

AFA 335

TENNESSEE VALLEY FLYER

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Happy Birthday Airforce!

The Chapter celebrated the 75th US Air Force birthday on September 16, 2022 at Straight to Ale in Huntsville. We had more than 40 members and friends in attendance to enjoy the evening. Thanks to Straight to Ale for great food, drinks, and atmosphere. Thanks also to Guy Broadhurst for getting the cake, and Zig for a fantastic slide show. We had a good laugh with the First Annual Chapter Air Force Trivia Contest, then cut the cake, and sang the Air Force Song. All in all, an excellent evening!



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Letter from the Chapter President

Dear Chapter Members,

This is the final quarter of 2022's issue of our Chapter newsletter. It's hard to believe that 2022 is over. We celebrated the 75th anniversary of our US Air Force on 18 September, and the 3rd anniversary of the founding of the US Space Force on 20 December.

As we enter the new year, please take some time from your busy schedules to think about the Airmen and Guardians who are deployed and serving all over the globe keeping our way of life safe. Say a prayer for our leaders, giving them the wisdom and good judgment they need to keep the "mission first, but people always" in their decision making. In addition, take some time for thoughts and prayers for the families who serve alongside our service members. Thank them for their sacrifices when and how you can. I personally want to express my sincere appreciation for the support of the Chapter Executive Council and especially to our outstanding Community Partners whose generous contributions allow us to support multiple exceptional initiatives throughout the Tennessee Valley. I also want to challenge and encourage all members of the Tennessee Valley Chapter to take a more active role in our many varied activities. Every one of you has a valuable contribution to make. Don't hide it away!

Finally, as we close out another year in our Great Nation's history, please take a few minutes to reflect on your own service. Most of us served directly in our nation's defense, and it's incumbent on us to remember the oath we swore to support and defend our Constitution. Though there is great turmoil in the world today, and a lot of bad news about any number of issues, the United States of America is still the greatest nation in world. Regardless of what anyone in the media might try to push to the public, the Airmen and Guardians of yesterday, today and tomorrow KNOW the truth. The truth is undeniable, and I'll repeat myself here: The United States of America is the greatest nation on earth. Evidence? No one leaves the USA to move somewhere else because they want less freedom and less opportunity for prosperity, do they? That's why millions of people from all over the world have knocked on our nation's doors for nearly 250 years to share in the bounty of this nation.

My wish for all of you is that you had a safe and happy holiday season, celebrating in whatever way your family desires. Strive to be the Americans our forefathers would be proud of, be great and dependable wingmen to those serving now, and be mentors, leaders and positive examples for the Airmen and Guardians of future generations.

Thank you for your service, Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, and Happy New Year, from my family to yours!

Yours in Air Power,
John Pennell, Lt Col, USAF Retired
AFA Chapter 335 President



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There I Was, In Acquisitions, When My Career Took An Unexpected Turn

A Heritage Article by a Gary Connor, Brigadier General, USAF (Ret)

It's the fall of 2005, and I was Commander of the C2ISR Wing at Hanscom AFB (when Wings were a thing in Air Force Materiel Command). Suddenly, seemingly out of the blue, I got notice I was deploying to Baghdad, Iraq to be the "6" for the Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I), serving under GEN George Casey, MNF-I Commander.

I got the notice on 1 Nov ... to be in Theater 15 Dec ... not only did I have to get ready, but we needed to pack up our Base House and find a place for my wife, Lee, to live ... in less than 45 days ... at the holidays.

For deployment prep, I asked the Security Forces Sqdn for some practice time on the range (they stored my issued weapon). The Superintendent (SMSgt) thought it would be just shooting at static targets. When I told him what I wanted to do (prone, behind various barriers, moving targets, me on the move, etc.) his eyes lit up! He closed the Sqdn that afternoon ... for 3 hours he put me and the range through its paces. When it was over, the Super said that was the best time he and his Airmen had in a long time! .

This would be my first joint job as a GO (and a junior GO at that, having only pinned on 6-months prior). The best part was there I was, a non-communications USAF guy in charge of a 3,000+ Army comm organization ... for the 3rd-largest communications network in the world at that time ... and in a shooting war. What could POSSIBLY go wrong? How hard could this be? Suffice to say this became the most impactful, meaningful and rewarding assignment of my AF career

On the day of my arrival (Thursday, 15 Dec, 2005) 12 million Iraqi citizens out of 15 million registered voters had just voted for the first time in their lives to elect members of their to-be-formed Parliament. Iraqis proudly displayed their purple index finger or thumb to signify they had voted. My immediate thought was "their experiment in self-determination is off to a very good start." Events in the next couple of months would undermine that hope ... we'll save that for another discussion.



