

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON'S SOURCE FOR NEWS

# ARCTIC WARRIOR

February 20, 2015

[www.jber.af.mil](http://www.jber.af.mil)

Volume 6, No. 7

## 673d ABW Airmen, civilians recognized at JBER ceremony

By Air Force Staff Sgt. William Banton  
JBER Public Affairs

Airmen from the 673d Air Base Wing gathered to honor the 2014 Annual Award winners during a ceremony at the Arctic Warrior Events Center on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson Feb. 13.

The awards recognized the Airmen and civilians who demonstrated superior leadership, job performance, community involvement and personal achievements during 2014.

“To all the award nominees, you are truly the best of the best,” said Air Force Col. Brian Bruckbauer, JBER and 673d Air Base Wing commander. “We have around 5,000 warriors – civilians and military members – in the air base wing.

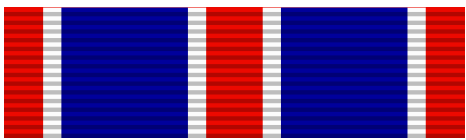
“This is a huge wing; it towers over most wings by at least a factor of two or three. The fact that you were all recognized tonight as nominees says a lot about you.”

The award winners included Airman of the Year Senior Airman Sheena Ross, 673d ABW Office of the Staff Judge Advocate; Noncommissioned Officer of the Year, Staff Sgt. Robert Lake, 673d Communications Squadron; Senior NCO of the Year, Master Sgt. Chad Smith, 673d Logistics Readiness Squadron; Company Grade Officer of the Year, Capt. Trenton Reeves, 773d Civil Engineer Squadron; First Sergeant of the Year, Master Sgt. Robert Chastain, 673d Communications Squadron; Civilian of the Year, Category I, Mr. Karl Schultz, 673d CES; Civilian of the Year, Category II, Mr. Duane Leventry, 673d Security Forces Squadron; Civilian of the Year, Category III, Mr. Lance Davis, 773d CES; Civilian of the Year, Category IV, Mr. Leon Sutton, 673d LRS; Honor Guardsman of the Year, Staff Sgt. Jordan Hayes, 703d Aircraft Maintenance Squadron and the Base Honor Guard Program Manager, Staff Sgt. Eduardo Peguero, 673d Force Support Squadron.

Bruckbauer said the accomplishments of the wing’s Airmen are evident in the accolades from obtained outside the wing.

“The fact that we have won so many awards at the 11th Air Force, Pacific Air Forces and Air Force [levels] is just incredible, and is a testament to the hard work and professionalism in what you do every day in this wing,” he said. “It makes me so proud to be working with you each and every day; well done.

“One award I was very proud to see come in, just tonight, was the 673d ABW [being] selected for the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award,” he said.



## Alaska wings net unit awards

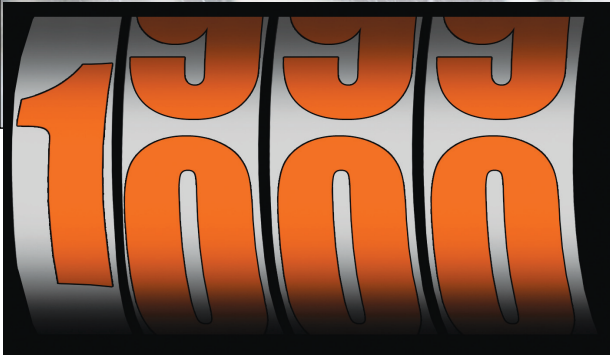
JBER PA staff report

The Pacific Air Forces announced Feb. 13 that several Alaska units earned Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards.

The awards were chosen according to different categories, with the 673d Air Base Wing winning the air base wing category for period of service Oct. 1, 2013 to Sept. 30, 2014; 3rd Wing winning composite wing for service Nov. 1, 2012 to Oct. 31, 2014; the 611th Air Operations Center winning one-of-a-kind unit for service Nov. 1, 2011 to Oct. 31, 2013; and Eielson Air Force Base’s 354th Fighter Wing winning fighter wing for service Oct. 1, 2012 to Sept. 30, 2014.

The AFOUA is awarded by the secretary of the Air Force to numbered units that have distinguished themselves by exceptionally meritorious service or outstanding achievement that clearly sets the unit above and apart from similar units.

Airmen who served in the units for the eligible period can wear the award once they see it on their “virtual ribbon rack” at the Virtual Military Personnel Flight website.



Air Force Lt. Col. Clayton Percle, 525th Fighter Squadron commander at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, tries to avoid a spray of Champagne after the flight which made him the first active-duty pilot to break 1,000 flight hours in the F-22 Raptor, Feb. 3. In 2011, Air Force Reserve Col. David Piffarerio, then a lieutenant colonel with the 302nd Fighter Squadron and now deputy commander of the 477th Fighter Group at JBER, became the first Air Force pilot to reach 1,000 hours in the Raptor. (U.S. Air Force photo/Justin Connaher)

## Bulldog commander breaks active-duty record

By Air Force 2nd Lt.  
Michael Trent Harrington  
JBER Public Affairs

Forty-two days is a long time to spend defying gravity.

On Feb. 3, Air Force Lt. Col. Clayton Percle, 525th Fighter Squadron commander, clocked his thousandth hour flying the F-22 Raptor and thereby crossed an invisible line in the air, into an elite club as exclusive today as the society of sound-barrier breakers was in the late 1940s.

Yet Percle’s road to that chiliad mark stretches back even further.

It took three generations, three wars and decades of men and women launching planes and bringing them home for him to notch the mythical sixth week in a stealth fighter jet cockpit. It was a long road through history to the first active duty, thousand-hour Raptor pilot...and a long road for Percle.

“The only thing I ever wanted to do before I became a fighter pilot was to be a train engineer,” Percle said, and sure enough, fate tried more than once to push him toward locomotives on steel tracks and away from steel wings on flightpaths.

Percle’s grandfather was a combat engineer in the First World War and fought in the battle of the Marne – a struggle that featured predecessors of the 90th Fighter Squadron, Percle’s sister unit here, flying over no man’s land. Another grandfather was a combat medic in World War II.

Both grandfathers survived, and eventually the Percle line brought forth a 7-year-old Tennessean from Clarksville who fell ill with chickenpox and missed attending an air show with his dad.

The senior Percle was an Army chief warrant officer in Vietnam, winner of the Distinguished Flying Cross and an AH-1 Cobra attack helicopter pilot with nearly 2,000 combat flying hours himself.

He was a survivor, too, and a good aviator. As most pilots would note, a good pilot is usually a lucky one, and as luck would have it, the flying father brought home to his someday-flying son a poster of an F-15C, the Eagle streaming across a laminated two-foot poster at full afterburner.

At that moment, Percle said, he knew what he was supposed to do, and he’d spend the entirety of his young life preparing to do it.

But the path that led Percle through the U.S. Air Force Academy – the service’s factory for pilot slots



Percle waits for clearance to leave a hangar in an F-22 Raptor for the flight which made him the first active-duty pilot to break 1,000 flight hours in the Raptor Feb. 3.

and the single most likely way to an eventual fighter cockpit – soon changed.

Percle fell and shattered a growth plate in his hip during basic training.

He was told he could choose to start all over, and lose a year of his life to sitting and waiting, or he could try his hand at an unlikely ROTC pilot slot from the University of Memphis.

Percle headed to Memphis.

He enrolled in 1994, as the Air Force shrank in the wake of the Cold War and Gulf War I.

Strategic Air Command had dissolved as a major command, and the Department of Defense fell to a fraction of its Reagan-era bulk.

“I would not give up on my dream,” Percle remembered, and he took the chance of not even getting to be a pilot, let alone flying the F-15s he’d pictured since childhood.

Percle did get that pilot training slot. When he was selected to fly the F-15C out of training, his dad was there to run on-stage and tackle him with joy.

Adding the hours he logged in the T-37 Tweet, the T-38 Talon and the F-15 to his Raptor tally, Percle has spent 2,000 hours, some 83 straight days, in flight.

One or two thousand flying hours is not so long compared to the time heavy counterparts log in their cockpits, Percle admitted.

But for a fighter pilot in the claustrophobic test tube that is a single-seat stealth jet – the

F-22 doesn’t even give its pilots the luxury of a second-seat companion in training models, like all other current fighters – it sure can seem like a long time.

Though he’s the only Airman in the cockpit, Percle won’t claim a single hour for himself alone.

“It’s not something I’ve accomplished on my own,” Percle said. “It’s a credit to the men and women who maintain the fighter, the operations crews, equipment organizers, resource managers and intelligence collectors who ensure I can go out and fly the airplane every day.

“It’s not a milestone or a benchmark for me, it’s a milestone for the program and for the Air Force,” he added.

“If I went back and talked to 7-year-old me and told him what was going on here today, that I was flying an F-22, he’d say ‘What’s that?’” Percle said with a laugh.

“I’d never have imagined it. It’s not even something I even dreamed of. I think if I went back and showed myself, I’d be pretty shocked.”

Other Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve pilots have already reached – and other active duty pilots undoubtedly will reach – the thousand-hour mark in the coming years.

The accomplishment is soon becoming part of a routine – and that, Percle says, is just fine, because it is less about the pilot in the cockpit or the plane in the air and more about the collective effort that keeps them there.

“You don’t really climb into the jet,” Percle said. “You strap it on your back. Like a home-sick angel.”



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**Recreation pass changes**

**Annual pass for recreation on JBER costs only \$10 – See story, A-2**





# Secretary of defense takes oath, addresses DoD forces

DoD News Release

WASHINGTON — Ash Carter, who was sworn in as the 25th secretary of Defense Tuesday, laid out his top priorities in a message to the Defense Department workforce.

Carter’s message reads as follows: To all Department of Defense personnel:

I am honored to become your Secretary of Defense. I am proud to lead men and women who devote their lives to the highest calling – the defense of our nation.

And I am grateful to follow in the footsteps of Secretary [Chuck] Hagel, one of our nation’s most honorable and conscientious public servants.

We live in challenging times – times that demand leadership and focus. And starting today, I will be calling on each and every one of you to help carry out three top priorities.

Our first priority is helping the president make the best possible

national security decisions for protecting our country – and then implementing those decisions with our department’s long-admired excellence.

We confront a turbulent and dangerous world: continuing turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa, and the malignant and savage terrorism emanating from it; an ongoing conflict in Afghanistan; a reversion to archaic security thinking in parts of Europe; tensions in the Asia-Pacific; the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and intensifying threats in cyberspace.

