

THE **STINGER**

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ABOUT THE STINGER

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Commander's Comments



“Communicate. Listen. Empower.”

24 years of service, seven F-16 duty assignments, six states, two countries, three combat tours and 44 combat sorties totaling more than 3,300 flying hours have all played a significant role in leading Col. Michael DiDio to his most current position, Commander of the Ohio National Guard's 180th Fighter Wing.

Though these are just a few of the accomplishments that have helped to prepare him to lead Ohio's one and only F-16 fighter unit, it all started with a dream of flying.

“I've always been interested in flying, even from a young age,” said DiDio. “My pilot friends will probably make fun of me for this, but the movie, Top Gun, opened my eyes to fighter jets. From there, I was set on joining the Air Force and flying fighters.”

After commissioning into the U.S. Air Force in 1995, graduating Cum Laude, with a degree in Electrical Engineering through the Kansas State University's ROTC program, DiDio headed right into undergraduate pilot training at Vance Air Force Base, Oklahoma, followed by F-16 fighter jet training at Luke Air Force Base in Arizona.

His first operational duty assignment was at Kunsan Air Base, Korea in 1998, where he served as an Electronic Combat Pilot and Assistant Chief of Weapons and Tactics. While the assignment at Kunsan was only to be one year, DiDio extended the assignment by four months, taking an early opportunity for upgrade training to become flight lead qualified.

DiDio then headed off to Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina

for his next duty assignment, as an instructor pilot. While stationed at Shaw, he was selected to attend the U.S. Air Force's premier weapons school.

“If you don't know what weapons school is,” said DiDio. “It's a six month course, where the top instructor pilots go to get even better. Very intense, awesome flying out at the Nellis ranges.”

The U.S. Air Force Weapons School, located at Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas, Nevada, is an intense graduate-level course focused on providing advanced weapons and tactics employment with extensive academics and rigorous training flights to the best instructor pilots in the Air Force.

Following the completion of weapons school in 2003, DiDio was assigned to Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho, where he served as an instructor pilot for two years before being invited back to Nellis as a Weapons School Instructor.

That was his last active duty assignment.

“We were at the point where it was time to make a family decision as to whether we stayed active duty,” DiDio said. “Active duty would have consisted of a lot more moves and a more rigorous schedule for my family, so we looked into the Air National Guard.”

“I applied for a job with the Iowa Air National Guard, in 2008, and was selected, so we transferred to the 132nd Fighter Wing in Des Moines,” DiDio continued. “Then, following sequestration and

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Ohio National Guard Visits the Last Frontier

Story & Photos by Senior Airman Kregg York





Every year, Airmen in the Air National Guard leave their home base and families, usually for multiple weeks at a time, to get some extra training, or training not easily available back home. This ensures that they are ready to deploy anywhere in the world.

More than 40 members from the Ohio National Guard's 180th Fighter Wing and 179th Airlift Wing traveled to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson for annual training in late August, 2019.

Each section of the 180FW has their own role within the mission, and their own training to develop.

MEDICAL

The Medical Group has an important job within the Air Force. The role of the clinic at the 180FW and 179AW is to ensure Airmen are

medically deployable by keeping immunization records up to date, conducting physicals and assessing overall health.

With a majority of the Airmen only being on base one weekend per month, having a large hospital on base with a full staff isn't practical, so Air National Guard Wings will usually have a small clinic. However, if any medical staff get deployed to an active duty base, or overseas, they will need all of the skill-sets that a full-scale hospital requires. The 673rd Medical Group Hospital on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, or JBER, is a fully functional hospital and provides Airmen with an environment to enhance their skills.

"Everyone who doesn't do nursing full time, we don't really get the experience with IVs and any emergency room experience," said Senior Airman Skylar Quintero,

an aerospace medical technician assigned to the 180FW. "Not all of us are working in the lab full time, so being able to work on my technique here, I'll be able to do that back home at the 180th."

Members of the 180FW and 179AW weren't the only ones benefiting from this training. Due to 673rd Medical staff transferring to other bases, illnesses and taking leave, the Ohio Guard members were able to fill some of those vacant roles.

"Us being here, whether it's doing vitals, or taking patients to CT, or doing IVs, it's really helpful and we've had more than a decent amount of people thanking us for helping out. So, that's nice to hear," Skylar said.

Along with hands-on training, Airmen also received Tactical Combat Casualty Care training. This training is specifically designed for combat zone

environments and can help save lives in deployed locations.

VEHICLE MAINTENANCE

Vehicle Maintainers do exactly what their name implies.

"Anything that refuels the jets or fire trucks, snow removal equipment and construction equipment, we keep all of that equipment safe and serviceable and ready to use," said Staff Sgt. Jason Warren, a vehicle maintenance mechanic assigned to the 180FW.

JBER has the largest snow removal fleet in the Air Force. While some of the equipment is similar at the 180FW, our Airmen have more opportunities to work on the equipment for longer than one weekend at a time.

JBER supports some missions that the 180FW does not. As a result, JBER has pieces of equipment 180FW

maintainers aren't as familiar with.

"I have very little experience on the 60k and 25k cargo loaders," Warren said, "So I was very interested in getting my hands in some of their work on the loaders, because we don't have them at our base. Since we're a fighter wing, we have no need to move that much cargo around," Warren said.

Training on diverse equipment ensure that Airmen are ready to deploy and support the mission anywhere in the world.

"You never know when we'll be called up," Warren said. "If we need to go somewhere and support a mission somewhere, we need to be able to fix this equipment. It makes us more ready and able to support the mission," Warren said

SERVICES

"Services is based on five different

parts," said Staff Sgt. David Bousonville, a Services Airman assigned to the 180FW. "It's food, fitness, mortuary, morale and readiness."

Services provides meals for Airmen, maintain fitness centers, administer fitness tests, handle mortuary affairs of fallen service members and help improve overall Airman morale and readiness.

While at JBER, 180FW Services Airmen were able to work in a dining facility that uses newer food system allowing them to order different foods, serve dependents of service members, and provide a more "campus" feel.

They also had the opportunity to work at the fitness center on base, and learn a new way of tracking fitness test data using spreadsheets. Using this spreadsheet system, commanders will have a more accurate view of service members overall fitness.

“It makes it a lot easier than sifting through the physical paperwork,” said Staff Sgt. Justin Spencer, a services Airman assigned to the 180FW.

By providing commanders with a better view of an Airman’s physical fitness, they help commanders ensure that their Airmen are fit to fight.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Public Affairs has the responsibility of communicating with service members and the public. It’s their job to show the local, national and global communities what the Air Force is doing in the world and the role our Airmen play in the Total Force. This includes taking photos, writing articles, making videos, press conferences and press releases. Public

Affairs serves as a liaison between the Air Force and the American public.

“Coming to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson with so many different career fields was extremely beneficial,” said Capt. Matthew Eck, a public affairs officer assigned to the 180FW. “We were granted great access to see what it takes for 180th Fighter Wing and 179th Airlift Wing personnel to accomplish their missions. We learned a lot about our hard-working Airmen, which enabled us to turn that access into products for others to also learn about their roles to support the mission.”