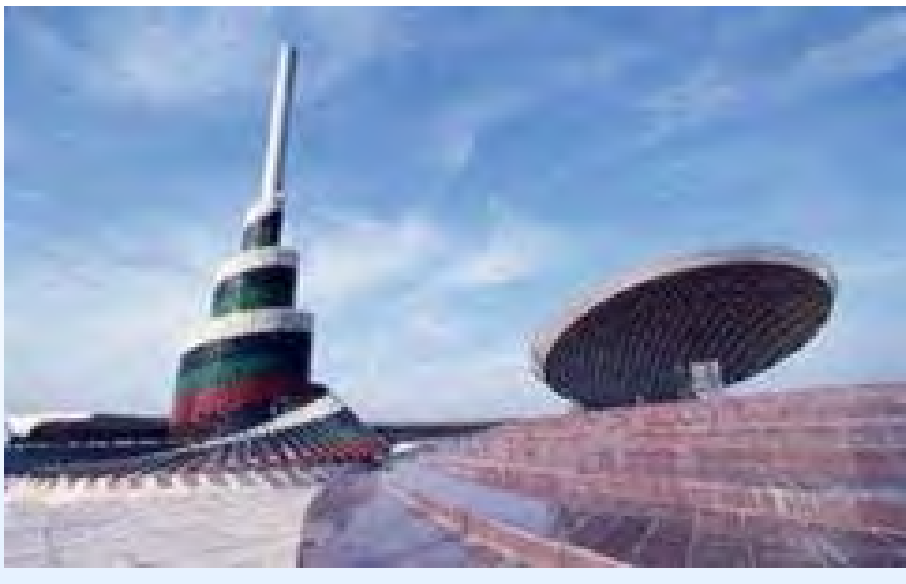
Brigadier General Gary S. Connor on the Multi-National Force Staff in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom

Eat, Sleep, Work, Workout ... repeat. The deployed battle rhythm for those of us on the MNF-I staff was work 6 days, 1 day off. Workdays were usually 10-12 hours long. So, besides work and sleep, your free time options were eating and working out. With a 10,000 sq ft Dining Facility (DFAC) open 24/7, and with food choices that would rival a first-rate cruise line (yes, we had a pastry section and a Baskin Robins concession) you could easily gain weight if you weren't careful. I remember vividly my first Friday night dinner ... as I'm heading down the serving line, the server asked if I wanted steak, lobster or both! I asked the guys in line next to me if I was in Baghdad, in a war zone! I get that an Army moves on its stomach ... I worried about how big that stomach would get for the troops under my care!

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An Acquisition Guy in Warfighter Clothing. As an acquisition pro, I worked hard to solve the warfighter’s challenges and try to look at things from their perspective. Now, as the “6” for a warfighting headquarters, I GET TO BE A WARFIGHTER! This “split personality” came in handy during a review with Army program folks, where I gave them a “wire-brushing” for failing to meet schedules with the communications capabilities they were delivering. After the meeting I took them aside and let them know I KNOW how hard their job is ... but I wouldn’t let them off the hook. They came through brilliantly after that meeting, and I became their biggest supporter as a result.

My first Iraqi Ceremony. On 6 January 2006, an MNF-I delegation led by the Chief of Staff, attended the 85th Anniversary of Iraqi Army Day at the Monument to the Unknown Soldier in Baghdad. After the event, on our return to Camp Victory down Route Irish (dubbed “the world’s most deadly road”) our convoy encountered a cross-road firefight between Iraqi Police and a militia faction on a bridge over the road. As we sped past, the radio crackled with “THE CHIEF’S HUMVEE HAS BEEN HIT WITH SMALL ARMS FIRE!” My HUMVEE driver instructed us all to “GO RED” (chamber a round in your weapon). My weapons training kicked in (recall my prep session above) and I chambered a round instinctively while we watched for further threats. We made it back to base unscathed. It wasn’t until we arrived safely, and I cleared my weapon, that it occurred to me I might have to shoot someone to defend myself.

**“Connor, get back in your lane!”**

Shortly after arrival, I re-connected with Col Kirk Mardis, USAF, who was working the Targeting and Engagement cell in the “2” (Intel) organization. He was headed to a Classified Video Tele Conference (VTC) to discuss their Intel, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) needs with CENTCOM HQs and the Joint Staff. The single biggest issue was the Improvised Explosive Device (IED) threat ... and finding ways to stop it. The objective of the VTC was to bring system solutions to the fight and close their needs gaps. I asked if I could tag along and listen to the conversation. Kirk agreed, given my recent experience leading our front-line airborne ISR programs.