In addressing these challenges, I have pledged to provide the president my most candid strategic advice. I will count on your experience and expertise as I formulate that advice. I will also ensure the president receives candid professional military advice.

But as we tackle the many threats to our national security, we must never lose sight of our nation’s enduring strengths – or

of the opportunities to make a brighter future and better world for our children.

The United States remains the strongest and most resilient nation on earth. Because of you, we have the finest fighting force the world has ever known. We have friends and allies in every corner of the world, while our adversaries have few. We have long possessed the world’s most dynamic and innovative economy. And our values, principles, and leadership continue to inspire hope and progress around the world.

Safeguarding America’s security and global leadership will depend on another of my main priorities: ensuring the strength and health of you who make up the greatest fighting force the world has ever known – our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, civilians, and contractors all around the world.

I will do that by focusing on the well-being, safety, and dignity of each of you and your families.

I will ensure your training and equipment are as superb as you are. And I pledge to make decisions about sending you into harm’s way with the greatest reflection and utmost care – because this is my highest responsibility as Secretary of Defense.

Honoring all these commitments also requires us to focus on building the force of the future, which is my third priority.

We must steer through the turmoil of sequestration, which imposes wasteful uncertainty and risk to our nation’s defense.

We must balance all parts of our defense budget so that we continue to attract the best people – people like you; so that there are enough of you to defend our interests around the world; and so that you are always well-equipped and well-trained to execute your critical mission.

To win support from our fellow citizens for the resources we need, we must show that we can make better use of every taxpayer dollar.

That means a leaner organization, less overhead, and reforming our business and acquisition practices.

It also means embracing the future – and embracing change.

We must be open to change in order to operate effectively in an increasingly dynamic world; to keep pace with advances in technology; and to attract new generations of talented and dedicated Americans to our calling.

I first arrived at the Pentagon more than three decades ago, and have had the privilege of serving 11 Secretaries of Defense in Democratic and Republican administrations. I took the oath of office this morning because I love our country and am devoted to you who defend it. And I am committed to our fundamental mission: the defense of our nation.

I look forward to leading and serving alongside you at this extraordinary moment in our nation’s history. May God bless you and your families, and may God bless America.

## JBER iSportsman recreation pass policy to change April 1

Public Affairs staff report

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson will institute a recreational permit fee for activities covered by the iSportsman program beginning April 1.

The annual fee is \$10 for active duty, military-affiliated and civilian personnel. Senior citizens 60 years of age and older, and those disabled 50 percent or more as documented by the Department of Veterans Affairs, will see a \$5 rate per year.

Establishing the fee is necessary to sustain JBER’s recreational program, according to Brent Koenen, 673d Civil Engineer Squadron, chief of the natural and cultural resource program at JBER.

“Programs such as this are required, by DoD and Air Force instructions, to be self-sustaining – essentially meaning, they must pay for themselves,” Koenen said. “We will use all revenue collected from recreational fees exclusively to support the Natural Resource, Conservation and Enforcement programs at JBER.”

All persons wishing to recreate on JBER

must have a permit, as has formerly been the case. After March 31 all current-year permits will become invalid and a new permit must be purchased through the JBER iSportsman web site at: [www.jber.iSportsman.net](http://www.jber.iSportsman.net).

The iSportsman recreational permit is not an installation access permit. Recreational users not affiliated with the Department of Defense are still required to obtain an installation pass from Security Forces at the JBER-Richardson Visitor Center located on Arctic Valley Road. Those recreating on JBER are required to have an iSportsman recreational permit and a government issued form of identification on them at all times.

Not every recreational activity on JBER requires an iSportsman permit. Some activities – such as camping, picnicking, cross country skiing, boat or pavilion rentals, for example – fall under the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation program. The iSportsman web page has further details on the applicable policies and when a permit is required.

All recreational users are required to sign in and sign out using the iSportsman system. The system can be accessed using comput-



JBER offers many opportunities for hunting, hiking, camping and other recreational activities. For some, users need an iSportsman permit – which provides accountability of people and ensures public safety. (U.S. Air Force photo/David Bedard)

ers, kiosks at the JBER-Richardson Visitor Center and the JBER-Elmendorf Visitor Center at the Boniface Gate, and by phone. Koenen said this requirement is essential for

accountability of persons, to avoid disrupting military training and to ensure public safety.

Questions regarding this policy may be directed to 552-2439 or 384-6224.

## Be aware of information you provide; OPSEC is a state of mind

By Josh Nichols

673d ABW Plans and Programs

We have all seen the posters with the big purple dragon plastered across the walls throughout our units, and hopefully we are all aware of operations security concepts.

But for some, especially in the comfortable, military-friendly town of Anchorage, the consequences of poor OPSEC practices seem vague, unlikely and incredibly distant.

OPSEC is not a process that can be oversimplified through regulation. It is a consistent, subtle check on a person’s habits regarding the information he might publicize.

According to Air Force Instruction 10-701, “OPSEC is a process of identifying, analyzing and controlling critical information indicating friendly actions associated with military operations.”

This also includes the need to “identify those actions that can be observed ... determine what could be collected, analyzed, and interpreted to derive critical information

... and execute measures that eliminate or reduce the vulnerabilities.”

In other words, we are all responsible for identifying what information can be collected and pieced together by adversaries into something useful.

Furthermore, we are responsible for figuring out what actions to take to minimize our adversaries’ accessibility to such critical and sensitive information. This does not come without challenges.

One of the main obstacles to good OPSEC is complacency. This is compounded by the handling of particularly sensitive information throughout the day. Mishandled unclassified information can very easily become significant to an adversary. Unfortunately, we are all susceptible to complacency that can lead to breaches.

Here are some common examples of poor OPSEC:

- Throwing away anything with personally identifiable information – such as bank statements, names and addresses, social security numbers and medical information

- Throwing away any “for official use only” information

- Flags hanging in windows for deployed family members, which can identify a spouse home alone

- Decals or license plate frames displaying branch of service or unit

- Secure-area badges left in vehicles in plain view

- Wearing t-shirts in town which advertise military units, installations or technical expertise

- Social media profiles identifying military service, job series, where you are stationed, deployment info, etc.

Some information, if divulged, could put everyone at risk for being socially engineered. Social engineering happens when adversaries befriend individuals and collect information over the course of time – sometimes for years. Staying focused 24/7 is the ever-present challenge to maintaining good OPSEC.

Seemingly unimportant information or actions become much more significant

when pieced together and placed into context. Regulations governing OPSEC can be written, and training can be mandated, but ultimately, good OPSEC is a matter of consistently monitoring the information we allow others to see, and creating good habits consistent with the military lifestyle we have all chosen to live.

In other words, you should always be in an OPSEC frame of mind – whether you are on or off duty, on or off base, or at home on your computer.

Family members are vital to the success of our OPSEC program. They are privy to certain sensitive information, such as deployment times and locations or recalls. They assist in creating, focusing and monitoring their families’ OPSEC frame of mind. Family members are just as important as active duty, civilians and contractors in protecting JBER, the Army, the Air Force, and the Department of Defense.

For more information, contact your unit coordinator or call the 673d Air Base Wing OPSEC program manager at 552-4503.

## Only 8 months left before use-or-lose leave cap drops to 60 days

By Air Force Staff Sgt.

Alexander Martinez

PACAF Public Affairs

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii — Service members should be aware of a change to leave-accrual policies.

On Oct. 1, leave will be capped at 60 days, and all leave beyond that will be lost unless special leave accrual applies.

Active duty, active Guard and Reserve members with more than 60 days of leave have fewer than eight months to use or lose those days as a result of changes in leave policy.

Since October 2008, high operations tempo drove the implementation of a temporary leave carryover extension provision that allowed service members to carry over 75 days of leave to the next fiscal year without incurring a loss.

But as of Sept. 30 – the end of fiscal year 2015 – the provision expires, bringing the leave cap down to 60.

“I don’t see any indication of it being extended at this time,” said Derek Salis, Pacific Air Forces chief of enlisted promotions and customer support. “Consequently, if [service members] don’t prepare by planning on using leave between now and Sept. 30, they will lose it.”

Personnel may be eligible for special leave accrual entitlements if they faced situations caused by a catastrophe, national emergency or crisis, or operations in defense of national security that prevented them from reducing their leave balance before the end of FY15.

### Soldiers

Soldiers serving in an area where they are eligible for hostile

fire pay or imminent danger pay for a continuous period of at least 120 days are authorized to accumulate and retain a maximum of 120 days of leave – 60 days of ordinary leave, plus 60 days of SLA.

Leave accumulated before deployment plus leave earned during eligible deployments is SLA protected. Leave earned after return from deployment is not protected. SLA protection ends either on the expiration date or when the Soldier’s current leave balance drops to 60 days or less.

### Airmen

For the Air Force, SLA is not automatic, it must be requested, Salis said. “Additional information can be found in AFI 36-3003 [Military Leave Program], or members can talk to their servicing [Military Personnel Section] customer service.”

Another option is to sell leave back to the service.

For each day of leave sold back, they’ll be paid a day’s worth of basic pay. With this option, service members are only allowed to sell back 60 days.

Salis said enlisted members may sell back leave upon reenlistment or entering the first extension of an enlistment.

“There are also provisions ... that allow a one-time SLA sell back, to be sold at any time, which is authorized for enlisted members who would lose leave accumulated in excess of 120 days,” Salis said. “Officers may only sell leave prior to a retirement or separation.”

Air Force Master Sgt. Marija Showalter, PACAF command military pay manager, noted the importance of knowing the accurate balance of leave come Sept. 30.

As the military payment system

has not yet been programmed to show the updated use/lose changes, the use/lose block on Leave and Earnings Statements may not accurately reflect the number of days a member is projected to lose.

Members wanting to know their actual use/lose leave balance need to look at their current leave balance and do the calculations necessary to arrive at the correct use/lose balance, she said.

“Leave Web may not provide you with the most up to date information,” Showalter said.

Service members should also ensure they factor in the amount of leave they will earn until the end of September, which accumulates at 2.5 days per month.

For information about the military leave program, visit the myPers or iPerms websites, or consult your local finance office or personnel section.

<b>Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson/ 673d Air Base Wing Commander</b> Col. Brian R. Bruckbauer (USAF)
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Editorial office and mailing address: JBER Public Affairs, 10480 Sijan Ave., Suite 123, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, AK 99506; telephone (907) 552-8918.

Send emails about news stories and story submissions to [david.bedard.1@us.af.mil](mailto:david.bedard.1@us.af.mil).

Deadline for article and photos is 4:30 p.m., Monday, for the week of publication. Articles and photos will be published on a space-available basis and are subject to editing by the *Arctic Warrior* staff. Submission does not guarantee publication.