During their training, Public Affairs produced multiple videos, photos, articles and social media posts, effectively communicating the training

to the American public.

COMMAND POST

The Command Post has a vital function at any Air Force Base.

“We’re the eyes and ears of the base,” said Tech Sgt. Brian Best, a command and control operator assigned to the 180FW.

“We’re launching the F-16s, sending emergency notifications, as well as being a liaison for the command staff and helping notify them for important events,” added Zac Westrick, a command and control operator assigned to the 180FW.

“We were able to be a part of two practice jet scrambles, and participate in an active shooter exercise, so we helped send out messages and answer

phones,” Best said.

“They have nine different missions they are responsible for, all at the same time,” Westrick said. “We don’t have that. So, I think that was the biggest struggle for us so far is just realizing that they have a much larger footprint to cover than we do at home and trying to balance it a little bit easier.”

During their training, the Command Post also participated in multiple simultaneous exercises.

“It was zero to one-hundred in two seconds flat,” said Westrick. “Literally, people were running back and forth, trying to prioritize. It was probably the biggest exercise I’ve been a part of at the ground-level. We were really impressed with the controllers here and how well they worked as a team.”

The Command Post Airmen learned a lot from their active counterparts, including new practices to streamline their workflow.

“It’s been great, and I’m really excited to get back and start helping implement those changes,” Best said.

“We love having the 179th and 180th,” said Capt. Jenny Ward, the medical administrative officer assigned to the 176th medical group at JBER. “They have a good leadership team and did a lot of pre-planning, which ensures that their trip is going to go smoothly.”

The Airmen from the 180FW and 179AW have learned new skills and practices that they can implement back at their home units. While their training has come and gone,

more Airmen will continue to go on trainings like this. Every one of these trainings is an opportunity for Airmen to grow and make the Ohio National Guard and the Air Force, as a whole, even better. 🇺🇸



NEVER STOP TALKING

Airman Reflects on Struggle with Depression and Suicide

Story by Senior Master Sgt.

Beth Holliker

“I struggle with depression.”

Master Sgt. Crystal Carper, a first sergeant assigned to the Ohio National Guard's 180th Fighter Wing, shares her story of battling depression and suicide.

Depression is a disease that can cause one to feel isolated, hopeless and helpless and alone. But, Carper is not alone.

Affecting more than 320 million people worldwide, depression is the leading cause of disability between the ages of 15 to 44, according to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America.

“I have struggled with depression since high school,” said Carper. “I never thought I was pretty enough, or smart enough, or interesting enough.”

Throughout high school, Carper felt a void that she couldn't quite identify and didn't know how to fix, but that seemed to change as she became old enough and started dating.

“When I started dating, the attention I was getting from those relationships made me feel better,” explained Carper. “It filled that void in me that I couldn't quite fix myself and I became dependent on that.”

While the attention filled the void, it was temporary. Each time a relationship would end, Carper would blame herself, sure that she had done something wrong, the rejection hurting more and the void growing larger each time.

Carper was hopeful things would change in the fall of 1994 when she made the decision to enlist, joining the 180th Fighter Wing.

“I was in a relationship that was going very well, right before I left for basic military training, but it didn't work out the way I had hoped,” said Carper. “And I thought that going away to basic training was a good thing at that time. I thought it was the diversion I needed to not punish myself, to not torment myself trying to figure out what it was I had done wrong. I was completely taken away from the situation.”

Not too long after basic training and military technical school, Carper began working at the 180FW and found herself in a new relationship, one that became serious with talks of marriage.

“I remember thinking, this is the one!”

Carper said.

But after several months the relationship ended, leaving Carper wondering, once again, what she had done wrong and she became consumed with trying to fix the relationship.

“This was the one, and I lost it,” Carper said. “I don't know what I did, but I'm going to fix it. How can I fix it? I must have broken it, I always do. How can I fix it?”

She couldn't fix it, and this time, the hurt didn't go away.

“I had two friends in the office who knew what was going on. I confided in them and they were compassionate,” said Carper. “But after a couple of weeks, I stopped confiding in them. They didn't understand. No one understood.”

“I was in so much pain,” she said. “I didn't know how to stop that pain.”

Carper explained that as the weeks went by she just couldn't bring herself to get up and go to work each day.

“I started calling in regularly, saying that I was sick,” Carper said. “I isolated myself. I would stay in my room all day. I was home





180FW Changes Command

*Story and photos by
Senior Master Sgt. Beth Holliker*



Barasch to Lead Ops Group

*Story by
Senior Master Sgt. Beth Holliker
Photo by
Senior Airman Kregg York*

Col. Michael DiDio left his position as Operations Group Commander as he officially assumed command of the 180th Fighter Wing during a change of command ceremony Nov. 16, 2019. His first official duty as wing commander was to assign a new commander for the Operations Group. During a change of command ceremony Nov. 17, 2019, Barasch officially assumed command of the group. Lt. Col. Greg Barasch has served, most recently, as commander of the 180FW's 112th Fighter Squadron since January 2017. Replacing Barasch as squadron commander is Lt. Col. Brian Moran, who served as the 112FS's Director of Operations for the past year. 🇺🇸

The 180th Fighter Wing celebrated a change of command Nov. 16, 2019. During the ceremony, The Assistant Adjutant General for Air, Ohio National Guard, Brig. Gen. James Camp relinquished command of the wing from Col. Kevin Doyle to Col. Michael DiDio.

Doyle served as commander of the 180FW from July 2016 to Nov. 2019. During his assignment with the wing, Doyle provided leadership and guidance to four groups and 12 squadrons, made up of more than 1,000 military personnel and 300 civilian employees. He successfully executed a \$100 million budget while managing more than \$1 billion in military assets while also facilitating the deployment of more than 1,000 Airmen to 117 countries around

the world. He was instrumental in securing more than \$24 million in construction funds, bringing a specialized aircraft simulator facility, new aircrew lodging and aircraft hangars dedicated to the wing's Aerospace Control Alert mission, a first of its kind modular, indoor small arms firing range and a personnel deployment facility. Each of the military construction projects greatly enhances the wing's mission success.

Doyle departs the 180FW and Ohio National Guard, returning to the Indiana National Guard where he will be assigned as the Chief of Staff with the Indiana National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters.

DiDio assumed command of the 180FW following his assignment as Operations Group Commander at the wing. His career spans 24

years and includes service in both the active duty and the Air National Guard. DiDio is a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Weapons School, where he also went on to become an instructor of air-to-air tactics and serve as the assistant director of operations. His prior assignments include 112th Fighter Squadron Commander, followed by 180FW Operations Group Commander. Before his assignment with the 180FW, DiDio was assigned to the Des Moines, Iowa Air National Guard, Mountain Home Air Force Base in Idaho, Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina and Kunsan Air Base in the Republic of Korea. DiDio has logged more than 3,300 flying hours, combined, in the T-37, T-38 and F-16, including 44 combat missions, totaling more than 185 combat flight hours. 🇺🇸



Who let the Air Force In?

Airman First to Compete in Army Hand-to-Hand Combatives Tournament



Story by Senior Master Sgt.

