

Air Force Sixtieth Anniversary

Commemorative Edition

Generations of Service

AIR
FORCE
History
and
Museums
PROGRAM

Laura E. Yardley

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COVER PHOTO: CMSgt. Ralph "Bucky" Dent (left) and son TSgt. Jason Dent at an undisclosed location.

Foreword

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then certainly any parent, brother, sister or cousin, aunt or uncle is honored to see a loved family member follow in his or her footsteps to military service. In old Europe it was traditionally the second son, since only the eldest could inherit the land. But in America the opportunity is there for any fledgling to dream, “I want to serve in the Air Force, just like my Uncle/Brother/ Grandfather Bob.” Few are more aware of the demands of military service than those who serve, so to have a loved one make the commitment can be bittersweet—on the one hand a joy and honor; on the other the knowledge that it can be too frequently a tough way to make a living.

In this short study you will meet several such families, and you will learn about their relationships and the reasons some have seen a clear path that has been forged by the generations ahead of them. Myriad reasons motivate these multiple generations of Airmen, some of which are clearly expressed, while others are just felt: honor, pride, responsibility, patriotism, courage. The author herself is experiencing the family tie of common service: she served as an active duty, now reserve, officer; her husband served as an active duty enlisted man and officer and is now an Air Force civilian. Her grandfathers served during World War II, Korea, and Vietnam; and as of the writing of this foreword, her brother-in-law is in the process of enlisting.

Generational succession, legacies if you will, are certainly not unusual in the Air Force, or the other services for that matter. The twenty-one families you will meet in the pamphlet only scratch the surface. They represent a much larger body—one that serves the nation, subordinates its personal desires to the greater good, and makes history every day. We are confident you will find their stories interesting and uplifting.

C.R. Anderegg
Director AF History and Museums
July 2008

Acknowledgements

On September 18, 2007, we commemorated the sixtieth anniversary of the United States Air Force. Though it is the youngest of our nation's military services, the Air Force already possesses a rich heritage. The Director of Air Force History, Mr. C.R. Anderegg, asked me to capture that heritage, to honor all families who serve the United States.

For this book, I sought out families who have started their own tradition of service. The men and women in these stories learned to love their country by watching the service and dedication of their grandparents, their parents, their aunts and uncles, even their brothers and sisters. These Airmen are pilots and maintainers, security forces and services, logisticians and lawyers. While each story is unique, and I expect readers will identify with different stories, each story also shares a common theme—love of family and love of country. Again and again, the people I interviewed described their Air Force as an extension of their families.

I owe a debt of gratitude to all these families. They spent many hours with me sharing their stories. I can only hope these pages honor the families and their service.

I also want to thank all of the people who helped make this book a reality: Mr. Anderegg; Col. Jim Sale, who tirelessly read and reread each story; Mr. John Sullivan, who kept the timeline on track; Capt. Rachel Rose, who helped organize the project and assisted with interviews; Mrs. Vanessa McCombs, whose excellent counsel guided my writing; the reservists on staff who assisted with editing; Dr. Richard Wolf, without whose guidance I would never have completed this; and last, and certainly not least, my husband, Aaron, who spent countless hours reading each story and advising me.

The stories in this book capture only a slice of our Air Force heritage, but I hope each Airman who reads it is honored by the effort.

Generations of Service

FOUR BROTHERS

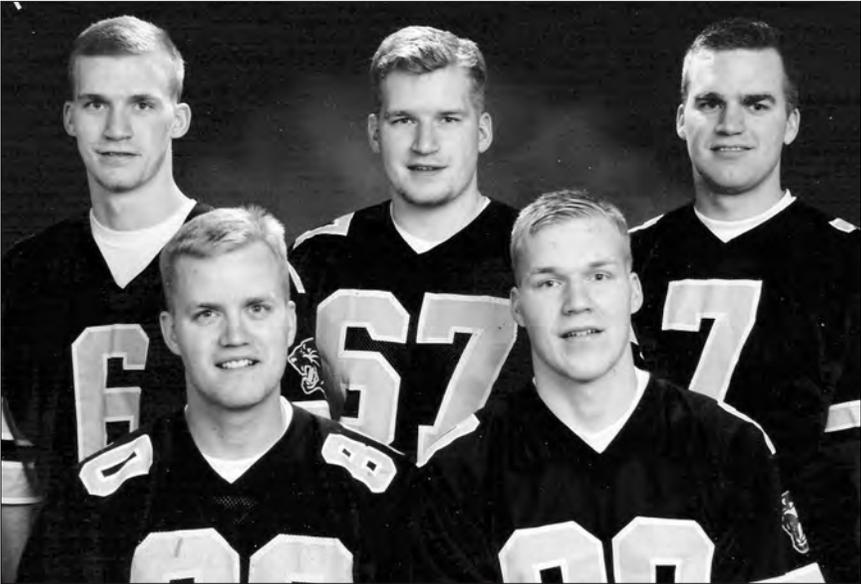
The Alley brothers of Spokane, Washington, have more in common than just their initials. For Maj. Michael L. Alley, Jr., Maj. Matthew L. Alley, Capt. Mitchell L. Alley, and Capt. Merrill L. Alley, serving in the Air Force is also something they share.

The family's history of service began in 1961, when their father, Michael Alley, Sr., joined the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps, Detachment 855, at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. His wife, Caryn, said he had "wanted to fly ever since he was a little boy," and his dream came true—after his commissioning in 1968, he was assigned to pilot training in Texas.

Michael senior was selected to be an instructor pilot at Vance Air Force Base, Oklahoma, and later deployed as a weapons controller to Udorn Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand. After the war in Southeast Asia, he returned stateside and began flying as a C-5 pilot at Travis Air Force Base, California. Over the years, however, his family continued to grow—he and Caryn had eight children together—and in 1977, Michael decided to separate from active duty to spend more time with his family. He did not want to give up his service completely, so he immediately joined the Air Force Reserve and continued to fly at Travis until his retirement in 1990. He also flew commercially and retired a second time from Delta Airlines in 2003.

Half of the Alley's eight children chose to follow in their father's footsteps and joined the ROTC program at Brigham Young University. Mike, Matt, Mitch, and Merrill were all commissioned at the same detachment as their father. Three of them became pilots, lured by the same blue skies as their father. Merrill decided early in his training that the skies did not hold that calling for him. Instead, after commissioning, he followed in the footsteps of his mother's father, Clifton Caldwell, who served as a dentist in the Air Force.

The Alley boys remember much about their father's service and his frequent trips to Travis for reserve duty. A few times, he was able to bring them along—he wanted his children to understand the importance of service to their country. When they were little, the boys were allowed to climb on the C-5 their father flew, and they explored the aircraft, asking him question after question, enraptured by the huge plane and in awe of its pilot—their hero. He began teaching all of his children the Air Force values—integrity, service, and excellence—at an early age. Merrill and Mitch remember donning their Boy Scout uniforms and proudly posting the colors on the flag pole in the family's front yard, a tradition their father had them perform each year on Independence Day. Merrill says his father "taught us to take pride in our flag and in our uniforms"—obviously, their father's example made an enduring impression.



All the brothers: Merrill #6, Marcus #67, Matt #7, Mike #80, Mitch #80. "We all attended the same high school, and each of us did really well playing high school football, as well as other sports. Marcus joined AFROTC his freshman year at BYU, but decided not to continue with it because he didn't want to move his family as often as the military moves you. Ironically, he has now moved his family the most times out of all of us being a manager for Sears."

All of the sons agree that their father's service and the values he instilled in his children led them to serve in the Air Force, and as each son joined, their service encouraged the younger brothers also. Mitch remembers when his older brother, Matt, joined the ROTC detachment. "[He] came to my apartment and dragged me to the detachment and said, 'You need to do this'—so I did!"

The oldest brother, Maj. Mike Alley, is a KC-135 pilot at Fairchild Air Force Base, Washington. Maj. Matt Alley became an F-16 pilot and is currently serving at the Air Force Academy in Colorado. Capt. Mitch Alley is a C-17 pilot stationed at Charleston Air Force Base, South Carolina; and Capt. Merrill Alley is a dentist at Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi.

What brings four brothers to the same decision, to serve their country? All four say their service is a product of the pride and patriotism instilled in them by their father, and they hope to give their children the same values. Caryn, their mother, could not be more proud of her sons. Since her husband passed away in 2007, Caryn finds comfort in seeing her husband's strong character in each of her children. And the four Airmen still feel a special connection to their father as, each day, they proudly put on the uniform he taught them to love.

ONE AFTER ANOTHER

In January 1942, the five Sullivan brothers enlisted in the U.S. Navy, asking to be assigned together. The Navy granted their request, but at great cost: in November of 1942, all five perished in an attack on their ship, the U.S.S. Juneau. Their deaths are said to be the catalyst for the law requiring siblings to be assigned to different units in combat—to avoid such a tragedy for one family.

The story of these famous, brave brothers is well-known in their hometown of Waterloo, Iowa—especially to the Anderson family. Ted and Bonnie Anderson raised their seven children in Waterloo, and six of the seven followed their father into service in the U.S. Air Force.

What drives an entire family to serve their country? Ted Anderson served in the Air Force for four years in the 1960s, before he married Bonnie, before their children were born. Bonnie says Ted enlisted because he knew he needed discipline to settle down, to be a man, and he knew the Air Force would make a man out of him. But their children never really knew anything about their dad's service. They witnessed the man's passion and wisdom in his chosen life as a public servant, advocate, and state senator, and maybe that's what influenced them. Whatever the reason, the Andersons certainly started a substantial family tradition.

In 1983, the oldest son, Tom, enlisted in the Air Force and served for four years as a firefighter. When his enlistment ended, he decided to stay near McConnell Air Force Base, Kansas, and continue his service as a civilian firefighter in Wichita. The next to join was Chris, the third oldest, in 1986, and he served as an aerospace ground equipment mechanic for seven years, before moving back to Waterloo. Then, Tim (number four) enlisted in 1988 and later returned to his hometown to work at John Deere. Travis, the fifth son, enlisted in 1999, served for five years, and then returned to Waterloo to work for the Federal Postal Service. The youngest (number seven), Nick, tried to enlist like everyone else in his family, but a paperwork error prevented him from receiving his medical clearance. Undaunted, Nick found another way to serve and followed in his oldest brother's footsteps, becoming a fireman and paramedic in his hometown.