<b>JBER Public Affairs Director</b> Maj. Angela Webb (USAF)
<b>Deputy Public Affairs Director</b> Bob Hall
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# COLD-WEATHER COOPERATION

By John Pennell  
USARAK Public Affairs

BLACK RAPIDS TRAINING SITE, Alaska — A trip to Alaska tops many people’s bucket lists, but not many would want to visit in February. Make the destination a location known for brutal sub-zero temperatures and dangerous, mountainous terrain filled with avalanche hazards, and most people would surely pass on the opportunity.

Military people aren’t like most people. So when U.S. Army Alaska Commanding General Maj. Gen. Michael Shields decided to host a collaborative event at the Black Rapids Training Site for partner nation militaries who also have to deal with extreme cold weather and mountainous terrain, a line quickly formed to attend.

Black Rapids, an hour south of Delta Junction in Interior Alaska’s wildness, is home to USARAK’s Northern Warfare Training Center, the U.S. Army’s premiere cold region proponent.

It’s the logical destination for representatives from the participating nations to get together and talk about winter warfare, with deep snow, sub-zero temperatures and stunning mountain ranges just outside the front door providing the perfect backdrop.

Even as the event kicked off, Soldiers from USARAK’s Aviation Task Force – freshly returned from a deployment in support of Operation Enduring Freedom – were training in the nearby snowy mountains as part of NWTC’s Aviation Cold Regions Survival Class.

The inaugural Cold Regions Military Mountaineering Collaborative Event, from Feb. 9 through 12, saw representatives from Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, Mongolia, Nepal and Japan, as well as representatives from the United States Army Mountain Warfare School in Jericho, Vermont and the U.S. Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center, Bridgeport, California, gather to focus on doctrine, equipment and operations among the specialized military schools and units.

The attendees met with a goal of establishing an environment of sharing and learning among international military schools and units that conduct specialized training and operations in cold weather and mountainous environments.

“When we received the invitation it was a tremendous opportunity,” said Canadian Lt. Col. Francois DuFault. “In the Canadian



**ABOVE:** Service members from around the world arrive at the Northern Warfare Training Center Feb. 9.

**LEFT:** NWTC 1st Sgt. Robert Whiteley discusses his global positioning system with German Col. Michael Varter and U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Steven Brunner between presentations at the U.S. Army Alaska-hosted international Cold Region Military Mountaineering Collaborative Event at the Black Rapids Training Site. BRTS was the classroom site Feb. 9 through 12 for participants from 12 nations exchanging ideas about tactics, techniques and procedures for dealing with harsh weather and terrain. (U.S. Army photos/John Pennell)

defense strategy, the first priority is the north. For Canada to be able to talk with allies and close partners about the common issues we are facing when we are training and operating in an arctic environment, was a tremendous opportunity.”

Lt. Col. Mats Forsman, commander of Sweden’s Winter Warfare School, touched on the importance of interacting with other military cold weather and mountaineering experts.

“This is a meeting where we can build networks with each other,” he explained. “We always have things to learn from each other. We may do things one way, but the

Canadians or Americans or Finns may do it another way. We learn something from each other and together we all become better in winter warfare.”

For Maj. Nikolai Lundsteen, representing the Kingdom of Denmark Home Guard, the event was more of a one-way exchange of ideas as his country works to build the capabilities from the ground up.

“For us it’s important, because we know in the future we need to build new capabilities to operate under arctic conditions, especially in Greenland,” Lundsteen explained. “We have no experiences with this. So basically we know our end state

is to develop the capability, but we have no knowledge about the ways and means to develop those capabilities.

“For us, this is a fact-finding mission where we are trying to find out, on a tactical level, what are the do’s and don’ts, and we have certainly gained a lot of knowledge here,” he continued. “We are exploring new territories here, so this was the perfect event for us.”

The four-day event was a combination of information briefings and hands-on activities such as snowshoeing, cross-country and downhill skiing, and other arctic tool and equipment demonstrations.



# A survivor’s story: grooming, sexual assault happen to men too

*(Editor’s note: the author of this commentary, stationed at JBER, requested anonymity.)*

Sexual assault is a hot topic – one addressed often throughout the military – but details of victims’ stories are seldom mentioned. This is understandable; the crimes are intensely personal. Also, as many victims have learned, listeners don’t always know how to respond, which can make sharing one’s story awkward, even painful.

This is unfortunate. We are drawn to stories; they help us learn from the experience of others. Are we missing out on a powerful tool in the world of sexual assault prevention? Perhaps calling on survivors to share their stories holds potential for making people more aware of sexual assault and ways they can prevent it in their spheres of influence.

To that end, here is my story.

Like most men I know, I never thought much about sexual assault. I saw it as predominately a female problem that only happened to males under highly unusual circumstances such as prison.

Each year, I endured the mandatory training, but never examined people in my life for indicators of predatory behavior or spent any time considering issues like stalking, grooming, or consent. Little did I know – like many other victims of both genders – I was oblivious to the threat until it was too late.

Though the sexual assault I endured was not my fault, I failed to recognize the warning signs in the preceding months.

When I returned from a deployment, I found the girl I had been dating had unexpectedly moved most of her belongings into my home. I had left her a key so she could occasionally check on my house, but I was nowhere near ready for her to move in. Our relationship was already rocky during the deployment, and her unilateral move forced me to break things off.

I made sure to get back the key to my house, returned her belongings, and left the state on leave.

That’s when the text messages started to arrive.

At first they came almost hourly – throughout the day and occasionally into the night. I read the first couple of apologies and deleted the rest on sight. I tried to have the phone company block her, but at the time, blocking texts required a restraining order.

Since my only other options were to get a new number or put up with it, I chose the latter.

When I returned from leave, the stalking escalated to showing up at my doorstep every few days.

She lived 45 minutes away – these were not visits of chance. I would ignore her, drive into my garage, and shut the door. Before long, it was so bad I remained locked in my house except while at work, and only opened my door at night to get my mail.

Then I discovered she’d purchased a house down the street.

One day I woke up to find every window and door covered with Post-It notes saying “I’m sorry.”

I didn’t even attempt to take them down for fear she’d come over while I removed them.

The night before the assault, I checked my mail. Either I forgot to lock the deadbolt or she made a copy of my key – but the outcome was the same: she had access to me inside my house.

I remember waking up to her sitting beside me on the bed with her mouth and hands on me. I froze, unsure how to react. At some point she noticed that I was awake and said something, but I have no idea what that was.

I was tremendously conflicted because my body was responding to something I knew was completely wrong. She moved from oral to anal intercourse – far beyond anything we had engaged in during our relationship.

I remember the pain and disgust, but little else. When she finished, she tried to converse some more and to cuddle, but I just lay there.

Eventually she gave up and left, so I locked the door and took a shower. I remember washing repeatedly, playing the events in my head over and over, unable to understand what had just happened.

The thought I had been sexu-

ally assaulted never even crossed my mind.

I wrote it off as a horrible sexual encounter and tried not to think about it. There was no way I was going to tell anyone what had happened.

Over the next couple of weeks, my situation went from bleak to one of complete despair.

Still reeling from the shock of the assault, I did nothing to stop her as she came over and assaulted me several more times. Each time, I would try to wash off the shame of the events, but I felt powerless to stop them. I had no will to resist, and felt completely broken and alone.

Many aspects of the assault made little sense to me. I knew what had happened was wrong, but I blamed myself because my body had responded to the stimulation. I associated that with enjoyment and let my assailant continue.

We also live in a society where males are expected to want sex all the time. To complain about having sex – no matter how wrong – would go against those expectations.

Would I be seen as weak for not fighting back? Would I be seen as unmanly for not wanting to have sex with someone? If I got married, what would my wife think?

My fears about how others would respond only drove me to further isolation.

I was afraid of my assailant and let her do things to me that I never wanted to happen, but I couldn’t understand my fear, let alone explain it to someone else.

It wasn’t until weeks later, when talking with my sister, that I had the courage to describe what had taken place. She unhesitatingly told me I had clearly been sexually assaulted. I argued that was impossible. Only when she pointed out I had been asleep and couldn’t possibly have consented did I begin to realize the truth.

I had seen the definition of sexual assault numerous times in briefings, but the lack of consent in my own case had never dawned on me. With that newfound understanding, I gained the courage to file a police report. I don’t know what actions the police took, but I

never saw my assailant again. The texts dwindled, but persisted until I finally changed my number. I notified the SARC on base and started on the road to recovery.

Through that process, I came to realize just how little I truly understood about sexual assault. The vast majority of sexual assaults occur between people with an existing association – through work, friends, or an intimate relationship. This goes for both males and females.

I’d always thought fight-or-flight mechanisms were the only instinctive human responses to danger. When you hear a loud crash nearby, do you run toward it, run away, or freeze and try to figure out what it is before taking either action?

Many sexual assault victims never make it past the instinctive response of freezing. Additionally, many predators groom their victims to decrease the likelihood of fighting back or fleeing. Some use force or threats, but fear can be just as effective – as I learned.

Control through fear is why many predators stalk their victims before, during or after assaults, and with cell phones and social media, it’s more prevalent and easier to do from a distance.

One of the final pieces I came to understand was the nature of control which impacted the events after the initial assault.

For years, I blamed myself for everything after the initial incident. This only changed when I heard how many victims are subjected to repeat assaults from the same perpetrator.

Through grooming tactics like manipulation and progressive undermining of resistance, predators can bypass normal defensive reactions and boundaries.

Once those barriers have been removed, assailants use despair, shame, or fear to trap their victims and perpetuate the abuse. This is particularly true within the first couple of weeks, while the victim is suffering from the shock and trauma of the initial assault.

Only upon hearing this did I begin to understand I had been assaulted not once, but multiple

times, and was not to blame for any of it. Even then, it took me a long time to be comfortable with sharing my experiences. That all changed due to some tremendous words of encouragement from a former wing command chief.

I saw him confidently stand in front of more than 100 people and plainly tell how he had been sexually assaulted as a young man. Unashamed, he said while he had been victimized, sexual assault does not define him. Rather, he is defined by who he chooses to be: a chief, a leader, an Airman.

That single moment effected a complete paradigm shift in my thinking. My sexual assault does not define me. It impacted my life, but does not make me who I am. From that realization, I found the courage to begin telling my story. With each person I told, the fear of ostracism diminished and I truly came to understand the value behind the chief’s words.

My hope is that those words ring true for other victims of sexual assault. Victimization of males has no correlation to strength, manliness or sexual orientation. The simple fact is, they are victims of a terrible crime.