Beth Holliker

For the first time in its 19-year history, the Ohio Army National Guard Combatives Tournament opened registration to allow Airmen to compete in the hand-to-hand combat skills competition.

This year's double-elimination tournament, featuring six weight classes, took place at the Maj. Gen. Robert S. Beightler Armory in Columbus, Ohio, Sept. 14, 2019.

With more than 65 competitors in this year's tournament, Staff Sgt. Christopher Kervick, a cybersecurity specialist assigned to the Ohio National Guard's 180th Fighter Wing, was the first and only Airman to compete.

"The ruleset for the tournament closely aligned with training I have been doing in my civilian life," said Kervick. "It was also the first year the Air Force had been invited, so I wanted to step up to the challenge and represent the Air Force."

Practicing Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu training four

to six times per week, Kervick felt that this training had him prepared for the tournament and jumped at the chance to compete.

"Initially it felt a little intimidating and there was definitely some confusion on the faces of others since this was the first year the Air Force was invited," said Kervick. "There was no feeling of 'who let the Air Force in?' Everyone was very friendly and welcoming, even though we had to fight each other. Nonetheless, it wasn't long before people recognized that I was the only Air Force member and I felt like I was being watched closely."

Not only did Kervick stand out in his uniform, clearly representing the Air National Guard, he also stood out in the competition, bringing home the silver medal in the Middleweight Division.

"I think it takes a lot of discipline to prepare for anything like this, and to some degree, military training can instill that need for 'excellence in all we do,' and Staff Sgt. Kervick definitely has that," said Lt. Col. Melanie Ferguson, 180FW Communications Flight commander. "This is demonstrated

with his combativies training as well as the time and training he puts toward his Cyber Security career, in both his military and civilian jobs."

Kervick competed in four six-minute preliminary rounds and one 10-minute semi-final round that encompassed grappling and wrestling skills, along with physical body strikes such as punching, kicking and open-hand hits to the face.

Because the tournament was held in Columbus on a weekend when the 180FW was conducting training in Toledo, Kervick's biggest supporters were unable to attend in person, but that didn't stop them from showing their support.

Throughout the day, members of the 180FW Communications Flight could be found squeezed into cubicles and offices, gathered around computer screens to watch their Wingman compete. And for the final championship round, the wing commander opened up the wing conference room so that unit members could watch the match on the big screens, cheering Kervick on from afar.

"One of my coworkers sent me a picture

of my flight gathered around the computer," said Kervick. "It felt great to know that I had the flight backing me and supporting me from home."

"In the Communications Flight, we pride ourselves is supporting each other, and in lieu of having a contingent in Columbus, taking some time out to be able to cheer him on from afar just made sense," said Ferguson. "I just wish he could have heard the cheers that would resonate throughout our work areas after each match he won!"

Kervick says he will absolutely compete in the tournament again next year and will continue so long as the tournament remains open to members of Air National Guard.

To his fellow Airmen, Kervick said, "If you're thinking about entering the competition next year, I would definitely encourage you to do so. If you're a wrestler or a jiu-jitsu person, it's an absolute ideal weekend: representing your wing, getting to hit people and getting paid to do it!" 🥋





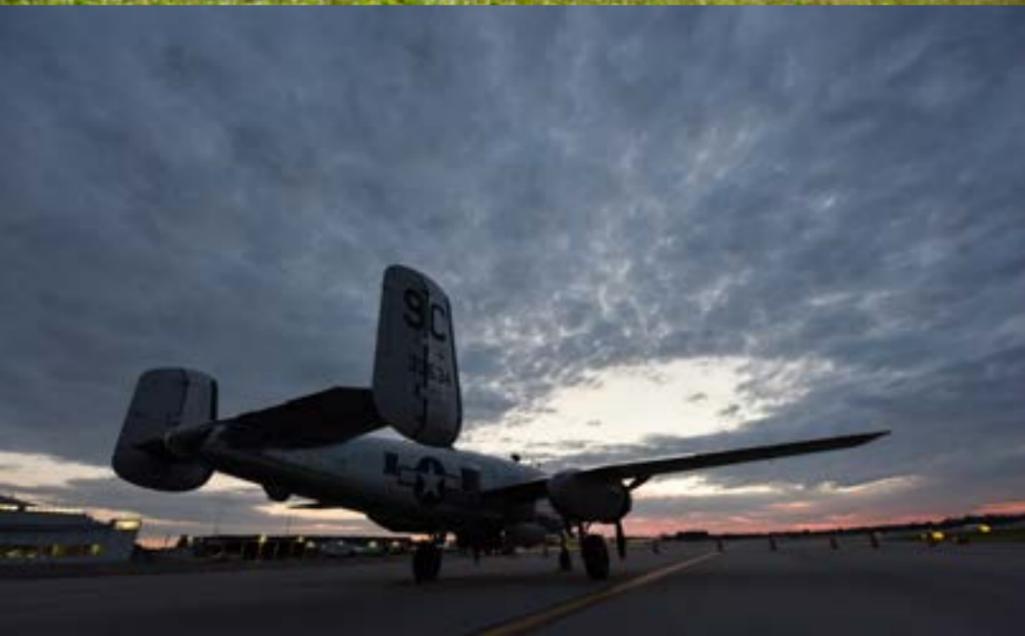
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Tech. Sgt. John Wilkes
Staff Sgt. Hope Geiger
Senior Airman Kregg York

TOLEDO AIR SHOW









AIRMEN OF THE YEAR 2019



*Photo by Tech. Sgt. Nic Kuetemeyer
121st Air Refueling Wing*



COMPANY GRADE OFFICER OF THE YEAR

Capt. Greg Hallett

Assigned to the 180th Fighter Wing’s Logistics Readiness Squadron as the Installation Deployment Officer, Hallett is responsible for centralized command and control, planning and execution for all wing deployment operations and the movement of cargo and passengers. His duties require the oversight of operations in four different areas of the squadron including air transportation, ground transportation, traffic management and logistics plans.

Hallett also serves as the Guard Emergency Liaison Officer to the Ohio National Guard’s Joint Force Headquarters, increasing domestic capabilities to the Northwest Ohio region. In 2019, Hallett was responsible for leading four deployment operations, delivering more than 400 unit members and 164 tons of cargo throughout the U.S., enabling the wing to successfully conduct more than 270 training mission flights, resulting in a 90% mission capable rate for the wing.

A lead planner for the NORTHCOM Operation Vigilant Guard, Hallett crafted a Joint reception, staging, onward movement and integration exercise, executing the largest domestic operations exercise in Ohio to date. Additionally, his leadership ensured the Deployment Control Center element was identified as a Superior Performing Team during the recent Unit Effectiveness Inspection. Hallett shows continuous improvement pursuing a master’s degree at the University of Findlay while simultaneously graduating from two military courses, Contingency War Planner Course and the Deliberate and Crisis Action Planning and Execution Segments Course.