But what of number two and number five? Well, number two—or Jim, as his friends and family know him—is still serving. After high school and a year of college, Jim followed in Tom's footsteps, enlisting in 1987. Jim worked in the intelligence career field for ten years, joined the reserves in 1997, and then completed his second bachelor's degree through the Reserve Officer Training Corps and was commissioned as an active duty officer in 2000. A services officer who clearly loves his work, Jim says his biggest accomplishment was his opportunity to lead a deployed unit. His job as commander of a services squadron in the Middle East in 2003—when he was only a lieutenant—was both the most challenging



TSgt. Pamela Anderson gives a set of souvenir Thunderbird “dog tags” to a Make-A-Wish participant at the 2007 California Capital Airshow in Sacramento, California, June 7, 2007. Sergeant Anderson is the noncommissioned officer in charge of the Public Affairs department for the Air Force Thunderbirds. (USAF Photo by SSgt. Kristi Machado.)

and rewarding time in his career. Though he experienced the same scrapes and bumps any commander encounters, he earned a Meritorious Service Medal in his first command job.

And number five? Well, number five is the daughter—Pamela. She is the only girl of the seven, but she was the first to get a tattoo, the first to ride a Harley-Davidson motorcycle, and the first to go to war. Her mother does not know which of those things worried her more! Bonnie is extremely proud of her daughter, who has also made a very successful career of the Air Force. Enlisting in 1992, Pam started her career in administration, but soon found her calling in the public affairs field. Her first fifteen years in the Air Force were exciting enough, but then she was chosen to serve in public affairs with the Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron, the Thunderbirds, a very high-profile and highly selective position. Though she has deployed all over the world and been part of several important missions, she says her biggest accomplishment was making a difference in the life of one Airman. Through her leadership as an NCO—and what Pam calls tough love—she helped an Airman turn her life and her career around, setting her on the path to success.

It says a lot about a family when each of seven siblings chooses a life in service to others—firefighters, paramedics, Airmen. But it says even more about their parents; the example Ted and Bonnie set for their children every day inspired each child to find their way to serve. Luckily for the Air Force, Ted and Bonnie Anderson raised seven children who each found a calling in service to their country.

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

Gloria joined the Air Force in 1955—she needed money for college, and she thought she might like flying airplanes. The perfect solution?

“I went in the Air Force thinking I could be a pilot—I was very naïve at the time—and found out that number one, at that time, they didn’t have women pilots, and number two, [even] if they did, I have to wear permanent glasses, and therefore I could never have passed an eye test.” Happily for Gloria, the Air Force assigned her a job she had a passion for—playing the saxophone with the Air Force Band at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. To save more money for her education, she also worked part-time at the base movie theater, where she met her husband, Perry Berryhill. A member of the Creek Indian Nation of Oklahoma, Perry enlisted in 1956 and worked as a recruiter. The two married in 1957, and had their first child, David, in May 1959.

“Back in my time, when a woman got pregnant, she had to get out.” Gloria and Perry shuffled the paperwork around as long as they could, but the Air Force soon realized her “condition” and released her from active duty in January 1959. Perry stayed in the service, and soon they moved to their next assignment, at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio. In August 1962, Gloria was eight months pregnant with their second son, Layne, when Perry died in a car accident.

Knowing it was up to her to support her children, Gloria began her career in civil service at Wright-Patterson AFB as a computer analyst. She raised her children near the base, and the Air Force remained a part of their daily life. Layne, the son who never met his father, felt at home on the base and spent most of his time with military dependents. His best friend’s father, a former Marine, helped reinforce the strong military influence Layne’s parents valued.

By the age of 20, Layne was restless and looking for focus in his life, and the military seemed the place to find it. In 1983, he joined the Air Force. It seemed the logical choice: the military had been a substitute father for him, teaching him about discipline, responsibility, hard work, and family—all the things his father would have taught him. Layne jumped at the chance to serve as an Air Force cop, reveling in the opportunities to engage in typical law enforcement activities—drug busts, breaking up fights, collaring DUIs—but also appreciating the value of the military experience: “I was really kind of caught in the military vibe of...supporting my country and doing what I thought was something that would help a lot of other folks.”

Thirteen years later and looking for a new challenge, Layne applied to cross over to the other side of law enforcement. The paralegal career field accepted him for retraining, and he graduated at the top of his class in 1997. He quickly found



The Berryhills (left to right): MSgt. Layne Berryhill, wife Tracy Berryhill, son Bryce Berryhill, and mother Gloria Berryhill.

his true calling, working in the claims office at his next duty station and then moving up to the headquarters office for Air Force claims. In his new field, he felt like a modern-day Robin Hood: “As a paralegal working in claims, you are truly the only enlisted litigator in the Air Force...our job is to get the money back. And I really...took that very personally.”

That sentiment was evident throughout Master Sergeant Berryhill’s career. One of his most important goals was to bring credit to his father and to the Berryhill family name. In one of his most humbling moments, Sergeant Berryhill and his fellow American Indian service members were honored for their service by the President of the United States. At a 2004 White House breakfast in recognition of the opening of the National Museum of the American Indian, the President acknowledged their attendance and service, and the crowd of attendees gave Layne and sixteen other American Indian service members a standing ovation for their devotion to their country.

Though he never knew his father, Layne sees the imprint he left on his life. But Layne credits his mother with shaping the man he is today: “whatever [she] did got me to where I’m at, and I’m *very* happy with where I’m at.” So is his mother. And his father.

THEIR HERO

Retired Col. John Carey's career is legendary, and his two sons have followed in his footsteps.

In 2007, John Carey was inducted into the Air Command and Staff College's Gathering of Eagles, an airpower "hall of fame." The shortest biography written about him covers a page and is simply a list—a list of achievements and awards for a World War II hero. A Silver Star, two Distinguished Flying Crosses, two Purple Hearts, and thirty—thirty!—Air Medals. A Spitfire, P-47, and P-51 pilot, he flew 181 combat missions in World War II, with 4 ½ air-to-air victories. He also flew 20 combat missions in Korea.

John Carey's most memorable heroic action occurred two days after D-Day, the day of the Normandy invasion during World War II. Only a twenty-four year old major, he had flown four missions on D-Day, and he and his team continued the fast pace over the following weeks. On June 8th, German antiaircraft fire hit one of his wingmen, who crash-landed his damaged plane in enemy territory in France. John made an instant decision to go back for his wingman. He deftly landed his P-47 in the field and opened the canopy, allowing the younger pilot to jump in the one-man cockpit. John immediately took off again, flying the aircraft while sitting in the other pilot's lap! Unfortunately, word of his heroic—but dangerous—rescue made it all the way up the chain, to General Eisenhower. The general called John, berating him for the dangerous landing, but congratulating him on the successful rescue.

John's sons, Steve and Tim, were born many years after their father's heroic service during the wars, but they were always in awe of him. Evidence of the daredevil fighter pilot was still there, though it was expressed in a slightly different way. Steve remembers his father returning from a short cross-country flight, with a gift for his boys hidden in his flight jacket—a puppy. When the boys were thirteen and nine years old, the family moved to Korea, where John served as the Director of Operations for the United Nations Command, Korea. Both boys remember Korea as the place where their fascination for the Air Force grew, as they started to realize the importance of the Air Force mission.

John's father, the boys' grandfather, flew in World War I, and all three of John's brothers were fighter pilots in the Air Force. One brother was shot down over Korea; the other two retired as colonels. Flying and heroism is in the Carey blood. Steve and Tim inherited the family's love of flying and both decided to follow the family path. Steve attended the Air Force Academy and became an F-16 (and later F-15) pilot, and Tim attended Florida State, graduated from Officer Training School, and became a weapon systems officer, flying in both the F-111 and the RAF Tornado. Both are deeply entrenched in the fighter aircraft world, and both are now colonels. Their



Col. Steven Carey's retirement (left to right): Col. Patrick T. (Tim) Carey (brother), Col. John A. Carey (father), and Col. Steven Carey in the Daedalian Room at the Maxwell Air Force Base Officer's Club in June 2006.

opportunity to carry on the family tradition came in the early 1990s, when both flew in support of Operation Desert Storm. After a bombing mission, Steve and Tim even spoke to each other on the radio over the skies of Iraq.

An interesting transition happened for both of them over the last few years—their view of the Air Force and their role in it has shifted. Before his retirement in 2007, Steve served as the commandant of the College of Aerospace Doctrine, Research and Education, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, where doctrine and strategy are developed and taught. His in-depth involvement in the future of his Air Force shifted his focus and enabled him to look at the mission from a broader perspective. The importance of leadership and doctrine to developing the next generation of Air Force officers became central in his understanding of the mission. Likewise, Tim spent several assignments in joint and interagency environments, and his exposure to such fundamentally different approaches to protecting national security changed his viewpoint, giving him new insight on his role in the Air Force. His position in Baghdad in support of the Multi-National Force—Iraq has challenged him even further, and he understands now more than ever the sheer magnitude of effort behind putting bombs on target.

But that is still what the Careys do best.

RIDING THE DRAGON

Bob and LeEllen Coacher married young, had already put themselves through college and law school, and had three young children—the youngest only eight months old—when they decided to join the Air Force. LeEllen, daughter of a retired Air Force major, said the decision was easy: “When I stepped foot on my first assignment base, it was like coming home.”

LeEllen’s father, Russell Hilton, had served as an enlisted radar technician before receiving his commission in 1961 and training as a KC-135 navigator. During the war in Southeast Asia, he volunteered as a controller in the classified “Skyspot” program, using the same radar equipment he worked with as an enlisted man to control B-52 bombing runs over Vietnam. By the end of his third tour in 1970, he was the senior controller in all of Vietnam and, by his count, had controlled drops for some seventy-eight million pounds of bombs.

LeEllen faced her own trial-by-fire, right after the attacks of 9/11. A lieutenant colonel, she was serving as the staff judge advocate, or SJA, for the 325th Fighter Wing at Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida. Tyndall was also home to First Air Force and CONR, or Continental NORAD Region, for whom LeEllen also served as chief SJA. On 9/11, the operations tempo of the tenant units quickly expanded when the U.S. homeland was attacked. Her son, still in high school, did not see her for three weeks, as she worked nonstop to provide counsel to the commander and set up a legal cell, ensuring daily orders to those performing the air defense of the United States were properly written and legally sound.