After the VTC, I told Kirk I knew of at least 2 or 3 capabilities that could be IMMEDIATELY deployed to help thwart the IED threat. At the next VTC, the ISR programs folks at Wright Patterson and Hanscom got to hear the issues, and 2 weeks later they presented specific solutions to address the ISR shortfalls. Long story short – we enabled the rapid deployment (within 2-3 weeks) of capabilities that helped the special ops folks (led by then Lt GEN Stan McChrystal) roll up many, many bomb-making bad guys ... more swiftly and more precisely than possible before. Great example of rapidly-fielding war-winning capabilities ... one that I (and my ISR program buds) had a direct hand in. High fives all around, end of story, right?

Well, when the CENTCOM and Joint Staff folks found out this was happening (in effect, short-circuiting their very slow, ineffective “solutions fielding” process), they wanted to know: 1) how it happened, and; 2) who the HELL was this Connor guy who was the “6” messing around in the “2” world. When my CENTCOM “6” leadership got wind of this, they told me to “stay in my lane”. Didn’t matter that we rapidly-fielded decisive capabilities ... folks were more concerned about their rice bowls. After about a week of this, Maj GEN Zehner (the “2” for MNF-I reporting to GEN Casey) stepped in and told everyone to “knock it off” because HE asked for this to happen. That’s what top-cover looks like from a leader who cares about results ... not about the “bureaucracy’s egos”.

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Day the SIPRNET went down. The MNF-I Staff ran the war on SIPRNET, and it was my job (among many others) to keep the Command network operational. One day part of the network went down, leaving half of the MNF-I Staff in the dark. While we troubleshooted the problem we put in workarounds for the “blind half” to continue operating, albeit not as effectively. My staff was scrambling to find the cause of the outage, to no avail. We were under tremendous pressure to get this resolved! After about 8 hours, I decided to dive into the details of their “process.” First thing I asked for was the network diagram for the Command Network. (One thing glaringly missing from their troubleshooting efforts was a network diagram showing the configuration of the gear, interconnections, etc.) We pasted this up on a wall (it was a VERY big diagram) and began to assess where the outage(s) could have occurred. Since networks should be redundant in critical places, I asked the team to identify the non-redundant (single pathway) parts of the network (look for the likely single-point failures). Long story short, we found a couple single-point failure locations and discovered one of them was the culprit. Not only did that location get fixed (and get redundant capabilities) but ALL the other “single path” network areas were made redundant. Guess all that training as a LT in failure modes and effects analysis paid off!

Providing Assured Communications to the

Tactical Edge. The operational Brigades on the forward edge of the battlefield were the units that most-needed reliable comms ... and often were the most disadvantaged. We set out to fix that, in a several ways. First, we put ALL of the various comm-enabling organizations (there were 40+) under one roof, sitting side-by-side on an ops floor, all staring at each of their “operational views” on a big screen at the front of the ops floor. Once this Joint Net Ops Control Center-Iraq (JNCC-I) capability was in place, I gave them a simple charge: whenever and wherever there was a comms outage, their job was to “scrum on the ball” and fix it, FAST. And the forward-deployed Brigades ALWAYS got top priority.



Turned out this “swivel chair integration” set-up was highly-effective in serving the troops on the pointy end of every operational spear. The ultimate compliment came from then-Lt GEN Chiarelli who said to me one day “Connor, I don’t know WHAT the Hell your comms folks are doing ... but KEEP IT UP!”

Second, we created a “network integration cell” within the JNCC-I, with a particular focus on helping to deploy all of the various “capabilities” coming at us from the US and our Allies. We were struggling with all manner of new operational capabilities that were wreaking havoc on various Theater Network comms capabilities. So much so that my staff said “Boss, you have to find a way to stop this stuff from getting deployed”. Think about that for a minute. An Acquisition guy ... who’s now a Warfighting Comm guy ... is going to tell the operators to STOP deploying capabilities they need to improve their ability to fight! No, we were going to take a different tack. Hence the birth of the “network integration cell”. When I announced this to my core team at the JNCC-I, they asked “who’s going to be in this cell?” I pointed to the 6 folks with me and said “all of YOU!” I countered their objections with an irrefutable fact – since no one else knew our network better than us, YOU were going to help with the “last mile” of network integration for these capabilities. After a couple of weeks of doing this, the “cell” made great strides in reducing ops friction, successfully-integrating a host of capabilities that relied on (or could impact) the Theater Ops Network. Great example of a “systems thinking” approach for solving technical & operational challenges.