My story is just one of thousands. You may not identify with my experience; if not, I’m glad. But I hope you will consider how you can be active in prevention.

This calls for commitment, and you may have to challenge yourself.

Will you be able to recognize situations where inappropriate control could lead to a sexual assault?

Will you remain vigilant for stalking, grooming, and other predatory behaviors, and intervene before matters escalate?

Will you stay attuned to signs of distress, like isolating or significant behavioral or performance changes?

Will you reach out and offer support without judgment or retribution?

Committing to these actions will cost you time and attention. Those we serve alongside are worth your effort.

If you listen to our stories, I urge you – take them to heart.



**Elmendorf pool closure**

The pool at the Elmendorf Fitness Center will be closed until March for maintenance.

**JAG law school programs**

The Air Force Judge Advocate General Corps is accepting applications for the Funded Legal Education Program and Excess Leave Program until March 1.

The FLEP is a paid legal studies program for active duty Air Force commissioned officers and is an assignment action with participants receiving full pay, allowances and tuition. FLEP applicants must have between two and six years of active duty service (enlisted or commissioned).

The ELP is an unpaid legal studies program for Air Force officers, and participants do not receive pay and allowances, but remain on active duty for retirement eligibility and benefits purposes. ELP applicants must have between two and ten years active duty service.

For more information and application materials, visit [www.airforce.com/jag](http://www.airforce.com/jag), contact Capt. David Schiavone at the Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson 673d ABW Legal Office at 552-3048, or call (800) JAG-USAF.

**JBER tax centers open**

Active duty members, reservists, retirees, and their family members can receive free tax return assistance and preparation at JBER’s tax centers.

Volunteers are trained to prepare 1040 EZ and 1040 tax returns, and can provide advice on military specific issues, such as combat zone benefits and the effect of the Earned Income Credit. Volunteers also deal with the Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend.

All tax returns done through the centers are forwarded electronically to the IRS, and taxpayers can receive their refunds in as little as one week.

The JBER-Richardson Tax Center is located on the third floor of Building 600 and will be open Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and Thursday from 1 to 8 p.m.

The JBER-Elmendorf Tax Center is located on the first floor of the People Center, Building 8517 and will be open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Wednes-

day 8 a.m. to noon. Walk-in service is available, but customers having an appointment take precedence.

Taxpayers will need proof of identity (military ID); social security cards and birth dates for all dependents; last year’s federal income tax return; wage and earning statements from W-2s, W-2Gs, and 1099-Rs; interest and dividend statements; bank routing and account numbers for direct deposit; amounts paid to day care providers; and day care providers’ tax identification numbers.

Appointments can be made by calling the JBER-R tax center at 384-1040 or JBER-E tax center at 552-5839. Customers can also contact a unit tax advisor, who may be able to complete tax returns at the workplace and forward it to the tax center.

**Provider Drive closure**

Civil Engineers are repaving Provider Drive between the Exchange and JBER Hospital through Aug. 15. Local housing will have one-lane access to Wilkins Ave.

The detour uses Westover Avenue, Grady Highway and Zeamer Avenue.

**Rental Partnership Program**

The Rental Partnership Program provides active-duty personnel with affordable off-base housing and consists of two options.

The first, RPP Plus, includes utilities and sometimes cable costs providing an easier budget with a set rental payment year round.

The other option, RPP Below Market, saves the member four to five percent off the rental fee that other tenants pay however utilities are paid for by the tenant.

Both options are available with no deposits or fees with the exclusion of pet fees as may apply.

An allotment must be executed through a Housing Management Office under either option of the RPP for the rental payments.

Visit the JBER-Elmendorf HMO, Bldg. 6346, or call 552-4328. Or visit the JBER-Richardson HMO in Bldg. 600, Room 104 or call 384-3088.

**DLA Document Services**

Defense Logistics Agency Document Services duplicates and prints documents.

Document Services documents including black and white, color,

large format, photographic prints, engineering drawings, sensitive materials, technical manuals and training materials. They also handle the design, printing and distribution of business cards, letterhead, invitations and programs.

Document Services’ Equipment Management Solutions Program provides networked multifunctional devices that print, scan, copy and fax. Production facilities offer scanning and conversion services for all types of documents.

They also offer Document Automation and Content Services, a service for building digital libraries of content with online access.

Hours of operation are 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

For more information visit [www.documentservices.dla.mil](http://www.documentservices.dla.mil), visit the office at 984 Warehouse Street, or call 384-2901.

**U-Fix-It Store**

The JBER U-Fix-it Stores are open to all Aurora Military Housing tenants. Assorted items for maintaining your home may be issued from the U-Fix-It Store. Availability is subject to change and limits; some may have a cost.

There are also American flag kits and fire extinguishers available. U-Fix-It work includes all home maintenance activities.

Its purpose is to allow the occupant to make minor improvements and repairs to their home and cut down on the number of service orders. There are two stores on base.

The JBER-Elmendorf location is 6350 Arctic Warrior Drive and is open 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Friday, closed from 1 to 1:30 p.m. for lunch, and Saturday, 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. (closed for lunch noon to 1 p.m.).

The JBER-Richardson location is at 338 Hoonah Ave., open from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, and closed from 1 to 1:30 p.m. for lunch.

A blind-cleaning machine is available at the JBER-E location.

A “reservation required to use” policy is in place with the priority going to military members PCSing. For more information, call 375-5540.

**JBER Bargain Shop**

The JBER-Elmendorf Bargain Shop, located in building 8515 Saville off of 20th Street, is open Tuesday and Wednesday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and the first Saturday of the

month 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Consignments are accepted Wednesdays 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

For information, call 753-6134.

**Richardson Thrift Shop**

The JBER-Richardson Thrift Shop, located in building 724, Quartermaster Drive, is open Monday through Thursday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and first and third Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Consignments are accepted Tuesdays and Thursdays.

For more information, call the Thrift Shop at 384-7000.

**Priority placement**

The Priority Placement Program and Executive Order 13473 provide non-competitive appointment for spouses of active duty service members, including full-time National Guard and Reservists, who are relocating to accompany their service member during a permanent change of station. The program allows spouses to register for Department of Defense positions and be considered for jobs offered internally.

Spouses are matched with positions based on qualifications and preferences. The spouse remains eligible for a maximum of two years from the date of the PCS orders and are in the program for one year. Military spouses who have never filled a federal position can now register for PPP.

Military spouses can register at the Civilian Personnel Office at JBER-Elmendorf or the personnel office at JBER-Richardson.

For information, contact Brenda Yaw at 552-9203.

**Furnishing Management**

The Furnishings Management Office offers 90-day loaner furniture. Appliances may be issued for the duration of the service member’s tour. FMO delivers as far as Peters Creek or Rabbit Creek; service members must make special arrangements beyond these areas.

When requesting furniture, service members must provide a copy of their reporting orders.

For JBER-Elmendorf, visit the Capital Asset Management Office at Building 6436, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., or call 552-2740.

For JBER-Richardson, visit the Housing Management Office at Building 600, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., or call

384-2576.

**Article 139 claims**

A Uniform Code of Military Justice Article 139 claim is a claim against any service member for willfully damaging or wrongfully taking property while the service member is not on duty.

Claimants are eligible to file an Article 139 claim whether they are civilian or military, a business, a charity, a state or local government. Claims covered by Article 139 are:

- Claims for damage to property inflicted intentionally, knowingly, purposefully, and without a justifiable excuse.
  - Claims for property wrongfully taken. A wrongful taking is unauthorized taking or withholding of property not involving a breach of a fiduciary or contractual relationship, with the intent to deprive the owner of the property temporarily or permanently.
- Not covered by Article 139 are:
- Claims resulting from negligent acts such as normal “fender-benders” or other such accidents;
  - Claims for personal injury or death;
  - Claims resulting from acts or omissions of military personnel acting within the scope of their employment (these may be payable as a tort claim);
  - Claims resulting from the conduct of Reserve Component personnel who are not subject to the UCMJ at the time of the offense;
  - Subrogation claims. That is a claim where your insurance company pays you and then seeks reimbursement; and
  - Claims for theft of services.

Claimants should submit claims within 90 days of the incident from which the claim arose unless there is good cause for the delay.

Your claim must be presented either orally or in writing. If presented orally, the claim must be reduced to a signed writing within 10 days after oral presentation.

For claims against Army members, contact the Army claims office in Bldg. 600, Suite 313, at 384-0330. For claims against Air Force members, contact the Air Force claims office in the People Center, Suite 330 at 552-3048. Claims relating to members of any other branch may be made at the Army claims office and will be forwarded to the proper service.



# Karate as a way of life

## Former Marine sensei imparts wisdom and respect through martial arts

By Air Force Tech. Sgt.  
Robert Barnett  
JBER Public Affairs

“I will work hard to build true confidence through knowledge of mind, honesty of heart and strength in the body,” begins the student creed of Sensei Ken Riley’s Ketsugen Karate class at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson’s Arctic Oasis community center.

“To keep friendship with one another and to build a strong and happy community; I will never fight to achieve selfish ends, but to develop for self-defense.”

The class is deemed successful by teacher and families, who give the credit to each other as they continue to learn and grow.

The sensei – Japanese for teacher – wouldn’t have it any other way.

When Jazmine Bowman, who joined the class at 11 years of age, she found it “scary and nerve wracking.”

“It’s okay,” Riley told her. “Just do your personal best.”

A child with Asperger’s Syndrome, Bowman said it was not easy for her to make friends, but “this class has been awesome, because I have had the opportunity to develop good social skills.”

She received her yellow belt after a year of training.

“I was ecstatic and extremely proud of my accomplishment over the past year,” she said. “When my sensei told me ‘You’re an amazing student and I hope you will continue these classes until you’re



**Sensei Ken Riley helps Bryson Martin, 4, learn basic sparring techniques during a Ketsugen Karate class at the Arctic Oasis community center Feb. 4. Bryson is the son of Air Force Staff Sgt. Amanda Martin, a member of the 673d Medical Group.**

a black belt,’ I made a promise to myself that I would.”

Now 13, Bowman has taken on a leadership role.

“It is so much fun helping newer students learn, because it feels as if they are looking up to me,” she said.

“When we help each other ... it helps me improve my skills and learn skills I am still having troubles with, because I have to concentrate really hard to teach something that is difficult for me.

“One of the biggest things that

I love about this class is that everyone is nice, caring, funny and understanding,” Bowman said. “We all come together to learn and be stronger, healthier and positive adults.”