Dedicated to community, Hallett is a continuous volunteer with Flag City Honor Flight, recently accompanying a Vietnam veteran to Washington D.C. to view the war memorials. Additionally, he serves as a 3rd and 4th grade volunteer coach and is a volunteer at Swanton Middle School teaching soft skills to students.✈️



SENIOR NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER OF THE YEAR

Master Sgt. Frank Skellie

Assigned as a flight chief to the 180th Fighter Wing’s Operations Group Aircrew Flight Equipment section, Skellie is responsible for the section’s quality assurance program, ensuring more than \$31 million of flight equipment and aircrew survival gear is operational and accounted for. He is also responsible for the management of the section’s technical order program, managing the more than 150 technical manuals that are crucial in maintaining 100% operational status of lifesaving equipment.

Additionally, Skellie supervises 10 Airmen and the safety and readiness of approximately 30 F-16 fighter pilots. In 2019, Skellie and his team conducted more than 4,000 equipment inspections, resulting in 100% pilot readiness and a 90% mission capable rate for the wing. Skellie provided oversight for the wing’s incentive flight program, managing more than \$3,400 in lifesaving training and equipment for 56 of the wing’s outstanding Airmen. He singlehandedly anchored the Combat Edge Oxygen Equipment System program, inspecting and uploading the Anti-G Suit Program consisting of more than 3,000 pieces of life saving equipment for 21 aircraft resulting in 36 members being combat mission ready. Throughout the year, Skellie and his team supported more than 20 on-base community tours in support of the wing’s community outreach program, instilling patriotism and mission insight to more than 600 community members and civic leaders.

In addition to working fulltime with the 180FW, Skellie is also a local small business owner and a part time student at the University of Toledo, where he maintains a 3.7 grade point average. Dedicated to supporting his community, Skellie contributes volunteer hours, placing flags at Woodlawn Cemetery, supporting area veterans’ organizations and donating more than \$4,000 in food from his restaurant to area schools and veterans groups.✈️



NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER OF THE YEAR

Tech. Sgt. Megan Torres

Assigned to the 180th Fighter Wing’s Medical Group as a health services technician, Torres is responsible for assisting with the wing’s overall healthcare administration program in health, fitness and diet standards. Her duties include ensuring the training of wing medical administrators and completion of required comprehensive medical readiness training, ensuring 100% readiness.

In 2019, Torres took advantage of additional training opportunities, traveling to Puerto Rico to participate in a joint medical innovative readiness training event, where she served as training site manager. Her participation in the event assisted in the Department of Defense providing no-cost medical care to more than 4,000 underserved residents on the island, totaling more than \$1.1 million.

Torres also traveled to Joint Base Elmendorf/Richardson, Alaska to further her education and training. While in Alaska, Torres voluntarily completed the Tactical Combat Casualty Care course, certifying her as an official course instructor, further enhancing the Medical Group’s ability to maintain overall deployment readiness.

Torres is a nationally certified athletic trainer, holding a Bachelor of Science degree in athletic training, and is currently attending Wright State University completing prerequisites for medical school in an effort to become an emergency medicine physician upon completion. Torres works closely with the Dayton, Ohio, community, providing crisis intervention, with a focus on supporting law enforcement and firefighters. Dedicating countless hours to her cause, Torres developed an initial self-aid buddy care class for the Dayton Department of Public Safety and SWAT members. Committed to her community, Torres volunteers, alongside her family, with Wreaths Across America to honor America’s fallen service members. 🇺🇸



AIRMAN OF THE YEAR

Senior Airman Raven Driftmyer

Assigned to the 180th Fighter Wing’s Logistics Readiness Squadron as a Traffic Management Journeyman, Driftmyer is responsible for assisting in the management of inbound and outbound freight packages within the squadron’s distribution flight. Her duties also include deployment manifest preparation, ensuring the wing is able to provide deployable Airmen and equipment, anytime, anywhere.

Driftmyer enlisted in the Air National Guard in 2015, graduating basic military training with honors, then remained at the top of her class throughout her technical training, maintaining an average of 95% in academics. In 2017, Driftmyer enrolled at the University of Toledo, majoring in social work where she maintains a 3.5 grade point average. Simultaneously, Driftmyer has been working fulltime at the 180FW, contributing to the wing’s overall mission success.

In January, 2019, Driftmyer successfully prepared manifests needed to deploy more than 130 Airmen and 112 pieces of cargo to Patrick Air Force Base, Florida, while still managing her shipping and receiving duties. Throughout the year, Driftmyer processed more than 950 mission priority items, totaling more than \$99 million in shipping costs. Her efforts enabled the wing maintenance group to maintain a 76.6% mission capable rate that allowed the wing to complete more than 2,600 training sorties, totaling more than 4,000 flying hours.

In addition to working at the 180FW and attending the University of Toledo, both on a fulltime basis, Driftmyer also completed additional military education by attending Airmen Leadership School and a Hazardous Materials Preparation course. Driftmyer is also dedicated to her community, volunteering for several area charity organizations to include Headstones for Veterans, The Toledo Airshow and Make-A-Wish. 🇺🇸



FIRST SERGEANT OF THE YEAR

Master Sgt. Crystal Carper

Assigned to the 180th Fighter Wing’s Mission Support Group as a First Sergeant, Carper is responsible for the readiness, health, welfare, morale and quality of life for more than 200 Airmen assigned to the wing’s Civil Engineering Squadron, Force Support Squadron, Mission Support Headquarters and Student Flight. Her duties include representing the enlisted force as an advisor to commanders on topics including personnel programs, administrative and disciplinary actions, ensuring overall health of the force.

Carper is a critical link between commanders and Airmen, providing advice and mentoring, not only to Airmen assigned to her, but also new first sergeants by sharing her knowledge and experiences, resulting in increased capabilities and readiness. Committed to continuous growth, Carper volunteered for additional training in an effort to become a better resource for Airmen. She attended a five-day First Sergeant Symposium, gaining important knowledge on resources, administrative and disciplinary programs, allowing her to better advocate for Airmen. The symposium, along with her training on incident investigations, not only prepared her to better support Airmen, but has enabled her to partner with the wing Staff Judge Advocate to assist Airmen with legal needs and better communicate policies and resources available. An ambassador to the resilience of wing members, Carper participated in a critical suicide awareness event, sharing her story with more than 1,000 Airmen in an effort to let members know they are not alone.

Carper volunteers monthly with the wing’s fitness improvement program to motivate Airmen struggling to meet fitness standards, mentoring and encouraging more than 20 Airmen and reducing repeat fitness test failures. Committed to community, Carper dedicates time to supporting local organizations including the Sunshine Community Home, 12 Kids of Christmas and Adopt-A-Road. 🇺🇸



HONOR GUARD MEMBER OF THE YEAR

Staff Sgt. Nathan Cousino

Assigned to the 180th Fighter Wing’s Force Support Squadron as a dining services specialist, Cousino, is responsible for assisting the food services team in preparing meals for more than 1,000 Airmen, as well as assisting in the wing’s physical fitness program.

Not only is he a dedicated member to his squadron, since 2012 Cousino has also been a key member of the wing’s honor guard team, where he is responsible for representing the 180FW, Ohio National Guard and Air Force at community events throughout the state.