LeEllen’s husband, Bob Coacher, also served in the Global War on Terror. In 2004, he deployed to Iraq and worked under the Secretary of Defense General Counsel’s Office to help rebuild the Iraqi Ministry of Justice and court system. “Even though it was [only] for four months, I found it the most fulfilling assignment...of my 20 years.” Bob tells stories of bravery and courage, but not just about U.S. military men and women—he talks about the courage of the Iraqi people he worked with. The interpreters and court liaison officers in Iraq “took their lives in their own hands every day, because it was obvious they were working with the coalition, [but] they were doing it for a better Iraq.”

When asked to list their favorite assignments in the Air Force, both Bob and LeEllen said, without hesitation, “All of them.” Despite their successes, Bob and LeEllen were a little wary of the effect the military lifestyle might have on their children—the moves and constant school changes—but they partially credit the military for how wonderfully their children grew up: “All of my children are extremely intelligent and very mature and I think it’s because they’ve had the opportunity to go different places and see different things. I think the Air Force gave them that.”



Capt. Kacey Grannis with her mother, Col. LeEllen Coacher, at the 89th Airlift Wing Annual Awards Banquet at Andrews Air Force Base in 2006.

The Air Force gave their oldest daughter Kacey more than she ever dreamed. As a young girl, Kacey was an avid reader of fantasy stories about heroines and wars and dragons. While watching her first Thunderbirds' performance, however, she was mesmerized, discovering that real flying was far better than any fantasy. Now thirty years old, Kacey Grannis still remembers that moment, when she was only nine, dreaming of the fantasy world she read about where heroes and heroines rode into battle on the backs of dragons, the rulers of the sky. As she stood gazing at the aerial acrobatics, a voice inside said, "That's as close as you can get in this particular universe, kid—have at it." Kacey told her father that day she wanted to fly, and he advised his young daughter to work toward winning a spot at the Air Force Academy.

Kacey went on to graduate from the Academy and, following commissioning, became a helicopter pilot. For Kacey, the feeling of being one with the machine is almost like the mental connection she imagined between the heroines and their dragons. She followed in the footsteps of her father, mother, and grandfather by joining the Air Force, but expresses surprise at the joy she experiences in her job: "I love flying. I love being a helicopter pilot...I cannot believe they pay me for this."

FLYING AND FIGHTING TOGETHER

“My father told me I could join any service I wanted, as long as it was the Air Force.” Ralph “Bucky” Dent graduated from high school in 1978. Unsure what he wanted to do with his life, he attended college for a year while working a part-time job. After being promoted to a desk job, he felt he was meant to do something more with his life. His father, who served in the Marine Corps and then the Army, encouraged him to try military service—as long as it was Air Force service. Following his dad’s advice, in October 1979, Bucky left home for Air Force basic military training.

To get a guaranteed position and choice of his first duty location, Bucky accepted an assignment in general administration—another desk job. He paid his dues for three years and then applied to cross-train into something more exciting—airborne communications. He was assigned to work in a special operations unit right after graduating from technical school and immediately fell in love with the job. Since then, he has been in special operations, mostly flying on the MC-130E Combat Talon aircraft. Back in 1984, when he started training, personnel in airborne communications were still using Morse code to transmit messages to the ground units, because satellite time was precious and given to the highest priority missions first. Technology advanced dramatically over the next twenty-three years, and Bucky is not sure he even remembers Morse code anymore.

He still can not talk much about his missions, but since 1984, Bucky has deployed in support of nearly every Air Force operation, including Just Cause, Uphold Democracy, Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Provide Promise, Deny Flight, Southern Watch, Desert Thunder, Desert Fox, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom. His vast experience finally landed him in the chief of airborne communications position at Air Force Special Operations Command headquarters, back at a desk job. He liked this desk job, especially because he also served as the chief of enlisted aircrew training, which meant he still flew with crews for evaluations occasionally.

During his busy career and in between his many deployments, Bucky managed to find time for family. Bucky’s oldest son, Jason, entered college just as his father had, and he too was unsure what he wanted to do with his life. He talked to an Air Force recruiter, and after discussing it with his father, chose to enter the Air Force Reserves. Jason wanted to fly for special operations as well, and the reserve recruiter guaranteed his first choice job as a loadmaster, assigned to the 711th Special Operations Squadron and flying on the same aircraft as his dad, the MC-130E. After graduating from technical training in 2001, Jason deployed almost immediately in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Any nervousness Jason may have felt about his first combat deployment was eased as soon as he hit the ground. After his unit landed at the deployed location,



CMSgt. Ralph “Bucky” Dent (left) and son TSgt. Jason Dent on ramp of a C-130 at an undisclosed location.

the door opened, and the first person on the aircraft was none other than CMSgt. Bucky Dent, his father. Bucky deployed to the area a few months before Jason arrived, and they worked together for a few more months there, though on separate crews. They could never fly on the same aircraft together because of military regulations, but they did fly on separate aircraft on the same missions and also on the same aircraft, but at different times. Because they were on different crews, their sleep and work schedules did not always line up, but they often went to eat at the dining hall or work out at the gym together. They met up in a deployed location again in 2003, when they both deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Bucky’s wife, Michelle, grew used to the deployment schedule over the years, but Bucky admitted those two “joint” deployments were harder on her, especially since she had two younger children—twins—to care for at home. Worrying about the safety of both Bucky and Jason made watching the nightly news more difficult than ever, but as a former Airman herself, she knew these special operators had the training and skills to complete the mission and come home safely.

As Chief Dent reflects on almost thirty years of service, he is most excited to see what Jason will do in the Air Force for the next twenty or thirty years. Jason hopes to finish his degree and apply for a pilot training slot, so he can pilot the aircraft he flies on now. Whatever Jason chooses to do, his father is very proud of him—Jason is already a decorated veteran. For helping extinguish a fire onboard his aircraft while he was deployed for OIF, Jason received a Distinguished Flying Cross with Valor. His father jokes, “Maybe he’ll let me see it someday.”

A FAMILY FLAG

Sometimes the best traditions begin unintentionally. Through three generations, the Dreyer family passed a U.S. flag from one military member to the next, though no one intended to start a tradition—it just happened.

The son of a World War II and Southeast Asia veteran and the grandson of a World War I veteran, Steven Dreyer served as a helicopter pilot in the Marines and the Air Force for thirty years, retiring as a colonel in 2007. Colonel Dreyer describes the beginning of the flag tradition as a little commonplace—his father was taking down the old U.S. flag that had flown on a pole in front of the family house for years, and Colonel Dreyer asked his father if he could have it.

After that, he began carrying the flag with him on deployments, especially on combat missions. Over the years, the little three-foot by five-foot flag served as the official base flag at several base locations in Bosnia, Sierra Leone, and Romania, but Colonel Dreyer also carried it for another reason—he thought it might come in handy if he was ever shot down on a mission: “Maybe that’d get me picked up a little earlier!” He never told his wife, Solveig, this undisclosed motive, but she knew the small triangle of the folded flag went in his bag every time he packed. He carried the flag for nearly thirty years.

Colonel Dreyer is also the father of two veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom. His daughters serve in the Air Force, proudly carrying on a family tradition, though again, a little unintentionally.

“One day, when they were both in college,” Colonel Dreyer recalled, “we had this conversation where I told them, ‘You know, once you graduate college, you won’t have an ID card anymore.’ After a pause, they both said, ‘What do you mean, I won’t have an ID card?’” Colonel Dreyer laughs and explains his family’s continued service as a natural result of his daughters’ experiences growing up in the military. “As they got older, they saw the pride, the integrity, the friendships, the camaraderie; they saw all the things that the Air Force has to offer, and it’s a hard thing to give up.” His oldest daughter, Kristine, said she enlisted in the Air Force because “It felt like home.”

And so, when Kristine’s turn came to serve her country, as she packed her bags, her father asked if she would carry his flag with her to Iraq. Sensing the quiet march of history, she simply nodded. Kristine deployed to Balad in late 2003 and helped build the base that would later serve as a hub of operations in Iraq. When she returned, she handed the flag back to her father, sure he would need it again for another deployment.

And he did. On a deployment to Iraq in 2005, his last deployment of a long



Col. Steven Dreyer, 4th Expeditionary Air Support Operations Group commander at Camp Victory, Iraq, presents his youngest daughter, 1st Lt. Kathrine Dreyer, 777th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron, with the family flag at Balad Air Base, Iraq. Lieutenant Dreyer is a C-130 Hercules navigator deployed from the 50th Airlift Squadron at Little Rock Air Force Base, Arkansas. (Courtesy photo)

career, Colonel Dreyer passed the flag again. His younger daughter, Kathrine, flew into Balad as a navigator on a C-130—her first deployment, her first time in combat, and her first tactical landing. As she packed her gear to exit the aircraft, she felt two hands on her shoulders, and there stood her father, holding the same small U.S. flag she had watched him pack so often.

Kathrine should have been surprised—her father was stationed in Baghdad, not Balad—but somehow she was not. In their family, the overlapping paths of their lives of service had become normal, almost natural. Still, her father’s surprise appearance to pass the family heirloom to his youngest daughter during this, his last and her first deployment, will remain a poignant illustration of this family’s unintentional tradition.



SSgt. Kristine Dreyer, Air Force ISR Agency Public Affairs, and her son Jacob prepare for a Veteran’s Day parade in Wichita, Kansas, November 2005. (Courtesy photo)

STARS AND LEGENDS

Terry Walter, home on vacation from Louisiana State University, stood with her father on the flightline at Homestead Air Force Base. Her father, the wing commander of the 31st Tactical Fighter Wing, shook the hands and returned the salutes of his troops as their unit, the 308th Tactical Fighter Squadron, headed off to Thailand during the war in Southeast Asia. Terry took in the scene: the pilots climbing into their F-4E aircraft, the maintenance and support personnel loading onto the waiting C-141, and the families hugging and waving and shedding a few tears as their loved ones left for war. They did not know if they would see each other again, but they knew what they were doing was important and they were intensely proud. Terry grew up in the Air Force, but that moment struck her, and she thought, “these people that do this are very special...this is a very special way to spend your life.”