Riley, a ninth-degree red belt in Goju-ryu Karate and seventh-degree red belt in Ketsugen Karate, has been practicing and teaching for more than 40 years.

Both belts are considered higher than black belts, and Riley has nearly reached the highest possible rank.

He began studying self-defense while growing up in New York.

“I grew up in Harlem, in New York City; it was a very violent place at the time,” he said. “Going downtown was risky back in the day. Training in martial arts gave me confidence to go places and not be scared.

“Going to competitions helped me realize I did have potential. I was competing against people who were my age or older, my belt level or higher. I did quite well. The more I did it, the more I fell in love with it.”

He credits his skills to his teachers, including Gerald Gaylord, his first instructor in New York.

“One of my New York teachers, Peter Flores, said to always give back,” he said.

“I’ve learned, and I’m always a student, even [now]. Students show me things I did not teach them.

“That’s what it’s all about. If you can pass that on, then you’ve done a good job.”

He earned his black belts prior to joining the Marine Corps, where he served from 1974 to 1976. He began as a rifleman, but it quickly became clear he had close-combat skills, so he became a close-combat instructor. His unit hosted internal tournaments and he won them all, becoming the first All-Military Martial Arts Champion.

“They recognized that this was what my specialty was,” he said. “I spent a lot of time in the gym. I loved it; this has always been my passion.”

After separating from the Marines, Riley returned to teaching his passion.

Parents have sent letters thanking Riley for years.

“The karate class was awesome,” said Yelka Donnolly, wife of Army Maj. Ken Donnolly, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division.

“We had the best experience possible while [our son] Kenny grew as a young man under the teaching of Ken Riley. Keep the Rileys as instructors forever; they really care about the kids.”

“It’s just amazing what [Riley’s] done with [my son],” said Jennifer Grzegorzczuk, wife of Spc. Eric Grzegorzczuk, 4-25 IBCT. “[Riley’s] done everything he can to help [my son] get promoted and do well.

“[My son’s] really energetic and it helps him get his energy out in a productive way. He went to a competition and won a bronze medal in sparring. He loves it.”

“Sensei Riley was extremely

patient with the students and was able to effectively manage a classroom of 4-and 5-year-olds,” said Kimberly Payne, mother of a student.

“As an educator myself, I know that is remarkable ... Sensei Riley exhibits the qualities of a good teacher. He is genuine, caring, respectful, knowledgeable and patient. I wish I could take this program and sensei with us to Germany.”

Martial arts are a way to build the mind, body and spirit, Riley said.

“We never know what we can achieve until we try,” the sensei said. “Martial arts will open the doors to a world of new and exciting things and help you in all areas of life.

“Many of my students have gone on in life to do great things for themselves and their community. I am happy to be a part of the dream.”

“I absolutely love how I feel after my class – calm, relaxed and powerful,” Bowman said. “This class has changed my life dramatically both physically and mentally.

“Even though the techniques get harder and harder, I know that I just need to try again until I figure it out and get it right, and never, ever give up.”

At the end of each class, Riley has the children demonstrate respect towards each other, their sensei and their parents.

He tells them, “point to your hero,” – their parents, before the children reunite with their parents to say “thank you.”



**Sensei Ken Riley comforts an upset student during a Ketsugen Karate class at JBER’s Arctic Oasis community center Feb. 4. “Sensei Riley is extremely patient with the students and was able to effectively manage a classroom of 4-and 5-year-olds,” said Kimberly Payne, one of the mothers whose child takes the class. Sensei is Japanese for teacher. (U.S. Air Force photo/Tech. Sgt Robert Barnett)**

## Public Health Service lieutenant wins Buckner triathlon

By Airman 1st Class Kyle Johnson  
JBER Public Affairs

Michael Bakker cuts through the water as if it were his natural habitat. His white swimmer’s cap rhythmically breaks the surface as he sucks in precious oxygen for the next lap.

Bakker, a Public Health Service lieutenant assigned to the Indian Health Service, completed 9.62 miles at the Indoor Sprint Triathlon at Buckner Physical Fitness Center Feb. 9, winning first place in the male division.

The event was divided into two heats and was open to any Department of Defense cardholder or active duty personnel older than 18 years of age.

Participants biked for 15 minutes, ran for 15 minutes, and finished with 15 minutes of swimming, with only brief breaks for transitioning between events.

“It was great fun and a good event,” said former Air Force Capt. Bill Kane, Kenai Fjords National Park ranger, who also competed in the event. “I’m glad I didn’t have to break ice to go for a swim.”

As a physician’s assistant, Bakker encourages a healthier lifestyle for about 1,500 Alaska Native patients in the Anchorage area and 10 Native villages.

When he’s not on the clock he’s racing the clock, as he competes in roughly 20 fitness events a year, 10 of which are triathlons.

It’s not about winning, he said. It’s about besting his own time, constantly getting better.

“If you’re a competitive person, it’s fun because you are competing with yourself,” Bakker said.

Before Bakker began participating in these events, he was 80 pounds overweight.

“I was unhappy with myself, I knew I was out of shape,” he said. “I grew motivated to make a change and began to slowly incorporate more and more exercise into my life.

“I started working out two times a week or so,” he said. “Initially, my goal was to just complete a race. Over the past 10 years, I’ve begun to add in more and more exercise.

“As I became [more] in shape, I realized I had more energy to do things like go backpacking with my wife and enjoy nature.”

Bakker is now doing some form of exercise roughly 10 times a week. But he doesn’t go to the gym to achieve his goals; he simply pursues a more active lifestyle.

Throughout the week, he stays active, participates in community running events, and takes his dog out for jogs.

To unwind on the weekends, Bakker goes on a trail ride on his fat-tire bike, spends the day with his family, and typically goes for a hike with his wife in the afternoon.

To Bakker, a triathlon is simply a hard workout.

“I think these events are great,” Bakker said. “They are a great way to get a hard workout in and have a good time. When you get done with a hard workout, you feel great.

“It does release endorphins, but you feel like you’ve actually done something to improve your fitness.”



**Lt. Michael Bakker, a Public Health Service physician’s assistant assigned to the Indian Health Service in Anchorage competes in the Indoor Sprint Triathlon held at Buckner Physical Fitness Center Feb. 9. Bakker was the male division winner with a total of 9.62 miles completed between biking, running, and swimming. (U.S. Air Force photo/Airman 1st Class Kyle Johnson)**

“As you do more races, exercises, and achieve your goals, it becomes addicting,” Bakker said.

The Alaska cold can turn active service members into introverted homebodies, but Bakker seems to have warmed up to the unusual weather here and finds new adventures everywhere.

“I’m really thankful for the opportunities we have here,” he said. “They are really committed to encouraging a healthy lifestyle. Our gyms are some of the best I’ve ever been to.”

“We have fun runs, races and all these outdoor activities,” Bakker said. “I’d encourage everyone to take as much advantage of that as they can.”

Physical wellness may seem daunting, but it is not out of reach. A physically healthy lifestyle is as realistic as the goals one sets to get there.

“If you want to get yourself healthier, keep things small and simple,” Bakker said. “If you try to change six different things about your life on New Year’s day, a lot of that’s not going to stick. If you can achieve those small goals, it will motivate you to achieve bigger goals. That’s how it was with me.”

For more information on available programs, contact the Elmendorf Fitness Center at 552-5353, or Buckner Physical Fitness Center at 384-1308.



## A present reminder of hope in the midst of darkness

Commentary by Tech. Sgt. Kristina Decot  
JBER Chapel Center

Have you ever made a list of things you wanted to start doing, like exercising more, going to bed early, eating healthy, spending more time with your family? I have made many lists of things I want to start doing – however, recently I decided to make a list of things I wanted to stop doing.

One of those things is telling my generic Air Force story.

When people ask me what I do in the Air Force, to avoid long conversations, and questions I don't want to answer, I tell them I just do "administrative work." Nobody questions admin work. It's not that I'm ashamed to say what I do; in fact I am very proud of what I do, but I'm partly protecting people who ask, because I don't believe they really want to hear the answer.

Being in the Air Force, and sharing what I do is difficult. People I meet think Airmen don't see war; they only fly planes. I understand because our mission

is to "Fly, fight, and win." What I do in the Air Force is not well understood, yet so crucial. So what do I do? What follows is what I do and why I continue to feel honored to serve.

I am a chaplain's assistant in the U.S. Air Force. The Air Force has technical descriptions of my job – providing for religious freedoms, ensuring religious needs of the military community are met, and serving as a visible reminder of the holy. Some military people think our main job is to smile and pass out candy; however, the essence of my job is simply to be a reminder of hope in the midst of darkness ... and at times, yes, that can mean passing out candy.

I was there for a Soldier when the reality hit that his brother was not coming home from war. I led him to the chaplain where he received a glimpse of hope.

I was there outside a convoy in the middle of the night, as a grown man wept in my arms at the loss of another one of his friends as the chaplain said a silent prayer.

I was there cleaning out a young

Soldier's pockets after an improvised explosive device took his life, and looking at pictures of his sweet young wife. I cleaned the blood off the picture and his wedding band with such detail; I thought I was going to go insane. I knew his widow would receive those items and I didn't want any trace of war on his precious wedding band.

I was there wrapping blankets around mothers, husbands, daughters, and sons on the flightline at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware, as they wept for their loved ones who paid the ultimate sacrifice and ultimately came home in a flag-draped transfer case.

I was there helping Airmen fit fallen heroes for their uniform, straightening every last ribbon, with dignity, honor and respect; ensuring the ribbons look perfect for the family. I've worked alongside the embalmers, encouraging them as they do their best to reconstruct a face marred by shrapnel wounds to the head.

I was there protecting the chaplain as we traveled to remote outposts in Afghanistan to set up wor-



**Tech. Sgt. Kristina Decot takes time out of her schedule to mentor and teach English to local Afghan women while on a six-month deployment to Afghanistan. (Courtesy photo/Tech. Sgt. Kristina Decot)**

ship services and hoping to bring a sense of hope and peace to those who have seen sights more horrible than Hollywood could ever portray on a movie screen.

I have had military members come up to me after a tragic incident and thank me for what I did. To this day, I cannot tell you what I did, except that I was just simply

there – during the worst days of their lives, whether it's holding a hand of a brokenhearted Soldier, or wrapping a blanket around a widow.