Cousino enlisted in the Air National Guard in 2008 as an F-16 fighter jet maintenance technician before retraining into the Chaplain’s Corps as a Chaplains assistant in 2012, then into the Force Support Squadron in 2018. Committed to upholding Air Force Core Values, Cousino is continuing his military training in his new role within the Force Support Squadron, while simultaneously pursuing an undergraduate degree in religious studies. As he continues reaching toward his educational goals, Cousino still finds time to volunteer with the 180FW Color and Honor Guard teams. In 2019, Cousino dedicated more than 50 hours, supporting 25% of the teams community events, while also assuming the position of noncommissioned officer in charge of several funeral ceremonies and providing training to new members of the team, enabling them to continue fostering patriotism, Esprit de Corps and honor America’s fallen service members.

In his spare time, Cousino is committed to supporting his community, hosting an event for the American Cancer Society, raising more than \$1,000 for cancer research, and speaking at various community events, instilling patriotism throughout the state of Ohio. 🇺🇸



CHIEF'S AWARD

Staff Sgt. Matthew Stahl

Assigned to the 180th Fighter Wing's Logistics Readiness Squadron as a Mobility Readiness Specialist, Stahl is responsible for assisting in the accountability and quality control of the wing's mobility equipment and uniforms.

In 2019, Stahl led the War Readiness Section's M50 gas mask program overhaul, streamlining the cleaning and testing process, resulting in a 35% man hour reduction in issuing masks to and the Combat Hammer exercise at Hill Air Force Base, Utah.

These combined packages ensured 180FW Airmen. His duties also include noncommissioned officer in charge of managing the mobility readiness spare assets program where his efforts increased the part order fill-rate to 98%, exceeding the Air National Guard's goal of 85%.

Stahl accurately pre-configured a \$7 million dollar aircraft spare asset and hazardous materials package for two stateside training deployments to Patrick Air Force Base, Florida sustained support for both operations and maintenance missions, directly contributing to the wing accomplishing 238 training sorties, totaling 320 flying hours.

Throughout 2019, Stahl directly trained and mentored five new Airmen through required career development courses, resulting in a 100% pass rate and qualifying each for deployable status, enhancing overall wing readiness.

Dedicated to his community, Stahl contributes countless hours to the local Habitat for Humanity organization and the Toledo Foodbank. 🇺🇸



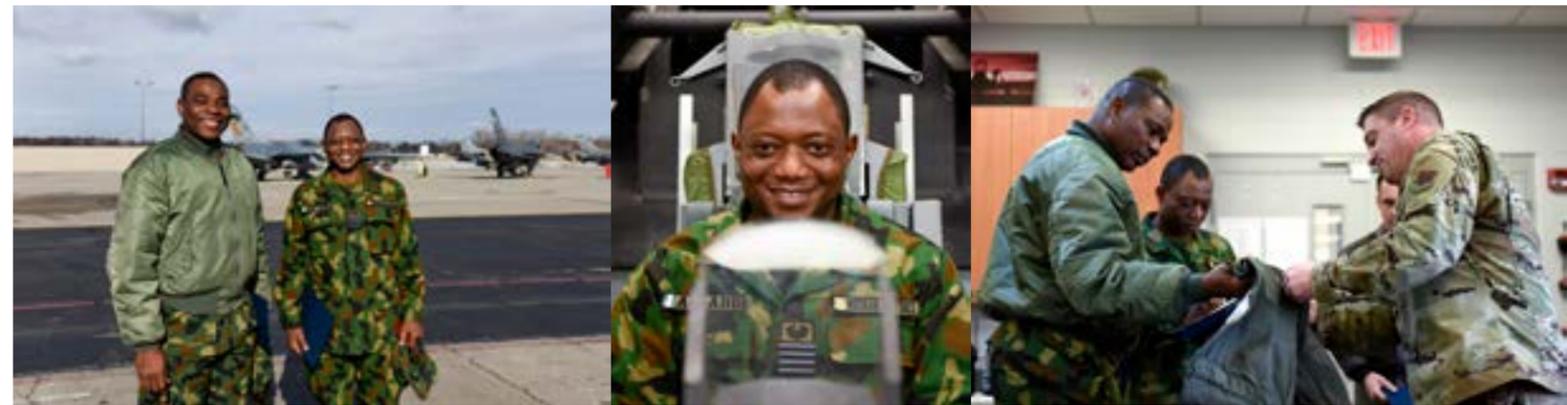
Supporting Community 180FW Participate in Blood Drive

*Photos by
Senior Airman Kregg York*

The 180th Fighter Wing continues to partner with the American Red Cross, hosting four blood drives in 2019. Community blood drives provide our Stinger Airmen an opportunity give back to our community.

According to the American Red Cross, up to three lives can be saved with just one unit of blood. Throughout the year, 107 units of blood were donated by 180FW members that can be used to save more than 320 lives.

"As the need for blood continues," said Erica Holland from the American Red Cross' Western Lake Erie Region. "We are grateful to our service men and women for continuously giving throughout the year to help meet the needs of our 23 hospitals in the region." 🇺🇸



Nigerian Air Force Visits Aircrew Flight Equipment

*Story and photos by
Senior Airman Kregg York*

Nigerian Air Force Air Vice Marshal Sule Baba Lawal, and Group Captain Abdullahi Obenyegba Abu visited the 180th Fighter Wing's Aircrew Flight Equipment section in December, 2019, to learn about life-saving equipment used by aircrew and how it contributes to safe execution of our mission.

The officers visited the 180FW in search of best practices in an effort to help with the modernization of the Nigerian Air Force. 🇺🇸



2019

IN PHOTOS



Heavy equipment removes snow and ice from the roads at the 180FW, Ohio Air National Guard during a polar vortex, Jan. 28, 2019. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Shane Hughes.



An F-16 Fighting Falcon flies over the coast of Florida during a training sortie during a deployment at Patrick Air Force Base, Feb. 4, 2019. Photo by Staff Sgt. Hope Geiger.



Staff Sgt. Sean Fitzpatrick, an F-16 crew chief, and Maj. Justin Kreicher, an F-16 fighter pilot, shake hands before an early morning training sortie at Patrick Air Force Base, Florida, Jan. 29, 2019. Photo by Staff Sgt. Hope Geiger.



Weapons loaders ensure that the fighter jet's munitions are secure and operational prior to a training sortie, Feb 1, 2019, at Patrick Air Force Base, Florida. Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Beth Holliker.



Maj. Brian Cherolis climbs into an F-16 Fighting Falcon before an early morning training sortie at Patrick Air Force Base, Florida, Jan. 31, 2019. Photo by Staff Sgt. Hope Geiger.



Senior Airman Alex Hoffman prepares the fighter jet for an early morning training sortie, Jan. 29, 2019, at Patrick Air Force Base, Florida. Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Beth Holliker.



F-16 Fighting Falcons sit on the flightline at Patrick Air Force Base, Florida, before morning training sorties, Jan. 30, 2019. Photo by Staff Sgt. Hope Geiger.



Airmen take part in a simulated chemical warfare exercise, May 16, 2019. Photo by Senior Airman Kregg York.