When Terry first entered LSU in 1970, women were not allowed to participate in the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps. After her graduation in 1973, Terry decided to apply for Officer Training School, and she was accepted. Her father, Col. Lon Walter, administered the oath of office to his daughter before she boarded the plane bound for San Antonio, Texas. Terry reported for training in typical civilian clothing, which at that time happened to be a fairly short skirt and fairly high platform shoes. As she climbed off the bus at Lackland Air Force Base, the drill sergeant glanced at her and bellowed, “Right FACE.” Terry attempted to turn quickly to her right, but pivoting on platform shoes is tricky, and she ended up face down instead.

Terry’s successful career quickly blotted out her inauspicious entry to active duty. An aspiring lawyer, she hoped to enter the Air Force’s Funded Legal Education Program, in which the Air Force would pay for her law degree, but the program required applicants to have at least a few years of active duty experience. In the meantime, the Air Force assigned her to avionics maintenance, where she surprisingly found her calling. “I got to [be] hands-on, fixing jets, being in the middle of the mission, and the rest was history...that truly was love at first sight!” Dismissing all thoughts of law school, Terry thrived in her career field.

In 1976, the Air Force Academy selected her to serve as an Air Training Officer for the first female cadets at the Academy. Humbled by the honor, 1st Lt. Terry Walter’s goal as an ATO was to help ensure the cadets in the first co-ed class were trained like all other cadets, that they “got all the good deals, all the bad deals, and weren’t treated any differently.”

As a maintenance officer, Terry entered a career field traditionally held by men, and it never occurred to her that she needed to be intimidated. She found that if she worked hard and knew her job, she was accepted. Also at that time,



Col. Alonzo Walter, HQ PACAF/ADO, swears in Terry Walter at Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii.

having a family was just beginning to be in the “art of the possible” for Air Force women. Her mother, Doris, was a brand new lieutenant when she met and married Terry’s father. Before she had two years of service, she found out she was pregnant with Terry, and at that time, pregnant women had to resign their commission and leave the service. Terry still grew up as an Air Force “brat,” and the family moved all over the country as her father’s career progressed. Terry cherished her upbringing and knew that when she had children, she wanted to raise them the same way, and thanks to a change in Air Force policy, she could share this life of service when she started her own family.

Terry was a lieutenant colonel assigned to Headquarters Pacific Air Forces in

Hawaii when she met another lieutenant colonel on staff. They began dating, and Terry mentioned him the next time she spoke to her parents. When she said she was dating “some guy” named Don Gabreski, her father gasped, “You’re dating someone named Gabreski? Is he related to THE Colonel Gabreski?” Col. Francis S. “Gabby” Gabreski was a fighter pilot ace in not one, but two wars, World War II and the Korean War. When Terry’s father was a second lieutenant in Korea, Colonel Gabreski was his wing commander. He was also the father of Lt. Col. Don Gabreski, the man Terry Walter was dating and would later marry. Don is proud of his family’s legacy, but humble, too. He is not the type to boast or use his last name to his advantage. But Terry later had a talk with Don about being a little more forthcoming about things like having a famous war hero for a father.

Terry finally had her dream: the career she loved and the family she had always wanted. Don and Terry married in 1989 and later had two sons, Matthew and Mark. Terry’s family—her mom and dad, Don, and her sons—have always been part of her promotions. They pinned on her stars to brigadier general in 1999, three years later pinned her second star, and when she was promoted to lieutenant general in 2005, the whole family gathered around her to pin her third star.

And Lieutenant General Gabreski believes that recognizing the significance of service to your country and a deep passion for the Air Force are keys to her success: “If you’re fulfilled and you’re committed to a higher calling, you’ll work even harder to do a better job. And the better the job you do, the more people want to give you more responsibility, and so it was sort of like a self-fulfilling prophecy.” She says her two biggest accomplishments are her sons. She is grateful she still has the privilege of serving her country and hopes her sons will see through the example of their parents and grandparents how important service is. And she hopes they may choose someday to serve in the Air Force, to continue in “the family business.”



Capt. Terry Walter (left), Mrs. Doris Walter, and Brig. Gen. Alonzo Walter, USAF (Ret.), during Captain Walter's Pentagon Astra Tour in 1979.

TOP COP

Don Reeves graduated from high school on June 5, 1944, the day before D-Day. Only 17 years old, he wanted to join the war effort but was too young to enlist, so he worked at a rubber factory until he was drafted into the Army in 1945. Discharged after the war, Don returned to college, where he decided to join the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps program, figuring he would rather be in the Air Force than the Army.

He proudly served as a security policeman in the Air Force for over thirty years, retiring as a colonel in 1981. His family lived the uncommonly common life of military dependents—moving every few years, living in strange foreign countries, always leaving schools and friends behind. When Don spent a year in Southeast Asia, his wife and children lived at an Army camp in Kansas set up for families of deployed service members. Later in his career, Mary took care of their six children for two years while Don served in Japan. Mary deftly performed the all-consuming role of wife, mother, and father many times during her husband's career.

Don and Mary felt strongly about the Air Force and asked each of their children to give ROTC a try. All six attended Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Their oldest daughter, Ann, knew the military life was not for her—she served her time growing up! The two older sons were commissioned as Marines at graduation. The other three children, Mary Kay, Nancy, and Joe, were commissioned into the Air Force, just like their dad.

Joe's first semester of ROTC confirmed it for him—he thoroughly enjoyed the military lifestyle, and he knew he would make a career of it. Of the children who joined ROTC, Nancy was the least convinced. She agreed to give it a try, but she was pretty certain she was not going to like it. The ROTC detachment called to talk to Nancy about her scholarship one day when she was in class at high school, so her father took the call. The official explained that Nancy's chosen major, business, would not qualify her for the technical scholarship; she needed to enroll in mathematics or computer science. Don thought his daughter would like computer science better, so he gave them the go-ahead to change her major. Nancy was furious with her dad, but her anger quickly subsided, and she came to enjoy both ROTC and her degree program. After her commissioning in 1984, the communications officer worked in several staff positions, but she found her most rewarding experience came from her time as squadron commander, when she was responsible for deploying people into combat and taking care of those left behind. Eventually she became a vice wing commander—Col. Nancy Wharton may have felt pushed into service, but she obviously found her calling.

Unlike her sister, Mary Kay knew she wanted to serve in the Air Force by the time she was in eighth grade. A talented basketball player, she attended Miami



October 31, 2005: the Reeves family at the pin-on of daughter Mary Kay Hertog to the rank of brigadier general. CMSgt. Herman Hertog, Brig. Gen. Mary Kay Hertog, and parents Mary and Don Reeves.

University on dual scholarships for basketball and ROTC. She wanted to be a security policeman, like her father, and though she remembers him trying to talk her out of it, he tells it differently. He witnessed firsthand the attitudes of high-ranking people in the career field, and they were not happy about women serving in their specialty. But Mary Kay was undeterred. Before she went on active duty, Mary Kay met her husband, Herm Hertog. Now married almost twenty-nine years, the two had impressive careers. He was chosen for very selective assignments throughout his career, once serving in the only enlisted medical position at the White House. Although he can not talk about it, he's also extremely proud of time he served with special forces. In 2003, CMSgt. Hertog retired as the command chief of the 59th Medical Wing at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

Mary Kay made a name for herself early in her career when she turned a failing unit into an outstanding one. Proving herself time and again, Mary Kay was chosen for squadron command, group command, and then wing command of the 37th Training Wing, one of the largest training wings in the Air Force. From there, she was appointed to the most prestigious position in her career field—the “top cop” job, director of security forces. Looking back on almost thirty years, Brig. Gen. Mary Kay Hertog is grateful for the opportunity to command so many times and hopes she has been able to affect her people in a positive way. Her goal now is to improve the quality of life for all security forces Airmen, and she is honored to serve them.

Don and Mary Reeves are very proud of all their children. Don is especially proud that Mary Kay followed in his footsteps, rising to the highest level of their shared career field.

THE OTHER ONE

Joanna Hetsko was “the other one.” Not that it really bothered her. In 1991, she left her twin brother, Josh, to attend college at Texas A&M, the “Aggies.” When she reported in to the Aggie Corps, they had the nerve to ask, “But where’s Josh?”

“I’m the Hetsko you got,” Joanna retorted. The Aggies would soon appreciate that.

Josh and Joanna Hetsko, fraternal twins, were born in 1973. At the time, their father, Ed, was a first sergeant in the Air Force, and Cynthia, their mother, was a civilian nurse who also served as a flight nurse in the Air Force Reserves. Ed spent most of his career in the crypto-maintenance career field, but his favorite duty by far was also the most difficult—first sergeant. Ed retired as a master sergeant in 1981, when the twins were eight years old.

Ed, who had a private pilot’s license, took Josh and Joanna up in a plane before they were four years old. Within minutes of takeoff, Joanna was asleep, but Josh was on the edge of his seat. From that moment, Josh knew he wanted to fly. When he was in high school, the family moved near the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. Ed and Cynthia took the twins to the Academy football games and invited cadets to the house for dinner, and the more Josh learned about the Academy, the more he dreamed of attending. “It was kind of like falling in love,” says Josh, and once a Hetsko sets his or her mind to a task, it will be accomplished. Today, Josh, a graduate of the Air Force Academy, flies F-16s.

Josh’s achievements paint an impressive portrait, but he describes himself in the context of family—his wife, Nicole, and their three children (twin girls and a boy) are obviously paramount to him. Even his career has taken on new meaning: “It’s not about 20 years and a retirement; it’s not about flying—it’s really about doing what I love, which is the Air Force. And I actually love the Air Force even more than I love flying.” An insightful sentiment from a self-professed fighter jock.

What about “the other one”? Courted by the Air Force Academy, West Point, and several other colleges, Joanna chose to attend Texas A&M on an ROTC scholarship. Leaving her twin brother for the first time in her life was probably the hardest thing she had ever done, but she was finally her own person. Flying was not for Joanna, although as one of the top cadets in her Aggie Corps, Joanna had her pick of career fields. While searching for her calling, Joanna remembered the people her father used to work with as a first sergeant—special agents from the Office of Special Investigations. She interviewed with OSI, and was selected from hundreds of applicants as one of only seven officers that year to join the pro-



Twins Joanna and Josh Hetsko, both second lieutenants in the Air Force, in 1996.

gram immediately after commissioning. She was commissioned in 1996—by her twin brother.