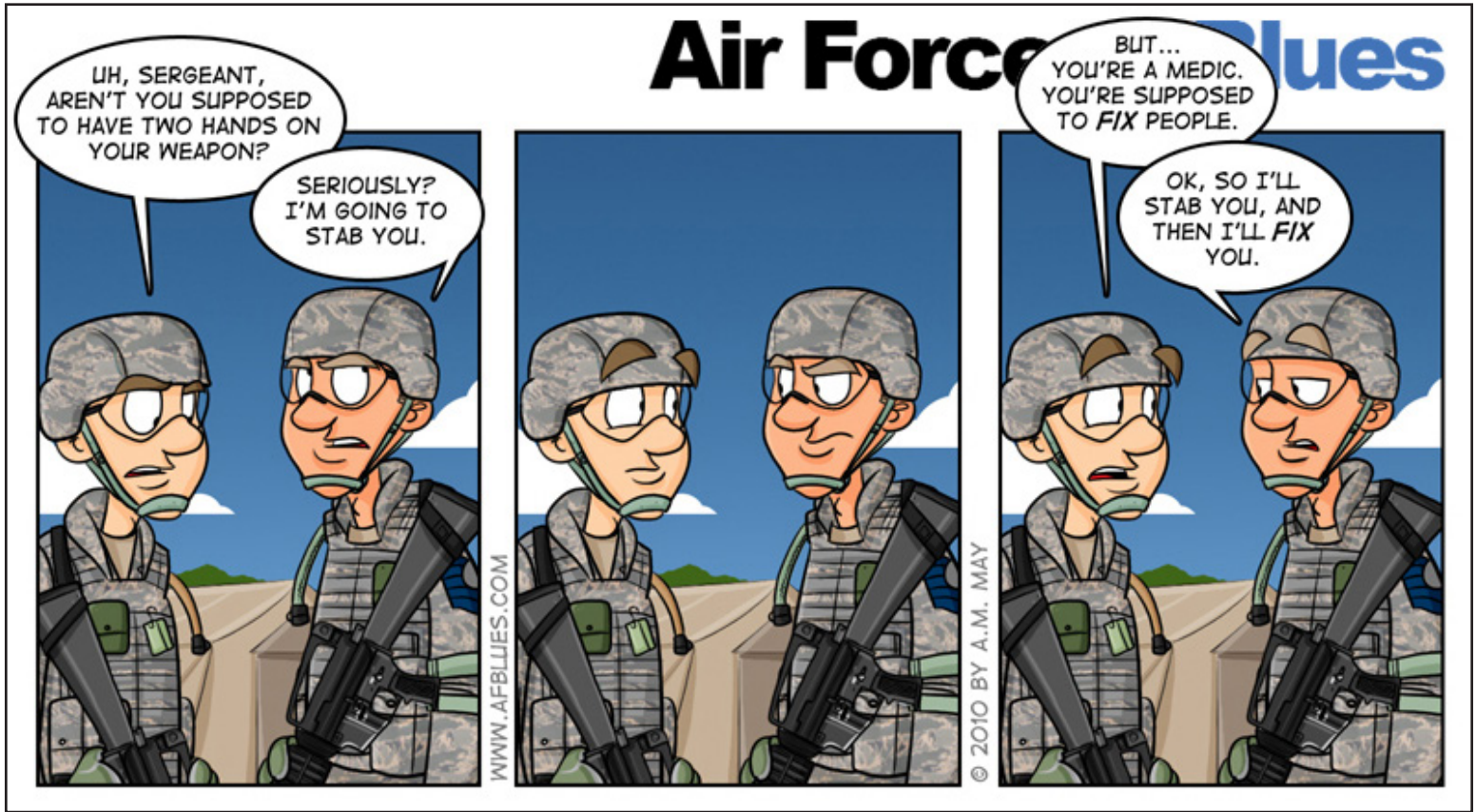
I don't say these things to brag or boast about myself, but to show the importance of just being present. People may never remember what you do for them in times of grief and sadness, but they may remember that you were there for them.

People often ask, "How can you do it? Why do you continue to serve?" I believe the real question is, "How could I not continue to serve?" My experiences have created such a fierce loyalty to my brother-and sister-in-arms, that doing anything other than serving my country would be a disservice.

I continue to serve because I never want to stop "being there" for the brothers and sisters I serve with every day. I want to provide them with the best possible spiritual care, even if that's just "being there."

I made a list of things I wanted to stop doing. Today, I cross one those things off my list. Today, I stop telling my generic Air Force story.

Today, I share what it truly means to be a chaplain's assistant, the light in the midst of darkness. Today, I share why I will continue to serve ... because I never want to stop being a reminder of hope in the midst of their hell.





**THROUGH FEB 28**  
**Elmendorf pool closure**  
The Elmendorf fitness center pool is closed for maintenance throughout the month and will re-open March 1.  
During this period, the Buckner fitness center pool will remain open.  
For information, call 384-1302.

**FRIDAY**  
**Black History Month**  
Celebrate Black History Month with featured guest speaker Vietnam veteran, retired Senior Master Sgt. Raymond Harris from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. in the Talkeetna Theater.  
All JBER personnel are encouraged to attend.

**Racquetball tourney**  
Today is the sign-up deadline for both men's and women's teams at the Buckner fitness center.  
There will be an organizational meeting March 2 at 1 p.m. The competition runs March 2 through May 1.  
For further information, call 384-1312.

**Winter BBQ Bash**  
Come join us on the patio outside the 907 Sports Bar and Grill from 6 to 8 p.m. Discounts on specialty refreshments, music and indoor games.  
For information, call 384-7619.

**Youth ice fishing**  
Hosted by the Kennecott Youth Center from 12:30 to 4:30 p.m. Bring your friends, dress warmly and enjoy this unique experience.  
For information, call 552-2266.

**Design a phone cover**  
Make your very own phone cover during Sew-So-Sew at Two Rivers Youth Center from 4 to 6 p.m.  
For information, call 384-1508.

**Parents Night Out**  
Parents, need a date night? Let the professional staff at the Juneau Child Development Center care for your children from 6 to 10 p.m.  
For more information, call Central registration at 384-7483.

**SATURDAY**  
**Blood drive**  
The Blood Bank of Alaska will be accepting donations at the JBER Exchange from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. in their LIFEmobile.  
For questions about donating, call 222-5630.

**Iron Dog race start**  
The world's longest snowmachine race starts for the first time in Anchorage and runs through Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. Festivities kick off at 9:30 a.m. on Fourth Ave. with a parade, kids' events and much more.  
Two viewing areas will be available on JBER: 37th Street and Talley Avenue, and Otter Lake.  
For information, visit [iron-dograce.org](http://iron-dograce.org).

**THROUGH SUNDAY**  
**Dog Sledding**  
Ever wanted to try your hand at mushing? Come out to Hillberg Ski Area between noon and 5 p.m. for sled dog rides, a uniquely arctic experience.  
For information, call 753-7467.

**MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY**  
**TAP seminar**  
The Transition Assistance Program Goals, Plans and Success seminar takes place Mon. through Fri. from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Air Force Transition Center.  
Call 552-6619 to register.

**Engineer's Week**  
Youths with an aptitude for engineering can engage in Lego, K'nex and 3D printing projects at the Kennecott Youth Center from 4 to 6 p.m.  
For information, call 552-2266.

**TUESDAY**  
**One page at a Time**  
This reading program for youth ages 5 to 13 which is featured on [MyAirForceLife.com/youth](http://MyAirForceLife.com/youth) and hosted by the Kennecott Youth Center is quickly coming to an end.  
Keep reading, the more you read, the more prizes you earn.  
For information, call 552-2266.

**Car buying seminar**  
Looking to buy a car, but don't know where to start? Learn how to make a smart investment through this seminar hosted by Army Community Service from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. in Bldg. 600.  
For information, call 384-1517.

**Home buying process**  
Ready to purchase a home and want to do it right? This Army Community Service seminar from

noon to 1:00 p.m. in Bldg. 600 will arm you with sound knowledge to ensure a successful transaction.  
For information, call 384-1517.

**WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY**  
**Financial Readiness**  
Let the professionals at the Military and Family Readiness Center in the Log Cabin help keep you financially fit through a series of courses: Financial readiness/TSP, 9:00 to 11:00 a.m.; credit report and score, noon to 2 p.m.; and identity theft, 2:30 to 4:30 p.m.  
For information, call 552-4943.

**THURSDAY**  
**Texas Hold'em tournament**  
The 907 Sports Bar and Grill hosts this tourney with sign ups at 5 p.m., dealing begins at 6 p.m.  
Free for club members; top three every week win FSS gift cards and the top weekly winner secures a spot at the final table at the close of this nine-week tournament.  
For information, call 384-7619.

**FEB. 27**  
**CDC tee-shirt logo contest**  
Show your creative side; help design a new logo for JBER's Child Development Centers.  
See the staff at your child's center for details.

**Free Movie Night**  
Come see Big Hero 6 at the Talkeetna Theater. Doors open at 6 p.m. for a 6:30 p.m. movie start. Enjoy cheap, cash-only concessions; popcorn, candy, drinks, nachos and more.  
Events, dates and times vary; visit [furrondy.net](http://furrondy.net) for information.

**FEB. 27 THROUGH MARCH 8**  
**Fur Rendezvous**  
Anchorage's largest winter festival is back for its 80th year with all the zany events and activities. Run with the reindeer, race outhouses, shop for furs or watch the sled dog teams race downtown – or bundle up for carnival rides.  
Events, dates and times vary; visit [furrondy.net](http://furrondy.net) for information.

**FEB. 28**  
**Parents Night Out**  
Parents, need a date night? Let the professional staff at the Juneau Child Development Center care for your children from 6 to 10 p.m.  
For more information, call

central registration at 384-7483.  
**ONGOING**  
**Scholarship opportunities**  
Applications are being accepted for the Richardson Spouses' Club 2014-2015 scholarship. Applicants must be military dependents, either graduating high school seniors or currently enrolled college students pursuing full-time undergraduate studies.  
Visit [richardsonspousesclub.com/scholarship](http://richardsonspousesclub.com/scholarship) to download full eligibility requirements along with the application.  
Applications must be postmarked by Feb. 28.

**JSC scholarships**  
The JBER Spouse's Club will award merit scholarships to graduating high school seniors to assist them in their first year of education at an accredited college or university.  
Scholarships are open to family members of all active duty or retired military members in the Anchorage Bowl. The application packet and further details are available on our website at [www.jberspousesclub.com](http://www.jberspousesclub.com) under the community tab.  
The deadline for the receipt of the application is Feb. 25.  
For information, email [info@jberspousesclub.com](mailto:info@jberspousesclub.com).

**AER scholarships**  
Army Emergency Relief is taking applications for scholarships. Scholarships are available for children, spouses and other dependents of active, retired and deceased Soldiers.  
Applications and instructions are available at [aerhq.org](http://aerhq.org). Submission deadline is May 1.  
For information, call 384-7478.