An Airman takes part in a simulated chemical warfare exercise, May 16, 2019. Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Beth Holliker.



Airmen perform pre-use inspection on aircraft lifting sling prior to lifting an F-16 Fighting Falcon during Crash Damaged/Disabled Aircraft Recovery training, May 20, 2019. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Shane Hughes.



Airmen assigned to the Crash Damaged/Disabled Aircraft Recovery training, May 20, 2019. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Shane Hughes.



Senior Airman Haelie Egbert is an aerospace propulsion technician assigned to the 180th Fighter Wing. Her role as an F-16 jet engine mechanic is to maintain the wing's Pratt & Whitney 229 engines through time-sensitive inspections, repairs and test runs, providing the highest quality engines for the mission, while ensuring the safety of pilots. Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Beth Holliker.



Firefighters respond to a simulated F-16 Fighting Falcon mishap, May 16, 2019 during a Major Aircraft Response Exercise at the Toledo Express Airport in Swanton, Ohio. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Shane Hughes.



Firefighters respond to a simulated F-16 Fighting Falcon mishap, May 16, 2019 during a Major Aircraft Response Exercise at the Toledo Express Airport in Swanton, Ohio. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Shane Hughes.



Security Forces Airmen highlight the capabilities of the wing's new, modular small arms range to Maj. Gen. John Harris, The Adjutant General, Ohio National Guard. Photo by Senior Airman Kregg York.



Airmen assigned to the 180th Fighter Wing, high-five during a simulated chemical warfare exercise, May 16, 2019.
Photo by Senior Airman Gregg York.



Firefighters participate in forcible entry training with a Boeing 727 at the Toledo Express Airport in Swanton, Ohio. Photo by Senior Airman Kregg York.



Lily, from our Lily's Letter video series, visits the 180FW for a behind the scenes tour. Photo by Staff Sgt. Shane Hughes





Light snow falls as Capt. Elliot England, an F-16 pilot assigned to the 180th Fighter Wing, taxis to the runway in preparation for a nighttime training mission, Dec. 10, 2019. Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Beth Holliker.



Members of the 180th Fighter Wing salute during morning formation lead by Col. Kevin Doyle, 180th Fighter Wing Commander, Oct. 19, 2019. Photo by Senior Airman Gregg York.

CONGRATULATIONS

to the following Airmen on their recent promotions

To Airman:

- Jacob J. Benson - Logistics Readiness Squadron
- Catherine E. Carene – Student Flight
- Dakota P. Chambers – Communications Flight
- Sabrina E. Durden – Security Forces Squadron
- Hannah E. Haviland – Medical Group
- Essence S. Johnson – Medical Group
- Romeo P. Martinez – Comptroller Flight
- Jettie G. Moore - Medical Group
- Garcia A. Reyes – Civil Engineer Squadron

To Airman First Class:

- Shyanne N. Brown – Security Forces Squadron
- Free P. Canales – Communications Flight
- Jordan M. Duly – Maintenance Squadron
- Zachary J. Fink – Security Forces Squadron
- Sophia R. Lombardo – Logistics Readiness Squadron
- Emma M. Niese – Logistics Readiness Squadron
- Mason L. Noland – Security Forces Squadron
- Korrin C. Zollweg – Logistics Readiness Squadron

To Senior Airman:

- Austen T. Bauer – Security Forces Squadron
- Sabrina E. Durden – Security Forces Squadron
- Brianna B. Espino – Civil Engineer Squadron
- Abigail L. Haynes – Civil Engineer Squadron
- Logan M. Hillesheim – Maintenance Squadron
- Debra J. Hoffman – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Cheyenne D. Hudspeth – Force Support Squadron
- Mackenzie P. Kreinbrink – Maintenance Squadron
- Erin A. Luke - Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Ashley R. Mitchell – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Jonathan P. Petit – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Braden S. Peterson – Maintenance Squadron
- Joel W. Pietrzak – Maintenance Squadron
- Drew E. Pinardo – Security Forces Squadron
- Kayla A. Pokornik – Security Forces Squadron
- Skylar M. Quintero – Medical Group
- James D. Sanderson – Maintenance Squadron
- Alexander G. Strohm – Maintenance Squadron
- Levi T. Van Tassel – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Kyrstyn R. Wallen – Medical Group
- Seth A. Walters – Security Forces Squadron
- Nicholas H. Whitman – Maintenance Squadron
- Kregg A. York – Fighter Wing

To Staff Sergeant:

- Christopher M. Arno – Maintenance Squadron
- Peter J. Barber – Maintenance Squadron
- Joseph T. Bradfield – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Brayden A. Bubp – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron

- Abigail H. Burdue – Operations Support Flight
- Mario K. Bynum - Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Kerry M. Cramner – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Kathryn M. Dobbs – Medical Group
- Haelie A. Egbert – Maintenance Squadron
- Hope N. Geiger – Fighter Wing
- Jacob C. Hancock – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Asher F.W. Harmon – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Aaron A. Hastedt – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Derek R. Herzog - Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Alex K. Hoffman – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Austin E. Jones – Maintenance Squadron
- Sienna M. Krise – Operations Group
- Robert J. Kuriger – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Jason P. Kwapich – Maintenance Squadron
- Brooke E. Logan – Maintenance Squadron
- Lukas D. Lombardo – Fighter Squadron
- Douglas S. Laycock – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Nathaniel S. Maddox – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Libby L. Mathewson – Maintenance Operations Flight
- Mitchell M. McClure – Logistics Readiness Squadron
- Andrew T. McCrory – Operations Support Flight
- Abbie R. McGuire – Operations Support Squadron
- Aubrey L. Mellott – Logistics Readiness Squadron
- Ryan M. Menear – Communications Flight
- Cameron J. O'Brien – Maintenance Squadron
- Deon L. Oglesby - Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Kevin M. Packard – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Benton T. Pohlman – Security Forces Squadron
- Jacob M. Reisinger – Civil Engineer Squadron
- Brittany N. Robarge – Logistics Readiness Squadron
- Jordan L. Rucker – Fighter Wing
- Paul L. Trendel – Logistics readiness Squadron
- Olivia S. Tusko – Maintenance Squadron
- Nicholas J. Wagner – Logistics Readiness Squadron
- Joshua A. Wakefield - Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Zachary R. Westrick – Fighter Wing
- Jacob C. Yeckley – Operations Support Flight

To Technical Sergeant:

- Kenneth B. Banzet – Civil Engineer Squadron
- Joseph R. Contreras – Maintenance Squadron
- Charles T. DeRaedt - Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Corey J. Eubank – Logistics Readiness Squadron
- Robert A. Flanders – Maintenance Squadron
- Nicholas J. Hineline – Maintenance Squadron
- Danniell V. Johnson – Security Forces Squadron
- Matthew J. Kelsey – Logistics readiness Squadron
- Danielle N. Lloyd – Medical Group
- Erik D. Nagucki – Logistics Readiness Squadron
- Tyler M. Roberts – Civil Engineer Squadron

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budget cuts in 2013, the unit lost their F-16s and we made the choice to move to the 180th Fighter Wing, here in Toledo, almost seven years ago now.”