In 2002, following a successful stint as an OSI detachment commander, she was selected to pursue a master's degree in forensic science at George Washington University. While studying at GW, she won a highly competitive fellowship in forensic medicine through the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology; during her fellowship, she worked with the Armed Forces Office of the Medical Examiner, attending numerous autopsies and conducting research. After graduation, Joanna moved to Tokyo, Japan, and became OSI's forensics consultant for all of the Pacific theater—from Japan to Korea to Guam to Hawaii. When she was introduced to the three-star general in command of all U.S. forces in Japan, he instantly understood her title: "So you're CSI-Tokyo!" Joanna will quickly explain that her job was really nothing like the popular crime-solving television show—she triaged cases: advising agents, performing preliminary tests on samples, and determining which cases need to be referred to labs for further testing. Agents throughout the region consulted her on their cases. Joanna found her most rewarding moments came when she was able to examine the facts of a case and determine a suspect had not committed the crime—thereby clearing an innocent person's name and saving that person's future.

Now a reservist, Joanna is not sure what the future holds—her time is consumed with her two young boys. Her husband is also an agent with OSI, and Joanna cannot imagine being disconnected from the Air Force: "I've never not had an ID card!"

THREE GENERATIONS, ONE DREAM

Bobby remembers riding his bike out to the flightline when he was only eight years old, watching the trainer aircraft take off and land at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas, and thinking, “One day, I want to do that.” Today, as the third generation of the Hogan family, he is.

This family journey began in 1942, when Robert J. Hogan, Bobby’s grandfather, signed up to fly. He studied aeronautical engineering in college for two years, but was anxious to try his hand at the P-38s he watched flying overhead in the San Fernando Valley, patrolling to protect the coast from submarines or Japanese aircraft. After completing basic and advanced flying training, he thought for sure he would get his chance in the fighter, but he became an instructor instead. After more training and a year and a half teaching advanced flying and acrobatics to U.S. and Chinese pilots, his chance came—but still not in fighters. In 1944, as the tenor of World War II changed, the United States decided it needed more bombers. So Robert Hogan, who to that point had only flown single-engine trainer aircraft, was dispatched to Roswell, New Mexico, to learn how to fly the B-29—a four-engine long-range heavy bomber.

In August of 1945, Robert Hogan was sitting in San Francisco, waiting with his B-29 crew to report to the Pacific theater, when Japan surrendered. He and his crew were reassigned to work on classified projects, but after a year or two, as the military began drawing down forces after the war, he was discharged. He kept flying—his own airplane, trying to make a living—and was ready when the military needed him back only two years later. He and his wife and son shipped out to Wiesbaden, Germany, where he flew C-54s in the Berlin Airlift. “I was there three months before I saw Germany,” says Robert, “everything was just the runway at Wiesbaden and the runway at Berlin!” When the Berlin Airlift ended and the military again did not need all the pilots it had, Robert was reassigned to base maintenance because of his experience in construction. He continued to move up, eventually becoming the head base engineer at several bases. In 1968, he retired with twenty-six years of service in the Air Force.

Robert’s son, Mike Hogan, was sixteen years old when his father retired, and he already knew he wanted to follow in his father’s footsteps. He enjoyed moving around as a child and appreciated the benefits of service, and he wanted to do something proactive to protect the freedoms he enjoyed. When he graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1973, however, the Air Force was not hiring. Circumstances changed by 1978, and Robert Hogan commissioned his son, Mike, as a second lieutenant in the Air Force. Mike wanted to follow in his father’s footsteps—to fly—but his eyesight was not 20/20, and at the time, there was no waiver for that standard. Mike entered what he thought of as the next best thing—the security police career field, which he quickly grew to love. His service



Three generations: father, Col. Mike Hogan, and grandfather, retired Lt. Col. Robert Hogan, pin gold second lieutenant bars on newly commissioned 2d Lt. Bobby Hogan in 2006.

took him and his family to England, Germany, Turkey, Spain, and Saudi Arabia, and he served as the air attaché in Ecuador for three years. Though he had many important force protection roles and was a commander in several tours, one of his most rewarding assignments is this, his last: opening a new Reserve Officer Training Corps detachment at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. In 2008, after thirty years of service in the Air Force, Mike Hogan will retire, but, in his view, being able to influence the next generation of Air Force officers is the best way to go out.

The next generation is his son, Bobby. In 2006, Mike commissioned his son as a second lieutenant in the Air Force, just as his father had commissioned him. Bobby's father and grandfather pinned "butter bars" on him, the third Hogan to serve his country. The Air Force selected Bobby for navigator training, and he hopes to one day fly like his grandfather—but he is honored to serve his country in any capacity. He and his wife, Corin, know the next few years will be difficult, with survival school, training, airframe school, and more training, but they are ready for it. Bobby hopes to spend his entire career—thirty years if he can—in the Air Force, serving as his father did, and his father's father before him.

SON OF A LEGEND

How does a young lieutenant, a pilot in the Air Force, make a name for himself when his father is a famous war hero who is still on active duty?

“Nobody could say...what happened to me was because of my dad...the thing about fighter business is, you can’t fake it—you gotta deliver!” And Danny James did deliver—two combat tours in Southeast Asia, two Distinguished Flying Crosses, seven Air Medals, and three stars—he retired as a lieutenant general, the director of the United States Air National Guard.

Danny’s father was Daniel “Chappie” James, Jr., the first African-American to achieve the rank of four-star general in the Air Force. A legend, Chappie James was a renowned speaker and civil rights pioneer. To Danny, his father was just a dad—his authority figure, yes, but not someone he aspired to be like. In the early 1950s, Chappie James was the squadron commander of the F-94 unit at Otis Air Force Base, Massachusetts. In the eyes of eight-year-old Danny, Chappie James was an impressive authority figure, but Danny wanted to be like the pilots his father commanded. All the young lieutenants and captains in the squadron seemed to have movie star looks. They lived in nice houses on Cape Cod, and several of them drove Oldsmobile Starfire convertibles, named after the jets they flew. Danny would finish his paper route and head straight for the flightline, to the squadron to hang out with the pilots while they played cards or ping pong or played their guitars. He thought they were so cool, but they were down-to-earth, too, and treated him like one of the guys. Danny loved being there when the pilots scrambled and went running out the door, jumping into the aircraft and hitting the afterburners. That was the life, and he knew that was what he wanted to do someday.

Danny also spent a lot of time on the road with his father. As a squadron commander, Chappie had a full schedule, but it was important to him to spend time with Danny. So Danny would grab his homework, a pillow, and a blanket and stretch out across the backseat of the car as his father drove them to one of his many speaking engagements—the Boy Scouts, the Rotary Club, Kiwanis, or town council meetings. Sitting quietly in the back, Danny would absorb everything at these meetings, watching as his father grew into a powerful orator. Danny soon realized that the pilots in his dad’s squadron, whom he admired so much, idolized his father in the same way. From that time on, he began to watch his father more closely, soaking up the example of one of the most powerful leaders of his time.

Danny went on to become a distinguished graduate of the ROTC program at the University of Arizona and was commissioned by his father, then a colonel, in 1968. After completing pilot training the next year, he deployed as a forward air



Lt. Daniel James III receives the first of his two Distinguished Flying Crosses from his father, Brig. Gen. Daniel "Chappie" James, Jr. The younger James served two combat tours in Southeast Asia.

controller to Southeast Asia (SEA) for his first combat tour. The same year, his father took command of Wheelus Air Base in Libya, just before the military coup in which Muammar Qaddafi seized control of Libya's government. Danny remembers reading about his father in the newspaper: "I was in Southeast Asia as a butter bar...and [Dad's] having a standoff with Qaddafi at the main gate!" Danny returned to SEA for a second combat tour as an F-4 aircraft commander. He left the region a highly decorated combat veteran—earning two Distinguished Flying Crosses and seven Air Medals—and his skills did not go unnoticed. Selected to join the first Aggressor squadron at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, Danny trained in enemy fighter tactics with an elite group of pilots—a veritable "who's who" of future Air Force leaders.

While flying in Red Flag exercises with the Aggressors, Danny met many pilots from the Air National Guard, who participated with active duty units in the exercises. To him, they seemed to have the best of both worlds: they flew for commercial airlines, but still got to be fighter pilots. In 1978, the year his father retired, Capt. Danny James left active duty service in the Air Force and joined the Air National Guard in Texas. Though he was also hired to fly for a national air-

line, he found that “the airline [business] was very unstable...but the Guard was always there for me.” His distinguished career in the Guard took him much further than he expected, and he steadily rose through the ranks, serving as a unit commander, group commander, and vice wing commander. In 1995, he was scheduled to take command of the wing, when he was selected by then-Governor George W. Bush to head the Texas National Guard. He was the first Air National Guardsman to hold the post—usually an officer from the large Army National Guard contingent in Texas ran the state’s military forces. During his seven-year tenure, he obtained his first and second stars, and earned his third star in 2002 when he became the director of the Air National Guard—the top position in the country.

“My expectation when I got out of the Air Force and went to the Guard, I thought I may be an operations officer, maybe a squadron commander, and then retire...I never envisioned being a vice wing commander, a wing commander—I skipped that, went right to Adjutant General! I never envisioned necessarily being a general officer. But the good Lord, and maybe my father’s spirit, had other designs for me.”

In 2006, Lt. Gen. Daniel James III retired after thirty-eight years of service. Some would take time to reflect on their achievements, but he and his wife Dana remained focused on the future. The retired general is still busy, working in consulting, but he said, “the focus, my center of gravity, has been our little boy, Daniel Steven.” A bright three-year-old who can already identify different fighter aircraft, Daniel is growing up with the legacy of two heroes in his family, his father and his grandfather. If young Daniel Steven wants to join the Air Force or the Guard some day, his father will certainly encourage him. But Danny James never lived in the shadow of his father, and he expects his son to choose his own path, too.



Lt. Gen. Daniel James III at his retirement ceremony on May 10, 2006, at Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, D.C.

