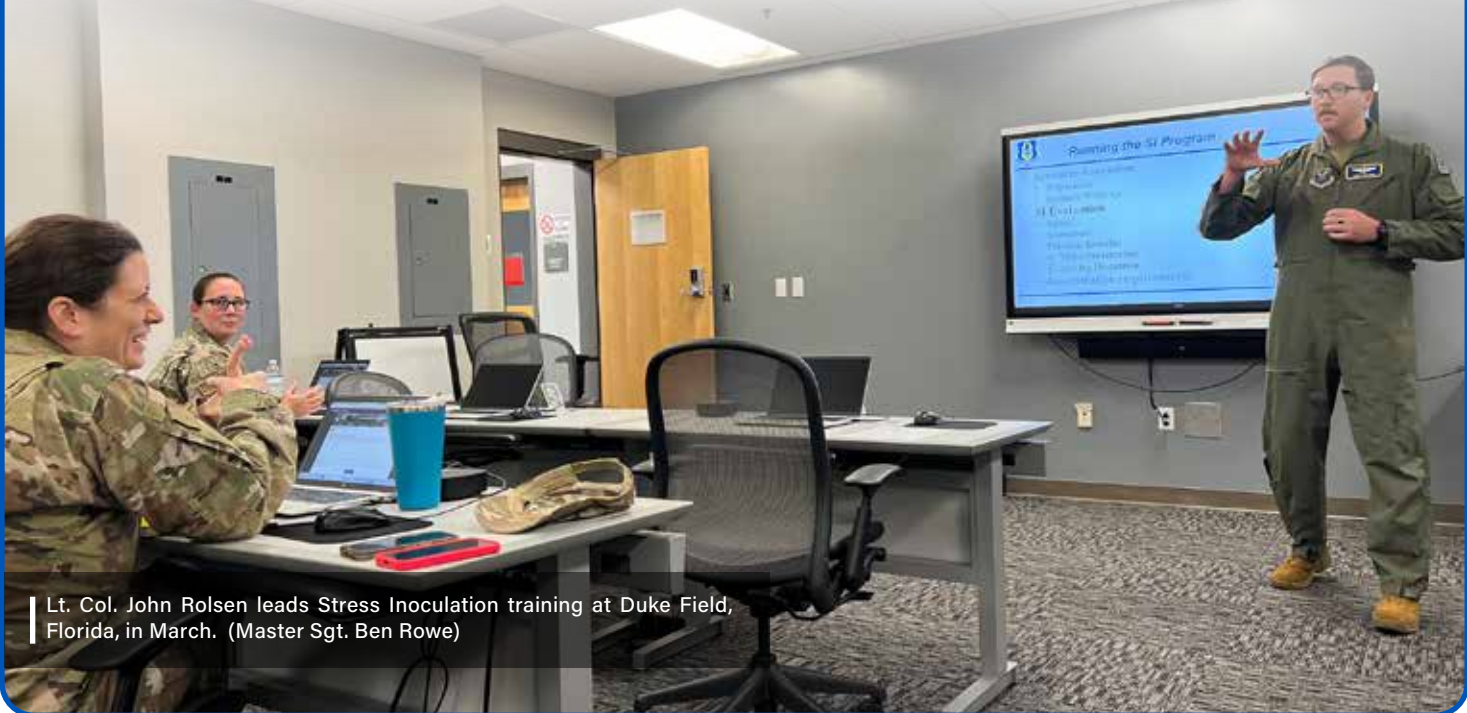
He went on to explain that the Stress Inoculation program focuses on shifting the training mindset to align with mission command’s five C’s: character, competence, capability, cohesion and capacity.

“The Air Force has been focused on task compliance for a long time,” he said. “We need to change the way we train to accommodate the change in how we are going to fight.”

Bicknell said that Stress Inoculation training can be conducted during a training exercise at any level. During the planning phase, planners can use pre-built scenarios to develop injects for an exercise, or evaluators can observe activity and conduct a deliberately developmental feedback session without interrupting the flow of the exercise.

Either way, the ultimate goal is the same.

“The trainee is the most important part of the entire Stress Inoculation program and why it exists,” she said. “The ultimate goal is the deliberate development of the whole Airman.”