Throughout his 24 years, DiDio has had an impressive career, with overseas operations to teaching the best-of-the-best Air Force pilots, and even spearheading the development of new Air Force-wide tactics, techniques and procedures for force integrated air-to-air weapons employment.

The past 24 years have enabled DiDio to build an arsenal of comprehensive technical skills, making him one of the most proficient F-16 pilots in the fighter community.

But, according to DiDio, these aren't necessarily the skills needed to be commander of an operational aviation wing.

Communicate. Listen. Empower.

These are the traits and skills DiDio has respected the most from the senior leaders and role models who shaped his career and that he hopes to embody as a leader and commander of the 180FW.

During a recent interview, Col. DiDio sat with the Public Affairs office and shared his thoughts on leadership, his values, and his goals, visions and expectations as commander of the 180FW.

Here is what he had to say.

Q. What are you most excited about as you assume command?

“I have had a lot of different emotions leading up to taking command over the wing. First, it's certainly intimidating. Coming from being commander of the Operations Group, I was responsible for about 70 people and the flying operation. Now, as wing commander, I'm responsible for more than 1,100 people and a lot of different functional areas that I'm not an expert in, so there was definitely a lot of nervousness, too.”

“Now that I have been commander for about three months, what I'm most excited about is just meeting the Airmen. I'm excited to meet them, and see, firsthand, how excited and motivated they are about executing the mission. I think that their excitement and motivation will rejuvenate and motivate me, too.”

“I'm also excited, going back to the values I mentioned earlier, communicating, listening, and empowering. I'm excited about growing that kind of culture here and I hope we can achieve that during my time as commander. My job is to simply set boundaries, some goal-posts, then just watch the excellence in this wing, because I do feel like we have a great group of talented Airmen and that all they

really need is just an environment to grow.”

Q. As incoming commander, what are your goals, visions and expectations?

“First, as a new commander, my overall goal, initially is to keep my eyes open and listen to what the Airmen have to say and to learn about the functional organizations that I didn't grow up in. I really want to learn about the wing and from there, we can look at whether we need to change the wing's vector or goals, visions, mission statements, etc.”

“Second, I really want to empower our commanders and supervisors at the lowest levels. I think that making decisions at the lowest levels, where the information is, is much more effective. Making decisions too high up tends to lead to micromanagement and that simply isn't productive in executing the mission. Empowering at the lowest level is the overall goal.”

“Third, I want to make sure we communicate properly. Not only messaging from me to our Airmen, but also when decisions are being made at a lower level, making sure that the communication is productive within those levels and that it can be channeled up the chain effectively as well. Getting the expectations and desires from the enlisted force is critically important to commander business and making sure that all commanders are getting the pulse of the people is necessary before making any kind of leadership decisions.”

“One way I plan to grow this culture is to go out and meet Airmen. I want to let them know who I am, but more to the point, I want to hear their stories, not only each as a person, but what they do for the wing and how we can improve the wing, because they are the ones who know how to do it. Not me.”

Q. Who are your most admired mentors?

“You learn from both the leaders you aspire to be, as well as those you don't aspire to be like. Instead of looking at individual people, I like to think of the attributes those leaders have passed on to me, or that I absorbed.”

“My common theme now, is communication and empowering at the lowest levels. The mentors I respected the most did that, sometimes in the midst of environments where it wasn't very popular to do so. What I've learned is that leaders are taught or programed, especially when in command, that they need to be a decisive leader and need to make quick decisions. This leads to uninformed decisions. Take your time, communicate with your team and analyze the situation. Only after all facts and contingencies are thought through, make a decision.”

“When I envision myself around a coun-

cil or a group of Airmen, I want to be the last voice that talks. I don't need to be that expedient, decisive leader. Yes, I hold that trump card as wing commander, but you really want the innovation and the brainstorming to happen at the levels below you.”

“There is so much ingenuity in the folks around me, and collectively, they are a heck of a lot smarter than me. I have to let them brainstorm and be sure we're getting all of the inputs, thoughts, ideas, and pro and con analytics presented first, then I can act second. The longer you've been in leadership and the higher up the chain you go, the further you are away from the functional operations, where things are happening, which means, you don't know any more what the people underneath you know. You have to let go of that and you have to let them do the course of action analysis to figure out what's best.”

“Being a leader is not a popularity contest though, because you're not going to be able to make everyone under your command happy all of the time with the decisions you're going to make, and that's ok. The goal is that even if they don't agree with your decision, they will understand it. And I think that is important.”

Q. Throughout your career, what assignment have you learned the most from?

“There are two aspects of my career that I need to consider. One is the technical or tactical side of flying the F-16. The other side is leadership. As you morph into command as a fighter pilot, traditionally, you're in that tactical role for a long period of time, until about the time you get into a squadron command position. There is ample leadership within the flying aspect, like flight leadership, but not necessarily on the personnel leadership side as much.”

“From the tactical side, the assignment I learned the most from was being an instructor at the weapons school. That was by far the pinnacle of my tactical career and being able to teach the best-of-the-best of the Air Force instructor pilots as they go through the school as a student.”

“Transition that now to the other side of my career, the leadership side, that, by far, I have learned the most here at the 180FW. I did have some leadership positions before here, outside of the 180FW, at the squadron-level, but every command or leadership position I have within this wing has taught me a ton about leadership. As you progress and take on more responsibility, it never ceases to amaze me how your aperture of the perspective of what's going on around you changes that.

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It's kind of a fascinating psychological event."

Q. What do you want your Stingers to know about you?

"I want them to know me and not just from email or videos, I want them to know me. I want them to see my face and hear my voice. The command chief and I will be walking around getting to know them and getting inputs from the Airmen around the base, finding out what they do. That's pivotal in all aspects of my job, whether its decision making or messaging with the community or representing our desires at the national level."

"I now have the opportunity, as wing commander, not just to lead our Airmen, but the opportunity to work alongside of our Airmen, and so far it's been incredible. I'm looking forward to this opportunity for as long as I'm in the hot seat." 🦅

Promotions & Retirements Cont.

- Andrew J. Sabo – Maintenance Squadron
- Anthony J. Unum – Force Support Squadron
- Bradley J. Waggoner – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- John M. Wilkes, - Fighter Wing
- Zachary J. Yeckley – Maintenance Squadron

To Master Sergeant:

- Eric M Abraham – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- William D. Boyer – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Brent W. Centers – Medical Group
- John T. Clellan III – Logistics Readiness Squadron
- Garrett M. Ebersole – Maintenance Squadron
- Jeremiah D. Gallaher – Logistics readiness Squadron
- Aerial N. McVicker – Force Support Squadron
- Alexander L. Miller – Communications Flight
- Nicholas P. Miller – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Caleb W. Mock – Civil Engineer Squadron
- James R. Razor – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Justin J. Schaffer – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Nathan P. Szymanski – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron

To Senior Master Sergeant:

- Russell A. Bacon – Security Forces Squadron
- Doug M. Harris – Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- Melissa D. Hurst – Comptroller Flight
- Joshua L. Burke – Security Forces Squadron
- Steven M. Chapa – Logistics Readiness Squadron
- Anthony J. Pacewicz – Civil Engineer Squadron
- Geoffrey S. Schwiebert – Operations Support Flight

Retirements:

- Robert Baker, Master Sgt.
- Carrie Cuftr, Master Sgt.
- Michael Holy, Lt. Col.
- Matthew Hopkins, Lt. Col.
- Sean Lolo, Senior Master Sgt.
- John Madison, Master Sgt.
- Constance McGuire, Chief Master Sgt.
- Matthew Michael, Senior Master Sgt.
- John Ohm, Lt. Col.
- Phil Pilcher, Master Sgt.
- Edmund Poitinger, Senior Master Sgt.
- Kelly Reader-Griffiths, Master Sgt.
- Bradley Righettini, Master Sgt.
- Ronald Schaupter, Lt. Col.
- Robert Siebenaler, Chief Master Sgt.
- John Van Horn, Senior Master Sgt.
- David Watson, Chief Master Sgt.