**Eat and Play Weekdays**  
What goes great with lunch? A free game of bowling. Present your receipt at the front counter totaling more than \$5 from Ten Pins or Topios (located inside the Polar Bowl) between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m., Mon., Thurs., or Fri. and receive one free game.  
For information, call 753-7467.

**Civil Air Patrol meetings**  
The JBER squadron of the Alaska Civil Air Patrol meets the first and third Tuesdays of the month at 6 p.m. in the JBER Aero Club Hangar.  
For information and access, 250-9548.

## Chapel services

### Catholic Mass

**Sunday**  
**8:30 a.m.** – Arctic Warrior Chapel  
**11:30 a.m.** – Midnight Sun Chapel  
**Monday and Wednesday**  
**11:40 a.m.** – Arctic Warrior Chapel  
**Tuesday and Friday**  
**11:30 a.m.** – Midnight Sun Chapel  
**Thursday**  
**12:00 p.m.** – Hospital Chapel

### Confession

Confessions are available anytime by appointment. Call 552-5762.

### Protestant Sunday Services

**Liturgical Service**  
**9 a.m.** – Heritage Chapel  
**Gospel Service**  
**9:30 a.m.** – Midnight Sun Chapel  
**Community Service**  
**10:30 a.m.** – Heritage Chapel  
**Collective Service**  
**11 a.m.** – Arctic Warrior Chapel  
**Chapel Next**  
**5 p.m.** – Chaplain Family Life Center

### Jewish Services

**Erev Shabbat Service (First Friday of each month)**  
**5 p.m.** – Heritage Chapel  
Call 384-0456 or 552-5762

### Religious Education

For religious education schedules, please call the Religious Operations Center at 552-5762 or 384-1461.

### Model railroading

The Military Society of Model Railroad Engineers meets at 7 p.m. Tues. and 1 p.m. Sat. in the basement of Matanuska Hall, Room 35.

Anyone interested in model railroading is invited.  
For information, call 552-4353, visit [trainweb.org/msmrr](http://trainweb.org/msmrr) or email [bjorgan@alaska.net](mailto:bjorgan@alaska.net).

## 673d FORCE SUPPORT SQUADRON

## MWR events & activities



**MARKETING TIDBITS**  
FSS = MWR  
**Don't Forget the I.C.E.**

I.C.E. is a web-based tool that makes it easy for customers submit feedback about services throughout JBER and also access information about them. Short for "Interactive Customer Evaluation," I.C.E. was designed to improve customer service through communication. I.C.E. allows managers to monitor customer satisfaction and respond directly to concerns, questions, ideas and compliments.

I.C.E. is easy to access on-line through JBER's Homepage ([www.jber.us.af.mil](http://www.jber.us.af.mil)). Users may submit comments anonymously or provide their contact information. Program managers have 72 business hours to reply if the customer requests a response. The I.C.E. process is elevated to the next level if the comment cannot be addressed at the manager's level.

The 673d Force Support Squadron Staff appreciates all our I.C.E. comments and users. Comments provide valuable insight on how the FSS facilities and programs are meeting customers' needs. All I.C.E. comments are valuable, lead to better customer service and help identify best practices across the squadron.

The Squadron Marketing and Publicity Office selects one comment a month that highlights a FSS facility, program or staff member that the I.C.E. users believes should receive recognition for a job well done. Once the comment has been chosen, the Marketing Staff contacts the individual and awards them with a \$20 FSS gift card. Winners are announced each month in the FSS Alaskan Adventurer.

Consider submitting an I.C.E. comment next time you receive outstanding customer service and your comment might be selected as our next \$20 gift card winner. Remember too, I.C.E. provides an avenue to keep communication open at all levels across JBER.

**907 SPORTS BAR & GRILL**  
**WINTER BBQ BASH**  
**FEBRUARY 20 | 6-8 P.M.**  
Come Join us at the patio outside the 907 for our Winter BBQ Bash! Music will be provided by a DJ, discounted specialty drinks will be offered, & indoor games!  
**Food for Purchase:**  
• Hot Dogs - \$7.50 • Hamburgers - \$9  
comes with baked beans & corn-on-cob with your choice of macaroni salad or fresh fruit.  
Call for more information 384.7619

**MILITARY AMERICA Saves**  
**START SMALL. THINK BIG.**  
Military Saves Week promotes good savings behavior and a chance for servicemembers and their families to assess their own saving status.  
**February 24**  
Held at Bldg. 600/ACS • 384.1517  
**CLASSES**  
• Car Buying Seminar: 9:30 - 10:30 a.m.  
• Home Buying Process (the Do's & Don'ts): 12 - 1 p.m.  
**February 25 & 26**  
Held at 8535 Wewak Drive/Log Cabin • 552.4943  
**CLASSES**  
• Financial Readiness/TSP: 9 - 11 a.m.  
• Credit Report & Credit Score: 12 - 2 p.m.  
• Identity Theft: 2:30 - 4:30 p.m.  
**Hey Kids!**  
Want to learn to save money?  
Sign up for the next "Money Matters" class by calling the Teen Centers: 384.1508/552.2266

## OUTDOOR ADVENTURE PROGRAM

Bldg. 7301, 552.2023/3812

**SNOWMACHINE GUIDED TOURS**  
**PETERSVILLE:**  
**February 21, 7 a.m. - 5 p.m. \$185**

**WILLOW:**  
**March 28, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. \$150**  
Bring cold weather gear and lunch. Helmet and transportation included.



<http://www.elmendorf-richardson.com>



Stop by and see us!

[www.facebook.com/JBER673FSS](http://www.facebook.com/JBER673FSS)



**Hillberg Lake**  
**Feb. 21 & 22**  
**Noon - 5 p.m.**  
\$10 for Adults  
\$5 for 13 years & under  
Get tickets inside Hillberg Lodge  
**Hillberg Ski Area Bldg. 23400 | 552-4838**



# Evolution of perspective: Airman finds balance after diagnosis

By Tech. Sgt. Vanessa Kilmer  
92nd Air Refueling Wing  
Public Affairs

FAIRCHILD AIR FORCE BASE, Washington — Senior Master Sgt. Daphne Soto never meets a stranger, because each encounter opens a door to a potential new friend, or to someone who just needs to talk, and she'll keep the door open for both.

This 24-year Air Force veteran will weave a serpentine path through cubicles and offices just to say hello to every Airman, regardless of rank. Her conversations are sprinkled with laughter and seasoned with Southern flavor, revealing her roots with the occasional use of “child.”

For Soto, the 92nd Air Refueling Wing Equal Opportunity director, it's not just part of her job. A self-proclaimed “sweet girl from South Carolina,” Soto has always held tight to one goal from the moment she enlisted: to always give her personal best.

Soto said she knew her lofty goals would require attention, and possibly sacrifices, but she didn't recognize the magnitude of the impending imbalance. Her aspirations formed blinders that cloaked lost time with her family, and shrouded symptoms as her body began to rebel against her.

Early in her career, as a telephone switch operator (“Operator 22”) and then in combat crew communications, her ambition was the ever-present shove toward more responsibility.

“I wanted to be the chief master sergeant of the Air Force,” she said. “I think everyone's had that little moment.”

Soto's appetite for responsibility left her family hungry for her presence back home. As a mother of three and wife of an active-duty crew chief, she described 12-hour days that didn't end when she returned home. She said she would bring work with her, and take phone calls on her home phone, even late in the evening. This was when cellphones were new, she noted.

“I've always tried to be a good mom, and a good wife and a great Airman,” she said. “But I soared at a cost ... because I sacrificed all of that precious family time. I was on every temporary duty assignment; I never turned down an opportunity.

“There was a time that my husband and I weren't even seeing each other. I would kiss my kids goodnight, read a quick bedtime story and then get right back on the phone.” She was on that cycle for almost 18 years, which she admitted took a toll on her as well.

“When you're used to being that go-to person and having to live up to that expectation, and not being able to say no — it takes a lot,” she said. “And then you find yourself saying, ‘You've got to say no.’”

Soto said she justified this brutal sched-

ule because she saw it as purpose, a part of her legacy.

“I thought I was being a role model to my children, and making my husband proud being that breadwinner,” she said. “So you lie to yourself. You lie to yourself to say, it's all worth it in the end. You convince yourself that it's going to justify it all once you hit that goal.”

For almost 20 years, Soto charged through, made rank, and earned more awards and accolades, with the support of her husband, Air Force Master Sgt. Damon Soto, pushing her forward.

Every extra hour she put in meant an extra hour away from Damon, but he accepted the sacrifice, “...because I love her, and that's what she wanted,” he said. “And she's way smarter than I am.” He acknowledged it was difficult to balance school, work and children, but their partnership kept them going.

“When her schedule was hard, I picked up as much slack as I could and vice versa,” he said. “My thought was if we didn't, everything would fail.”

It was 2010 when life for Soto changed. In two months, she had inexplicably lost weight — down from a size 6 to a size 00.

For about two years, Soto had noticed changes in her body, nothing to raise alarm, but the weight loss began to bring everything in focus. She asked for a referral to a doctor who would be able to diagnose her symptoms.

After Soto's doctor heard about her weight loss, he waived his three-month wait list and agreed to see her within the week.

It was just 30 minutes between the beginning of the examination and the diagnosis she had begun to expect — cancer.

Soto described driving home from the appointment and pulling over because she was overwhelmed by the weight of the diagnosis and blinded by uncontrollable tears. She said she distinctly remembers the primal urge to talk to her mother.

“My mother said, ‘It's going to be okay, we're going to get through it.’ And you know, I didn't really have a choice, because I had three kids and a husband to worry about.”

For Soto, whose life and career had been going full-tilt for more than two decades, everything suddenly stopped, and her life aligned itself along a completely unexpected trajectory.

After her diagnosis, Soto said she had a crash course in cancer. Because of the aggressiveness of the disease, she had to make very quick decisions to determine the course of her treatment and elected to undergo two invasive surgeries.

Prior to her diagnosis, Soto was chosen as the primary organizer for her career field's upcoming utilization and training



**Senior Master Sgt. Daphne Soto is the 92nd Air Refueling Wing Equal Opportunity director and is a 24-year Air Force veteran who spent 18 years of her career on the fast track until a diagnosis forced her to find balance between work, family and herself. Today, Soto dedicates her time to helping Airmen find balance and prepare them for life beyond the Air Force. (U.S. Air Force photo/Air Force Staff Sgt. Alexandre Montes)**

workshop — where attendees develop all of the equal-opportunity career field's training requirements.