TAKING CARE OF FAMILY

“I love being the son of two command chiefs...my parents were dedicated and loved what they did...the challenge I presented myself was to live up to the example that they’ve created.” 1st Lt. Michael Lane takes great pride in the legacy his parents gave him, and he is well on his way to writing the next chapter.

Michael Lane serves in the same unit his father, Mike, served in ten years ago. He is a navigator on the EC-130 aircraft flown by the 43rd Electronic Combat Squadron, where his father was a chief master sergeant and a maintenance superintendent in 1998. At that same time, his mother, Pam, a soon-to-be chief, was the maintenance superintendent for the sister squadron, the 41st ECS. As Mike said: “There’s two Compass Call squadrons in the world, and they’re both at [Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona], and I was the maintenance superintendent of one, and she was the maintenance superintendent of the other...that’s the best that the two squadrons have gotten along in a long time!”

The younger Michael Lane is leaving his own mark on the squadron, already earning praise for the unit during an inspection for his work in the standards and evaluations shop. He is hoping to be known for his own skills, and not only as “Command Chief Lane’s son,” although he is very proud of his parents, who both served as command chiefs. From 2003 to 2005, his father served as the command chief for Twelfth Air Force at Davis-Monthan—thus Lieutenant Lane’s notoriety; he arrived at the base in June 2006, less than a year after his father’s retirement at thirty years of service. His mother also served as a command chief, for the 31st Fighter Wing at Aviano Air Base, Italy, from 2005 to 2007 and has twenty-seven years of service so far. Though Michael knows his parents want success for him, he never felt pressured to join the Air Force or live up to a certain expectation. He tried the Reserve Officer Training Corps for a semester at the University of Arizona, but he preferred the smaller school he ultimately graduated from in Illinois, Knox College, where he had better access to professors and smaller classes. It looked like the Air Force was not in Michael’s future, though it was a cherished part of his childhood.

In fact, despite Michael’s upbringing, his parents actually credit a five-month period in his adult life with his decision to join the Air Force. In late 2002, the two chief master sergeants were tasked to deploy—at the same time. Michael, who had finished school earlier that year and moved to Chicago, was twenty-two years old and working and living on his own. His parents called him for a small favor: leave his job, leave Chicago, and move to Cannon Air Force Base to take care of his fourteen-year-old sister, Stephanie, while they were gone. Michael, who Pam says has always been mature beyond his age, moved to Cannon during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend in 2002. Two weeks later, his parents left.



Left to right: Lt. Gen. Randall Mark Schmidt, Twelfth Air Force Commander; 2d Lt. Michael Lane; sister Stephanie Lane; brother Sgt. Matthew Lane; mother CMSgt. Pamela Lane; and father CMSgt. Michael Lane, Twelfth Air Force Command Chief, during his retirement at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, July 22, 2005.

During those five months, Michael played mom and dad for Stephanie and managed his parents' finances as well. Whenever Michael needed anything, Col. Robert Yates, the wing commander, was the first in line to help. Mike and Pam credit him with influencing Michael's decision more than they did. Pam said the experience really opened Michael's eyes to "how we are an Air Force family first and foremost, and that we take care of each other, beyond what anybody who doesn't live it really knows." Before his parents returned, and with the help of Colonel Yates, Michael submitted his application for Officer Training School and was soon accepted. Five months back at home, caring for his sister, forced Michael to grow up fast, and he realized he wanted to be part of the Air Force family—again.

INTO THE WILD BLUE YONDER

In 2010, when Anthony graduates from the Air Force Academy, the Lorenzini family will become the first family to have three generations graduate from the prestigious institution. No pressure, Anthony.

Anthony, a sophomore at the Academy, has a lot to live up to. His father, Ed Lorenzini, graduated from the Academy in 1984 and retired in 2007 after a distinguished career in acquisitions. Anthony's grandfather, Dino Lorenzini, graduated from the Academy in 1962 and became a pioneer in Air Force space and missile technology.

Dino Lorenzini set the standard for his family. The valedictorian of his high school and later a Rhodes Scholar nominee, Dino excelled in academics. After graduation from the Academy, the Air Force sent Dino directly to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he earned master's and doctoral degrees in aeronautical engineering. In between his two degree programs, he spent three years at the Inertial Guidance Test Facility at Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico, where he was able to test his theories. After completing his Ph.D. he went back to the Academy to the Frank J. Seiler Research Lab, with an enticing and challenging assignment. The lab's aeronautical department gave him a large empty room and a big budget, and he built a state-of-the-art testing facility and research program. At his next assignment, Dino helped develop equipment for and launch the first-generation GPS (global positioning system) satellites. Dino took a short break from science and engineering to attend and then teach at the Naval War College, but he jumped right back into the field to work with directed energy weapons. Dino worked first at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency and then at the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization, which also became known as Star Wars, since its mission was to develop space- and ground-based systems to protect the United States from nuclear attack.

After his retirement in 1984, Dino opened his own commercial satellite company and continues to assist the Air Force using the extensive training he acquired during his career. He consults with the Academy on their cadet satellite program and helped build their third satellite, FalconSat-3.

Dino's son, Ed, inherited his father's love of science, and graduated from the Academy with a degree in engineering management. He started out in aeronautical engineering, like his dad, but said, "that got harder faster than I got smarter...so I switched to engineering management." Over the course of his twenty-year career, Ed managed exciting programs, such as the development of the Joint Direct Attack Munition, which converts unguided bombs into "smart" bombs through an inertial guidance system that relies on a GPS control unit—the same things his father pioneered in the lab. In the early 1990s, he managed the



Father, retired Lt. Col. Ed Lorenzini, and grandfather, retired Col. Dino Lorenzini, with Air Force Academy Cadet Anthony Lorenzini at the Air Force Memorial in 2006.

program that developed the upper G-suit, a complement to the long-used lower G-suit, to combat pilot fatigue and blackout in higher G (higher acceleration) aircraft like the F-15 and F-16.

Ed credits his successful career to his wife's support—she left the Academy as a sophomore to marry him when he graduated. Also from a military family, Elizabeth dreamed of becoming an astronaut and studied the Russian language so she would be prepared for an assignment on the space station some day. Elizabeth instead found a higher calling: raising and teaching four children. She home-schooled Anthony and his brother and sisters—no small step for any mother. From her, Anthony found a love and talent for the Russian language, learning to speak fluent Russian before graduating from high school. From his father, Anthony found a love of the Air Force; choosing to attend the Academy was natural, and his goal is to one day fly the new premier fighter jet, the F-22.

In 2007, Dino, Ed, and Anthony attended the dedication of the new Air Force Memorial in Washington, D.C. Like the three spires rising into the air, the Lorenzinis have left their mark on the Air Force. Both his father and grandfather expect Anthony to surpass their achievements, having no doubt that he will be the highest of the three spires.

HER NEW EXTENDED FAMILY

“My father used to tell me stories about the war all the time,” says Duong Ngo. The one that breaks her heart the most is one she has heard over and over. Her father and his friend were on a mission together in the war when they were attacked. As ordnance exploded around them, her father was knocked unconscious for a few moments. His friend, terrified for the other’s safety, went running toward him, his helmet gone, unheeding of the danger all around. As he reached Duong’s father and grasped his arm to make sure he was okay, more bombs exploded, and Duong’s father awoke to find his friend dead.

SrA. Duong Ngo’s father, Xe Ngo, served in the South Vietnamese Army from 1968 to 1975. He told Duong of his experiences in the war every day, and she remembers how fondly he referred to those he fought with, side-by-side, as though they were all brothers in a huge extended family. After the war was over, Xe returned, destitute, to his wife and family in Ben Tre, a small farming town in the far south of Vietnam. They struggled there until 1993, when they emigrated from Vietnam to the United States and settled in Amarillo, Texas.

“It was hard when we first got there...before we moved to the States, my dad sent us kids to the city to learn English, but it didn’t work well.” Duong was only eight years old—she and her family left all their extended family behind and moved to a land where they did not speak the language nor understand the culture. Duong says it got easier with time, and in ninth grade, she found her calling. From the first day she entered the Air Force Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps at her high school, she knew she wanted to join the Air Force. Her father’s stories had always inspired her, and she longed to be part of the family, the brotherhood he described—and she found it in the Air Force. She participated in JROTC all four years of high school, but she wanted to be an officer in the Air Force, so after graduation, she enrolled in college. After two years of college, Duong realized she needed to earn her citizenship before she could be commissioned. Though she applied for citizenship when she turned eighteen in 2003, she encountered every bureaucratic roadblock imaginable—her name was spelled wrong, then her name on her social security card had to be changed—one problem after another. When she realized this would not be a quick process, she decided to go ahead and enlist in the Air Force, so she could start doing what she really loved.

Though Duong’s father served his country proudly, Duong knew he would not be excited to hear his daughter was following in his footsteps; he would not want her to endure the things he did. She waited to tell her parents she had enlisted until the week she left for basic training. In 2004, Duong went to Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, for basic training and technical school to learn the supply business, and then received orders to report to her first assignment, Whiteman Air Force Base,



SrA. Duong Ngo at Ali Al Salem Air Base, Kuwait, March 2006, deployed in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. SrA. Duong Ngo's father, Xe Ngo, in a South Vietnamese Army uniform. The photo was taken in 1971, when Xe was twenty-three years old and a lieutenant. He was promoted to captain in 1973.

Missouri. Duong was nervous: “I didn’t know where Whiteman was—I didn’t even know where Missouri was!” When she arrived, she was assigned to work on the flightline, where she needed a security clearance to do her job. Since she was not yet a citizen, she had no security clearance. She bounced around from shop to shop until she finally found a place where she could work and train without a clearance. Duong spent two years in the mobility bags section, where she was responsible for inventorying and maintaining all the deployment gear for the base.

Finally in 2005, after waiting two years, the United States granted Duong citizenship, and she was able to realize another goal—to deploy. She deployed to Kuwait, and though she performed the same work she did at home, she loved every minute of it. What amazed her was how people from all different walks of life joined together to accomplish the mission. In fact, that is what Duong says she loves best about the Air Force: “Everyone can work as one, and you can be a leader or you can be a follower, but at the end of day, you get the job done.”

Duong loves her new extended Air Force family and hopes to be part of it for a long time. She is working toward completing her bachelor’s degree, in hopes of achieving the goal she set in ninth grade: becoming a commissioned officer in the United States Air Force. And though her father worries about his daughter—especially since he has seen war firsthand—Duong hopes he is as proud of her service as she is of his.