To 1st Lieutenant:

- Justin Brinkman – Force Support Squadron
- Todd Copic II - 112th Fighter Squadron
- Joshua Utter - 112th Fighter Squadron

To Captian:

- Benjamin Laubender - Medical Group
- Richard Morris - Chaplains Corps

To Major:

- Michael Dandurand - Chaplains Corps
- Seth Murray - 112th Fighter Squadron

To Lt. Col:

- Jennifer Beale - Inspector General
- Seth Carmody - Maintenance Group
- Curtis Voltz - 112th Fighter Squadron
- Garrick Webb - 112th Fighter Squadron

To Lt. Col:

- Gregory Barasch - Operations Group



An F-16 Fighting Falcon flies over the coast of Florida during a training sortie during a deployment at Patrick Air Force Base, Feb. 4, 2019. Photo by Senior Airman Hope Geiger

Never Stop Talking from pg. 10

"I started calling in regularly, saying that I was sick," Carper said. "I isolated myself. I would stay in my room all day. I was home for hours and hours on end. Alone."

"Then, I decided that I felt better when I was sleeping," she said. "I don't feel this pain. I'm going to sleep away the pain, but one can only sleep so much."

When she couldn't sleep away the pain, Carper turned to sleep aids for help.

"I started to take more and more of those pills," she said. "I started to feel dull. It seemed to be desensitizing me."

"I'll never forget, my dad came into my room, which he didn't often do, and I saw him cry for the first and only time in my life, as he was trying to understand what I was going through," Carper said. "But, by that time, I was so far into the grips of depression that it didn't even phase me."

After weeks of Carper isolating herself in her room, sleeping for hours on end and refusing to confide in her parents, her mother took matters into her own hands and called the doctor.

During the appointment, Carper's doctor explained depression and how it impacted a person, emphasized that a healthy diet and exercise were paramount in maintaining good mental health and sent her home with a prescription of antidepressants.

But Carper wasn't interested in what her doctor had to say. Convinced that she was fine, she never took those pills. She didn't exercise and she didn't eat.

"I never took those pills. I didn't exercise. I couldn't even get out of that room. I just wanted to sleep it away," said Carper. "So I started taking more pills. I just wanted to sleep away the pain, maybe when I wake up I'll feel better."

"I remember shaking those pills and I'd take them. I'd wake up, shake more pills and take them, but I kept waking up and I kept not feeling better," Carper continued. "Eventually, I took enough pills that I wasn't going to wake up."

That day, her mother happened to come home early from work and found Carper unconscious.

"The next thing I know, I woke up in an emergency room, wondering where I was and what had happened," Carper said. "I learned that my stomach had been pumped. They had used charcoal to absorb the poisons I had been putting into my body all those weeks."

Once the confusion wore off, Carper became angry. Angry that she had woken up to the pain again.

"It wasn't long before my mother came in to see me," Carper said. "I was so mad at her. The things I said to her I can't imagine saying to anyone, but I said those things to her and I hated her in that moment because she brought me back from it. I couldn't understand why she would do that."

Carper remained in the hospital for three days before being released to go home. They had offered help and resources, but she wasn't receptive, telling the hospital staff that she didn't want help.

"So I went home," Carper said. "It wasn't long after being home that I fell back into the habit of trying to sleep more, taking more pills."

Two weeks later, on her 25th birthday, Carper's mother and two of her coworkers came home to take her to lunch and found her nearly unconscious in her room.

After struggling to wake her up, 9-1-1 was called and Carper was taken back to the hospital to have her stomach pumped once

again.

"This time, I wasn't allowed to go home," Carper said.

Carper was admitted to the hospital for five days where she had no choice but to work through her depression.

"I was resistant to it. I was so resistant to it those first couple of days," said Carper. "I just didn't want to open up to anyone. I just didn't care anymore."

Without pills available to help her sleep, Carper eventually opened up and became receptive to getting help.

"I didn't have any pills at my disposal to help me sleep," said Carper. "I had no choice but to reckon with what I was feeling."

Once she made the decision to participate in the therapy sessions, listening and finally talking, sharing her story, she realized that she was not alone in the struggle with depression.

"Do you know how impactful that was?" asked Carper. "Sitting in that circle, with that group of people, struggling with so much. They were there. They got to that moment. Maybe in different ways. Different things got them to that point, but they were there, they were talking through it, working through it and I realized that I could do that too. I could lean on them."

"Those five days. It changed me," said Carper. "I realized that I was trying to cope with something that I just didn't have the tools to cope with. I only wished I would have recognized that sooner. I caused a lot of people pain. I caused myself pain."

After seeking help, Carper learned to recognize the symptoms and feelings. She learned to understand depression and that it is a disease, not just a feeling or a dark place she allowed herself to get to. She knew when it was time to reach out and confide in a friend or a loved one.

"What I learned from all of that, is that I wasn't weak. It wouldn't have been week of me to ask for help," said Carper. "I wasn't strong enough. I wasn't equipped to deal with this on my own. Depression. Real depression, not just sadness."

Carper also learned that she needed to connect and communicate with friends and family, both at home and at work and began developing her own Wingman network of those she could reach out to and lean on, day or night, when she felt the struggles of life were becoming too much.

"What I did differently when I struggled with depression after that is I recognized it. I knew when it was getting to be too much. I knew that feeling and I knew it very well," Carper said. "I reached out. I called people and say 'talk to me please.' I'd bother them in the middle of the night. I didn't want to go back to that place. It was a horrible place and I am not going back."

More than 20 years later, with the support of her husband and children, her network of family and friends, and her military career still going strong, Carper is speaking out and sharing her story in hopes that she can reach even one Airman to remind them that they are not alone.

"This all happened 22 years ago, and while that wasn't the last time I have struggled with depression throughout my life," said Carper. "It was truly the last time I felt that ending my life was the only way to end my pain."

"None of this changes the fact that I have depression and, sometimes, I need help," said Carper. "It's ok and I now know that and I never want anyone else to get to that point."

"I just wanted to convey my story so that people know, that if they are in a place like that, you are not alone," Carper said. 🦅

ALWAYS ON MISSION



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