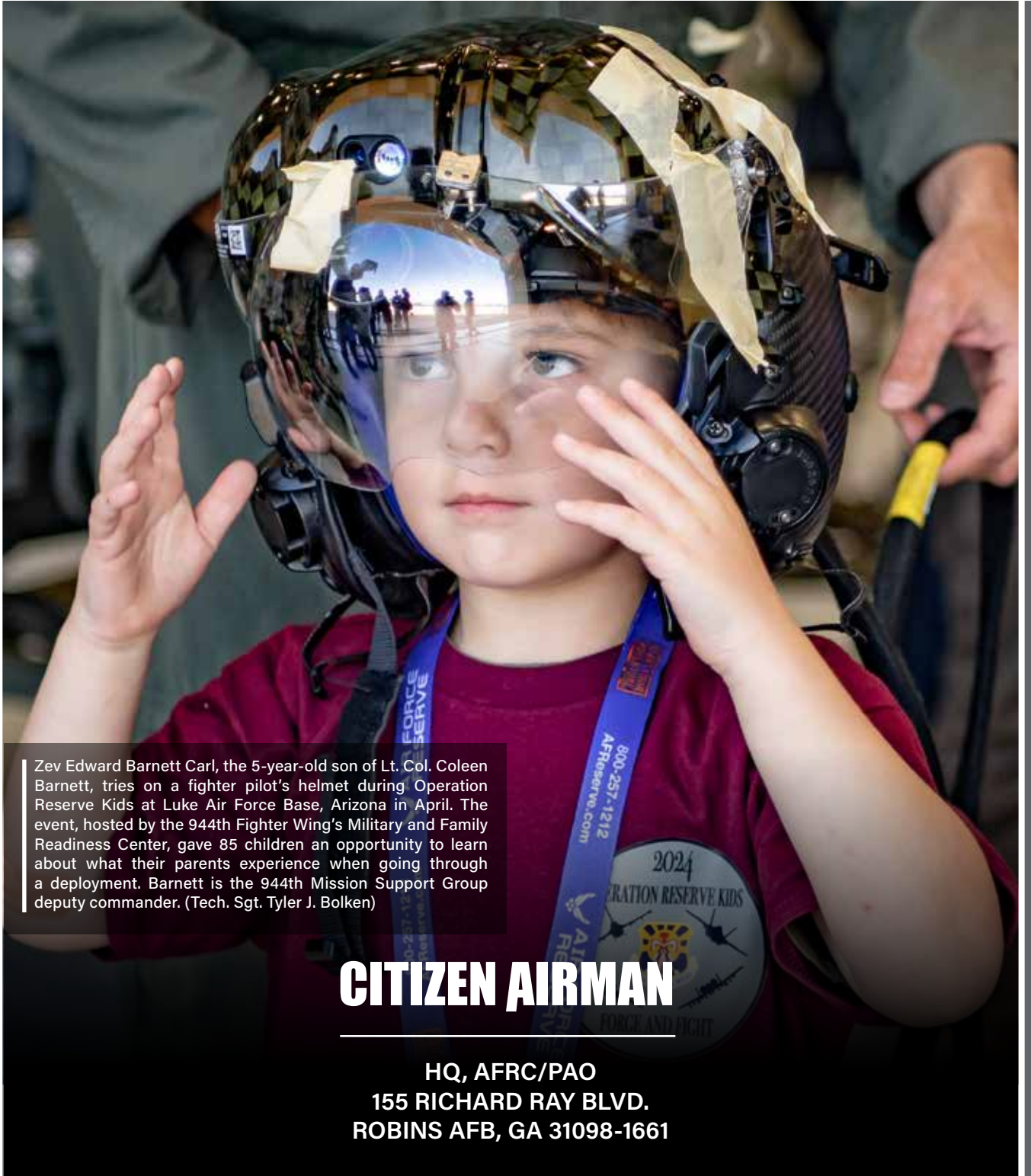


Lt. Col. John Rolsen leads Stress Inoculation training at Duke Field, Florida, in March. (Master Sgt. Ben Rowe)

NEW NAME, SAME MISSION

The Key Spouse Program has been rebranded as the Commander’s Key Support Program (CKSP) and identifies program volunteers as Key Support Liaisons (KSLs). Notably for our command teams, this change expands the volunteer eligibility pool to additional family members, as well as military and civilian members attached to the unit, provided it does not interfere with mission or duty requirements. If you want to connect with a KSL or are interested in becoming a KSL, contact your respective unit leadership or your local Military & Family Readiness office for more details.”





Zev Edward Barnett Carl, the 5-year-old son of Lt. Col. Coleen Barnett, tries on a fighter pilot's helmet during Operation Reserve Kids at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona in April. The event, hosted by the 944th Fighter Wing's Military and Family Readiness Center, gave 85 children an opportunity to learn about what their parents experience when going through a deployment. Barnett is the 944th Mission Support Group deputy commander. (Tech. Sgt. Tyler J. Bolken)

CITIZEN AIRMAN

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