THE FAMILY FIRE

As a young boy, Tony Rabonza used to ride his bicycle to the sandlot to play baseball every afternoon. Halfway down the street, he would always slow down as he passed the fire station, pausing to drink in the gleaming chrome, the fiery red metal, the quiet intensity. It always seemed like a perfectly still scene, but it was buzzing underneath with an unseen energy, ready to explode into action at a moment's notice, with a clanging of the fire bell.

As he grew into a man, he never lost the fascination with the fire station. When he was nineteen years old, he tried to sign up as a firefighter, but the county would not hire anyone under the age of twenty-one. Disappointed but not defeated, Tony looked for another route. His father had served in the Merchant Marine during World War II and always encouraged Tony to serve in the military. Tony was not making much money as a mechanic, and he knew the military would at least make sure he stayed fed, so he thought signing up might be a way to kill two birds with one stone—make a little money and train to be a firefighter. But the Marines didn't have firefighters; the Army didn't have firefighters. The Navy said they have firefighters—everyone on board a ship is a firefighter! Finally, Tony found the Air Force, the only service at the time with a dedicated firefighting career field.

After joining in April 1977, Tony's main duty was, in firefighter-speak, to "put the wet stuff on the red stuff," and the Air Force invested a lot of time and money in training him and his colleagues to be a premier firefighting team. Along the way, Tony gained more than he ever imagined—a professional education in leadership, diversity of experience, and rewards and challenges at each assignment. Over his twenty-six year career, Tony watched the cyclical changes in the Air Force, but one thing never seemed to change—the high-caliber personnel and the consistent excellence in everything they did. He credits his rise to the rank of chief master sergeant in part to the many outstanding people he worked with and to his wife, Kim.

Known as "Chief" to everyone except his family, Tony tried hard to never bring his work home. His sons, Nick and Brandon, and his daughter, Kristin, knew Dad was a fire chief, but they never knew much about his job. By the time the family moved to Texas in 2001, both Brandon and Nick had graduated from high school, and Kristin had married and moved to New Mexico. Shortly after the move, Nick announced he was joining the Air Force. Tony and Kim tried hard to encourage their children to find their own path, so they were a little surprised by this. Nick was facing the same problem his father had faced twenty-five years earlier: he wanted to be a firefighter, but fire departments would not hire him until he turned twenty-one. He decided his dad's idea to join the Air Force might work for him, too.



Brandon Rabonza, with his parents, CMSgt. Tony and Kim Rabonza, at his graduation from the DoD Fire Academy in 2005.

In 2002, Nick enlisted and headed off to basic training, and then to the Department of Defense Fire Academy at Goodfellow Air Force Base, Texas, where his father was the academy superintendent. After graduation, Nick moved to Ramstein Air Base, Germany, to start his firefighting career. Two years later, his younger brother, Brandon, arrived at the base in Germany, but not as an Airman. While in Texas, Brandon married Adel, an active duty Airman, and moved to Ramstein with her when she received an assignment there.

Nick was quick to show his brother around the base—and the fire station—after he arrived. Brandon always said he would never join the Air Force—he felt he served his time just growing up in a military family! As Brandon spent more and more time with his brother and the other firefighters, however, he realized he really wanted to follow in his father's and brother's footsteps. In late 2005, Brandon headed off to basic training and the Fire Academy and then back to Ramstein Air Base, to start his own firefighting career.

For Tony, nothing could make him more proud than to see his children succeed, in whatever they do. But he does admit he stands a little taller, knowing he and his wife gave their sons the desire to answer a noble calling, to serve as firefighters in his Air Force.

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

Brent Ragsdale is the third Air Force master sergeant in his family. Both his grandfather, William Ragsdale, an aircraft mechanic, and his uncle, Stephen Ragsdale, who worked in the missiles career field, retired as master sergeants in the United States Air Force. His father, Bill Ragsdale, also served in the Air Force for four years. Brent grew up in Colorado Springs, in the shadow of the Air Force Academy. He considered joining the Air Force, but after high school, a college offered Brent a scholarship to play football, and he accepted. After a few semesters, he still could not decide on a major, and he wanted more than anything to marry his high school sweetheart, Tracy, but needed a way to support her. So, following in the footsteps of his father, his uncle, and his grandfather, he enlisted in the Air Force in 1990.

He trained in supply and got lucky—his first assignment was to Hawaii. He and Tracy quickly began to appreciate all of the advantages of Air Force service, the opportunities for travel and education, and simply “fell in love with the lifestyle.” At their next assignment, Ellsworth Air Force Base, South Dakota, Brent’s best friend talked to him about the possibility of cross-training. He was a paralegal, and thought the career field would offer Brent some new challenges and help prepare him for life after the Air Force. Brent applied, and after an intensive interview process, his package was approved. After retraining in his new field, he and Tracy moved to Mississippi and then to Alaska, where he completed both a bachelor’s degree in paralegal studies and a master’s degree in human resource management.

In 2005, Brent jumped at an opportunity to deploy. He went to Iraq for six months, which meant he missed the holidays with his wife and two sons, Zachary and Nathan, but he was excited about the work. As a deployed paralegal in Baghdad, Brent coordinated detainee movement with court schedules. After receiving a list of cases scheduled for the Central Criminal Courts of Iraq (CCCI), Brent researched where each defendant, or detainee, was being held and arranged for them to appear for their court date. A few times, he traveled with the attorneys to the courts downtown and assisted with the prosecution of cases. For most of his deployed time, he ran the office of all the paralegals—Air Force, Army, and Navy—assigned to the CCCI.

For the entire six months, Brent and his teammates worked every day, all day, with the exception of one half day off each week. They usually started at 8 a.m., finishing at 9 p.m. or later, when most of the guys either hit the gym or hit the sack, but Brent hit the books. Despite his heavy workload, Brent set a goal for himself while he was deployed: to study every day for his upcoming promotion tests for master sergeant. After work, and after eating dinner and working out, Brent studied until midnight, every night. Well, almost every night: “There were



Left to right: Brent Ragsdale, father Bill Ragsdale, grandfather William Ragsdale, and brother Brandon Ragsdale in 2003.

some times I just couldn't do it." His diligence and sacrifice paid off—he was selected for promotion to master sergeant, just like his uncle and grandfather.

In January 2007, Brent Ragsdale stood on stage, waiting for the ceremony to begin that would promote him to the rank of master sergeant. He thought he knew what to expect—the orders would be read, his wife and sons would come forward to pin on his new rank and give him a little punch in the shoulder, and he would reaffirm the oath of enlistment. At the beginning of the ceremony, however, the senior master sergeant from his office stood up, and while Brent stood at attention center stage, the senior began to read a letter from Brent's uncle.

The letter explained that he was the third generation to achieve this rank and that his family was very proud of him. In the letter, his uncle said that though he could not be there, he wanted to pass on something to Brent that his father had given him when he became a master sergeant. Brent's sons came forward, each holding a master sergeant's insignia, only the stripes were not new—they were over sixty years old.

Brent leaned down, and his sons pinned on the master sergeant stripes Brent's grandfather, William Ragsdale, first wore in 1943. Today, the insignia is framed along with the letter and is hanging in MSgt. Brent Ragsdale's home as a reminder of his Air Force heritage and with the hope that one day he, too, will pass them on to a future generation.

LIKE FATHER, LIKE DAUGHTER

Attend the United States Air Force Academy: Check. Graduate number one in the military order of merit: Check. Score the highest possible score on the physical fitness test: Check. Serve as the cadet wing commander: Check.

Maj. Kim Campbell uses checklists all the time—she is an A-10 pilot in the Air Force—but she really did not set out to follow in her father’s footsteps at the Air Force Academy. When she was in fifth grade, she eagerly watched the exciting lift-off of the next space exploration mission, then stared in horror as the Challenger shuttle exploded in the sky. The tragedy impressed upon her how important it was to do something significant, something she believed in—something worth giving her life for. She told her father she wanted to go to the Air Force Academy and be a pilot, maybe even an astronaut. Her father hid the sinking feeling in his stomach.

Kim’s father, Chuck Reed, entered the Air Force Academy in 1966. From a small town in Kansas, Chuck had worked his way through life, sweeping floors, digging ditches, even driving trucks. At some point along the way, the challenge of a school like the Academy, demanding in athletics, academics, and discipline, called to him, and he answered it—and then some. Following his stellar performance at the Academy, Chuck served in Southeast Asia as an equal opportunity or social actions officer during a turbulent social time for both the military and the country. After five years of service, the military services began winding down from war, and Chuck went back to civilian life in 1975. He took with him the lessons he learned, the obstacles he overcame, and the passion for public service he possessed. He graduated from Princeton University, then Stanford Law School, and began a practice in San Jose, California, where for the next twenty years, he would be involved in helping the community in every way he could, starting out on his children’s school committees. He gained the trust of the town’s constituents, becoming first a city council member and, ultimately, the mayor of San Jose.

But the mayor is still a father, and he worries about his children like any other parent. When Kim told him of her plan to attend the Air Force Academy and his stomach sank, it was only because he knew what she would face. They talked frankly about expectations, advantages and disadvantages, and the difference between the idealism and the reality of Academy life. Kim decided to stay on the path and remembers her father running with her to help her break in her new combat boots. He helped her train for upper body strength, too, which the soccer player and track star had never focused on. In 1997, twenty-seven years after her father, Kim graduated from the Academy with all of the same honors as her father, although he says, “She was much better at it than I was.”



Chuck Reed with his daughter, Kim Campbell.

Even now, as an A-10 pilot who has deployed to the Middle East three times, Kim still worries her father. Though she usually can not tell him why she is calling, she tries to call ahead of breaking news to let him know she is fine. Before the news broke about her amazing landing under complete manual control after her aircraft was shot up over Iraq, Kim called her father in the middle of the night: “I can’t tell you what I’ve been doing, but I want you to know I’m OK.” Sometimes, her father says, it is better to learn about these things after the fact.

Asked what his biggest accomplishment is, Chuck Reed answers simply, “My daughter and my son.” Both followed in his footsteps to work in public service. His son, Alex, works in Washington, D.C. for a nongovernmental organization that aims to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction. In a way, his children are both working toward the same goal.