After her second surgery, she was confined to her home for six weeks, facing a six-month convalescent period and completely dependent on the man whom she called her rock — Damon. During that time, she said she came to a powerful realization: The workshop was hosted on schedule and her career field's training curriculum was developed — without her.

The mission went on.

“I think that's when it all started coming together,” she said. “I said I have to shift my priorities, and it's okay to take care of me.”

Upon returning to work, Soto said she had a new perspective. She said she found a new rhythm, and started feeling more effective at a slower pace.

The slower pace gave her time to think things through, be clearer with expectations, and the confidence to say, “no,” instead of trying to complete the task no matter the cost.

“It's okay to say, ‘no.’ It's okay to say, ‘I can't do it all,’” she said. “‘I can't’ is not a bad part of your vocabulary, unless

you are completely giving up, and I wasn't doing that.”

Not only did her work improve because of her honest communication, she said that by taking care of herself she saw more value in taking care of others.

“I was so worried about my career; what was I doing for others?” she said. “And now I realize, I don't have to supervise a soul — it's the Air Force's Airmen, they are all my Airmen.”

These connections, Soto said, helped her embrace and understand the importance of, “Mission First, People Always.” I'm not here just to transition an individual to the next rank,” she said. “I'm here to transition them to things that are going to be ... throughout life.”

With only a few months left until retirement, Soto has Florida and her dream tea shop in her sights, but is still focused on her Airmen.

“I don't believe in ROAD (retired on active duty),” Soto said. “I will work until that last duty day, even if that is just walking around and saying hello to every Airman. I will do my personal best. That is my goal with leaving the Air Force and living life.”



# Remotely piloted aircraft authorized on JBER, within limits

By Airman 1st Class  
Tammie Ramsouer  
JBER Public Affairs

Light breezes flow as the sound of a motor makes for mechanical music. A Hobbico NexSTAR remote-controlled airplane flies past its controller – a rookie learning how to fly for the first time.

Though the hobbyist in question may be new to the RC world, members of the Alaska Radio Control Society have been flying RC aircraft (also known as remotely piloted aircraft) for more than 45 years.

The society uses basic models like the NexSTAR to train and educate new members in the basics of flying RPAs.

ARCS is the largest and oldest radio control model club in Alaska and was established in 1957.

Armand Marshall, ARCS treasurer, said the organization has about 60 members.

The society’s membership includes civilians, retirees and all branches of the military.

“Some of our members have one-fourth,

30-percent and 40-percent scale compared to real aircraft,” said Edward Cunningham, ARCS member and RPA flier. “We fly anything from combustion engines and battery-powered engines to silent flight, where there is no engine at all.”

Society members are required to adhere to certain restrictions when they fly their RPAs. The aircraft can weigh 55 pounds or less in compliance with the Federal Aviation Administration’s Code of Federal Regulations 14, Part 19.

Every member is required to have insurance when they own and fly an RPA of any kind.

“The Academy of Modeling Aeronautics insures us and they also set the guidelines for when we fly,” Armand said.

“The insurance covers any accidents that happen when we fly, such as an RPA damaging personal property, or a personal injury.”

The AMA also offers its chartered clubs official contest sanction as well as assistance in acquiring and keeping flying sites.

When the members fly at approved

outdoor sites, such as Groeschel flying site in Wasilla, and Storck Park flying field in Anchorage, they must adhere to FAA regulations.

“We can operate our RPAs up to a 400-foot ceiling height and line-of-sight distance,” Armand said. “Line-of-sight distance would be about 600 to 750 feet. We go by these regulations, because they adhere to FAA regulations of RPAs.”

During the winter and school year, the members fly their planes indoors at Teeland Middle School gymnasium in Wasilla and Lumen Christi High School gymnasium in Anchorage. Members flying RPAs indoors must have AMA insurance, and their RPA can only be electric powered and weigh 16 ounces or less.

Regulations on JBER’s Elmendorf Field, off Richardson Drive, are more strict than off the installation.

“If our members fly at Elmendorf field, they are required to inform base operations they will be flying their RPA,” Armand said.

All fliers must adhere to the current

JBER 3rd Wing Instruction 13-204, Airfield Air Traffic Control Procedures. The instruction specifies fliers can only operate during daylight hours, RPAs must remain below a 300-foot ceiling, and the aircraft must not interfere with normal operating aircraft on base.

According to the Airfield Safety office, recreational or hobbyist RPA flyers don’t require FAA approval, but individuals should follow safety guidelines to ensure the safety of people, property and other aircraft.

According to J.R. Hackett, 673d Security Forces Squadron antiterrorism program manager, if someone observes an RPA operating on JBER in a location other than the RC flying field, they should consider it a suspicious activity and report it to the JBER Arctic Watch or Eagle Eyes hotlines at 552-4444 or 552-2256.

For more information about the ARCS organization or about RPA operations, contact society members at 245-3550, or visit their website at [www.alaskarc.org](http://www.alaskarc.org).



Ed Cunningham, Alaska Radio Control Society member and RPA pilot, prepares his battery-powered aircraft to fly at the Lumen Christi High School gymnasium Feb. 15. It takes about 15 to 20 minutes for the RPA battery to fully charge before flying. Cunningham is a webmaster with the 673d Air Base Wing Public Affairs Office.



A two-inch micro quadcopter weighing just under one-half ounce flies at the Lumen Christi High School gymnasium Feb. 15. Remotely piloted aircraft come in many different sizes and shapes ranging from tiny helicopters to 1:4-scale aerobatic airplanes. (U.S. Air Force photos/Airman 1st Class Tammie Ramsouer)



# Army captain captures photos out of this world

By Marie Berberea  
Army News Service

FORT SILL, Okla. — Army Capt. Joe Spracklen, an Air Defense Artillery Captains’ Career Course student, sits in the dark, waiting.

He has spent countless hours researching and preparing. He sets up his many pieces of equipment as he tracks the movement of his long-range target.

The stars.  
Spracklen leaves the pollution of the city lights regularly to take aim at his hobby of astrophotography.

“My parents got me a telescope when I was really little, Spracklen said. Kind of been hooked ever since.”

Recruited to play hockey at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, Spracklen said college is when he began looking into the art form.

“I spent a ton of time just researching and just figuring out how to do everything and figuring out what I was going to buy, so I was really prepared once I finally graduated,” he said.

Five years later, Spracklen is still honing his skills.

“It’s one of the most frustrating things I’ve ever done, especially because I didn’t have anyone to teach me,” he said. “I took all this stuff out probably 15 or 20 times, drove an hour away, set all this stuff up and then just completely failed.”

Spracklen has since figured it out, and said a great spot for astrophotography near Fort Sill is at Lake Lawtonka’s campgrounds.

He sets up his equipment about an hour before sunset, and then waits until the North Star is visible before he focuses on a subject.

“You have to find everything yourself, so you learn a lot about where things are just by hunting through the constellations,” Spracklen said.

His telescope and camera are fixed to a

mount on top of a tripod. The mount is motorized and controlled by a program on his laptop that tracks the exact rate of the earth’s movement.

As an extra measure, Spracklen uses a second telescope, called a guide scope, that detects if the mount isn’t tracking perfectly so he can adjust accordingly.

“The process to take these pictures is extremely complicated; there are a hundred variables that need to be exactly right for me to get a good image.

“Being able to create a detailed and systematic process has helped me get consistent results and allowed me to quickly diagnose problems that arise during an imaging session,” he said.

Each click of the camera’s shutter is open for 10 minutes to gather as much light in the photo as possible. After 20 viable frames, he layers them in editing software on his computer.

Spracklen also takes several negative frames with the lens cap on that are later used to reduce noise in the composite photo.

“I have to do some pretty extensive work in Photoshop to bring out details ... probably six to eight hours per picture,” he said.

Although it seems a hobby like this can only be taken on by someone inherently patient, Spracklen said his time on the ice has helped him focus in this medium.

“I attribute a lot of my personality and character to playing hockey, and I think that the dedication it took to reach a high level of competition in the hockey world has served me well in all areas of my life, including my hobbies,” he said.

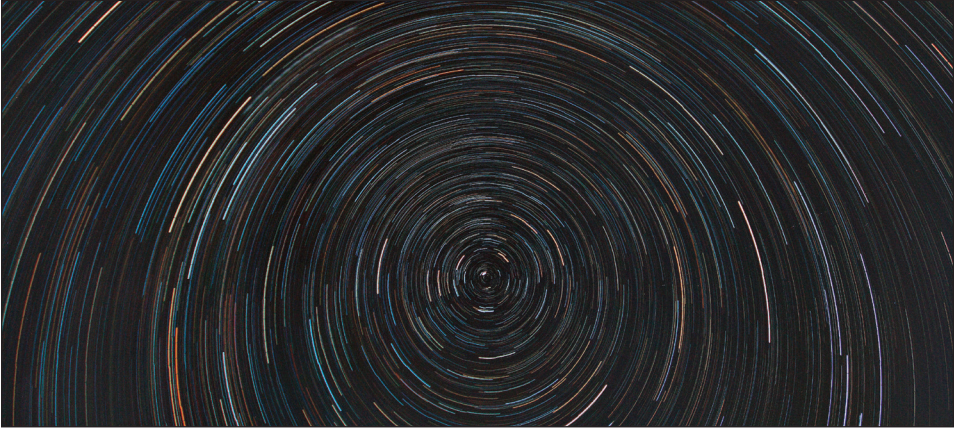
Spracklen said he is often teased about astrophotography until he shares the results of his labors. He said he loves to capture images that most think are only possible using the Hubble Space Telescope.

“What’s anyone get out of any hobby?” Spracklen asked. “It just fascinates me. It’s always fascinated me.”



**ABOVE:** Army Capt. Joe Spracklen, an Air Defense Artillery Captains’ Career Course student at Fort Sill, Okla., uses a telescope, camera, guide scope, mount, tripod and a laptop for astrophotography. He also created a shield to diminish any disturbance in the photos from wind gusts. (U.S. Army photo/Marie Berberea)

**BELOW:** The Rosette Nebula, also known as Caldwell 49 or NGC 2237, is about 5,200 light-years away from Earth. This flower-shaped nebula is a huge star-forming cloud of dust and gas in the Milky Way galaxy. (Courtesy photo/Army Capt. Joe Spracklen)



Using diurnal motion, “star trails” can be captured with a camera. The effect is created when the camera’s shutter is open for long periods of time while the camera is stationary allowing it to capture the movement of the Earth’s rotation in relation to the stars. (Courtesy photo/Army Capt. Joe Spracklen)