WHO HERE KNOWS HOW TO FLY?

George J. Savage, Sr., served as an aerial observer during World War I. After the war, he owned and managed a car dealership, selling Cadillacs and Oldsmobiles, so they had a little more money than the average family—his son even drove around town in a new Oldsmobile during the depression. In the 1930s, Oldsmobile sponsored a company, Aeronca, which made the C-3 aircraft. Called a “flying bathtub,” the Aeronca C-3 looked funny and had no brakes or airspeed indicator. George bought one for his son, though he refused to ever go up in it with him. Instead, his son’s Boy Scout leader taught him how to fly.

George J. Savage, Jr., enlisted in the Army Air Corps because he wanted to be a maintenance troop. Instead, he was assigned to clerk-typist duties. One day, recruiters came through his office, asking “Who here knows how to fly?” Though it might be a stretch to call piloting the “flying bathtub” flying, George’s hand shot up. He was immediately sent to pilot training. By 1945, he had flown several types of aircraft, including trainers and B-17s, and was then assigned to Guam, flying B-29s. On March 9, 1945, George was part of the first large-scale low-level night attack on Tokyo. In the air with more than three hundred other B-29s, George’s aircraft was located by the Japanese search lights during its bombing run and badly damaged by antiaircraft fire. George and his crew fought to keep the aircraft aloft and flying toward home, but Guam was hundreds of miles away, two of the four engines and half of the aircraft controls were no longer working, and Japanese fighter aircraft were on their tail—the crew knew they would never make it. As the island of Iwo Jima came into sight, George knew it was their only hope, even though the island had not been officially gained by the United States. One of the bloodiest battles in history was still raging there, but the fighting was mostly on the northern end of the island, leaving the south runway open. George and his crew were on the second B-29 to use the island as a crash-landing point, and a photo of their battered aircraft was featured in *Life* magazine, along with an article touting the strategic importance of Iwo Jima. George and his crew landed safely that day, and many more crews would also come to see the ugly little island, for which so many lives were lost, as the beautiful promise of life and fuel in the distance.

After the war, George remained in the Air Force, flying C-54s in the Berlin Airlift, B-36s through nuclear test explosions, and C-141s in and out of Southeast Asia. He retired in 1974 as a colonel, and he and his wife, Betty, say they have only one regret: “that we can’t do it all over again.”

George and Betty had five children, and three of the boys, Michael, Patrick, and Timothy, decided to follow the family tradition and join the Air Force. The oldest, Michael, enlisted and was later commissioned, serving as a B-52 navigator in Southeast Asia. He retired as a lieutenant colonel in 1993, after twenty-four



Col. George J. Savage, Jr., USAF, in August 1970.

years of service. Patrick, the next oldest son, served in the Air Force for sixteen years as a doctor of pulmonary medicine. The only daughter, Joan, worked in civil service for the Department of Defense, and the youngest son, James, served in the Army security forces.

The middle son, Timothy, also wanted to fly, but chose to enlist, just as his father had. In 1975, Tim was assigned and trained as a loadmaster on the C-130 Hercules. Over the next fifteen years, Tim flew on four different models of the aircraft, serving on active duty, with the Air Force Reserve, and with the Texas Air National Guard. For ten more years, he served as a senior recruiter for the Air Force Reserve, and at his retirement in 2008, SMSgt. Tim Savage had served his country for thirty-three years.

Tim said his father taught him and his brothers and sister to “always leave things better than we found them.” For all of them, this translated into a life of service. In turn, they have passed this wisdom on to their children. Already, the next generation has chosen to serve—Michael Savage, Jr., is a navigator in the Air Force, like his father; and Jonathan Savage, Tim’s son, is serving in the Navy.

SERGEANT MOM

SSgt. Amy Schmidt “grew up Air Force,” coming from a family of career Airmen. Santos Hernandez, her maternal grandfather, served in the Air Force for twenty years, spanning World War II, Korea, and Southeast Asia. Her father’s father, David Henry Dixon, also served in the Air Force for twenty years. Amy’s parents met at Vandenberg Air Force Base, California, while both families were assigned there. After they married, David Thomas Dixon, Amy’s father, served as a crew chief for A-10 aircraft and retired after more than twenty years of service. But Amy is the first female in the Dixon family to join the Air Force.

Amy Dixon met Gary Schmidt in Louisiana, where the family moved after her father retired. Amy grew up as an Air Force “brat,” moving all over the world—Alaska, Arizona, North Dakota, Texas, Japan—whereas Gary had never lived anywhere other than his hometown in Louisiana. His entire family lived there, in the same town, and everyone knew everybody else. Gary and Amy married in 1996, and Amy soon became a stay-at-home mom, raising their three children. For six years, they lived happily in the same town where Gary grew up.

As their children started school, Amy began to reflect on her own childhood, growing up on Air Force bases. She missed moving, making new friends, and learning about new places and cultures by actually experiencing them. She had not thought her childhood was unusual, until she began to realize her perspective on life was a little different from that of her friends and neighbors in Louisiana. Her experiences growing up in so many different places gave her the ability and confidence to interact in new situations and a broader view of the world. She yearned for the same thing for her children. Amy called her father and asked what he thought about her joining the Air Force. He was excited and agreed that it was a wonderful way to raise a family.

Convincing Gary took some persuasion—and bargaining. Finally, he agreed to a four-year trial; if the Air Force lifestyle did not work for the family, Amy would get out when her enlistment was up. Amy decided, at age twenty-six and as a mother of three, to enlist. In April 2002, Amy left for basic training and then technical training in Texas. Gary stayed in Louisiana for nine long months, balancing his job and three children, ages five, six, and nine—with a lot of help from his family. During that time, Amy only saw her husband and children twice. When she finished her training in early 2003, the family moved to their first assignment, Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas, Nevada. There she worked in maintenance, specializing in avionics for the base’s F-16s. Gary and the children adjusted slowly, but after just one year, Amy said, “he told me he was along for the ride.” Two years later, Amy volunteered for instructor duty, and the family moved again, to Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas.



SSgt. Amy Schmidt and her father, MSgt. David Dixon, USAF (Ret.).

Amy loved her instructor job, but when it came time to reenlist, she was given the option to move to a different career field. Gary and Amy fully agreed she should reenlist, but she wanted to try something new. She was pursuing a bachelor's degree in human resources, so she requested to transfer to the manpower career field, hoping to utilize what she was learning to benefit the Air Force.

Gary and Amy hope to move overseas at some point in her career, so their children can experience other cultures, just as Amy did growing up. There is no more talk of bargaining or trial periods—the Schmidt family loves the Air Force and what it provides for their family and their future.

A LANGUAGE THEY BOTH UNDERSTOOD

Carmelo Vega was an eighteen-year-old kid who barely spoke English when he showed up at the military processing center in San Juan in 1990. Carmelo grew up in Ponce, one of the largest cities in Puerto Rico, second only to the capital. Although Puerto Rico is a commonwealth of the United States and Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, Spanish is the dominant language on the island, and it is estimated that less than twenty percent of the population speak English fluently. When Carmelo Vega signed up for four years in the Air Force, he only spoke enough English to take the oath of enlistment. He had no idea what he was signing up for—how long, what job—just that he was going to be in the Air Force.

Carmelo Vega flew to Texas for basic training and technical training in his new career field, maintenance. No one in Carmelo's family had served in the military, so he was not sure what to expect, but he adapted quickly to the tough standards. Training also served as a crash-course in English; he had to learn the language quickly to survive. The Air Force recognized the value of Carmelo's fluency in Spanish—his first assignment was to Torrejon Air Base in Spain. His ability to speak Spanish made him very popular on base; all the guys wanted him to take them downtown and translate so they could experience the culture even though they did not speak the language. Carmelo was happy to oblige. His Puerto Rican Spanish differed a little from the language he heard in Spain, but he had no problems communicating with the local people.

In 1991, Carmelo's unit supported Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. He worked in the sheet metal shop, keeping the F-16s of the 401st Tactical Fighter Wing flying; but his most memorable deployment was to Kenya in 1993, where he supported the C-130s flying humanitarian missions for Operation Restore Hope. Though he had seen poverty in his hometown, the living conditions of the Somali refugees in Kenya disturbed him. Walking on the beach near base, a blind boy and his father stopped Carmelo, and used hand signals to ask him to trade—they would give him a figurine they had carved in exchange for Carmelo's t-shirt and empty soda can. Carmelo understood why they would want the shirt, but why an empty can? The boy had nothing to carry his lunch to school, and his father would cut off the top of the can and attach a string so he could use it as a lunchbox. The encounter stunned Carmelo. He found a new satisfaction in his job; what was previously mundane—working with sheet metal—seemed less common now, knowing his work indirectly helped the people he saw suffering.

A few years later, Carmelo found a new way to make a difference. He attended a seminar and was hired on the spot to become an Air Force recruiter. Carmelo was overwhelmed with emotion at the prospect of his first recruiting assignment: he was selected to return to his hometown in Puerto Rico. Every day, he talked to young kids just like he had been, desperate to join the Air Force, but not know-



Father and son, July 29, 2007, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

ing what to expect. His job was to talk to them, to share his experience in the Air Force, and to help them find their place in the service. After seventeen years in the Air Force, twelve of those as a recruiter, MSgt. Carmelo Vega did not think his job could get any better.

But in March 2007, Carmelo's son, Jean, walked into the military processing center in San Juan—the same one his father visited seventeen years earlier—and took the oath of enlistment in the Air Force. Carmelo was not there when his son enlisted, but the personnel at the processing center made sure he was involved. They called Carmelo, who was in training at Randolph Air Force Base in Texas, and asked him to do them a favor—to enter his son's name into the database and assign him to his chosen career field, maintenance.

Jean's experience with the military has been a little different from his father's; he may have been only seventeen years old, but with a recruiter for a father, he understood the Air Force and knew what to expect.

"I was just waiting until I was old enough to join," said Jean. "I couldn't wait to walk beside my Dad in blues." He was finally able to do that on July 27, 2007, when he graduated from basic military training. His father stood proudly in the stands, watching his favorite recruit march sharply by. Carmelo explained the tears in his eyes: "There is no greater honor for a father than to see his own influence reflected in his son's actions."