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Debrief of my tour ... to a thousand of my closest friends! The New Horizons Conference (hosted by AFCEA Boston) is an annual, signature event bringing together Government and Industry players involved in the Electronic Systems Center mission. Upon my return from Iraq, I asked if I could have a 30-minute time slot at the January 2007 event. I had just one stipulation – I wanted to brief in my desert fatigues, wearing my sidearm. When the organizers bristled at the “sidearm” request (remember, this is the State of Massachusetts), I asked the Security Forces Sqdn Superintendent if he could help. Based on our pre-deployment “training experience” he was happy to oblige – he got the State Police to take him and my sidearm to the event, where I took possession (never, EVER, underestimate the inventiveness of our SNCOs).

Donning my “warfighter gear” I briefed on my experience on the MNF-I staff, the challenges of providing assured warfighting comms and the initiatives we pursued. I emphasized the importance of being able to “walk in the operator’s shoes” and what a privilege it was for me to do so as an acquisition professional. Whenever I’m at the annual New Horizons event near Hanscom AFB (I’ve been to several since 2007), to this day, several people still come up to me and comment on how memorable and impactful my briefing was for them.

Now you have some insight into why I called my Iraq tour the most impactful, meaningful and rewarding assignment of my AF career. I have lots more to share, ask me about it over our favorite beverages sometime!



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Space Camp Adventure - A Thank You Letter

Letter By Eycis Vaughn

I want to thank the Tennessee Valley Chapter of the Air Force Association for making it possible for me to attend Space Camp 2022. As I mentioned in my application letter, I really want to be involved in the space program someday, and Space Camp this summer gave me a chance to experience and learn about so many things that will help me later. I also got to learn a lot about teamwork and how important that is to a successful space mission. Overall, it was an amazing experience!

My most and least favorite part of Space Camp were the same thing, flying the Space Shuttle simulator. It was the best because I really like flying in the simulator. It almost feels real. It was also the worst, though, because our team kept crashing. It seems like we sometimes didn't quite get our teamwork right and one person would be a little bit early or late and we'd end up out of control. Definitely a learning experiences on how important it is to work closely as a team and communicate.

As I said before, I'm grateful to the AFA for giving me this chance and I know I'll be able to turn what I learned this summer into something good for the space program when I get older. Thank you again!



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Veterans Day Parade

Once again, your chapter paraded its “Heavy Package” in the Huntsville Veterans Day parade on 11 November. That “package” consists of two pick-up trucks with side facing USAF banners and speaker system, led by a Ford Mustang Convertible. All vehicles had large door magnets proudly advertising our Association. Our speakers were set to loud and played the Air Force Song on an endless loop much to the patriotic joy of the crowds along the street, many of who sang along. It was a soggy day, but the crowds were still large. All four Chapter officers participated: President John Pennell (and daughter), Vice President Guy Broadhurst, Treasurer Jack Royster, and Secretary Eric Jackson. Other members participating included: Burke Hare, Bob Hovde, Daryl Carpenter (and wife Barb), Robert Barnett, and Rick Driesbach..”



Chapter Member Honored in Memoriam

The Madison County Military Heritage Commission honored one of our chapter members on 10 November by inducting him into the Madison County Hall of Heroes. Major General (retired) Mel Bowling, who passed away in January 2022, was one of four Madison County military personnel recognized for their heroism on foreign battlefields. General Bowling had been awarded the Silver Star for Gallantry during the Vietnam War for flying F-4 fighter bomber strike missions in support of U.S. Special forces being overrun in August 1968. Representing General Bowling at the banquet and induction ceremony was his wife Mrs. Joan Bowling.



Lt. Col. Bowling at Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam



Community Partners - ACE

Willbrook Solutions



Ms. Kathy Martin, Accountant, proudly accepts the ACE Community Partner renewal medallion on behalf of Willbrook Solutions CEO, Ms. Bonita Phillips. Many thanks for supporting Aerospace Education at the highest level! <https://willbrook.net/>

Community Partners - Wingman

Brenda Armstrong - Edward Jones



Brenda Armstrong, Chapter Council Member, Financial Advisor, and Area Manager of Edward Jones accepts the Wingman Community Partner Renewal Medallion from former chapter president Rick Driesbach. Thanks for all your support to AFA and Aerospace Education! <https://www.edwardjones.com/us-en/financial-advisor/brenda-armstrong?fasearch=Brenda%20Armstrong&searchtype=2>

Community Partners - Basic



Redstone Federal Credit Union

Ms. Mary Grace Evans, Senior Assistant Vice President for Community Relations, Redstone Federal Credit Union proudly accepts 2022-2023 Community Partner renewal medallion from chapter member Rick Driesbach. Thanks for your continued support!

Summer Camp Scholarship Application Reminder!

Our chapter is funding two 1-week summer camp scholarships to the U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville in 2023. The scholarships are open to children, grandchildren, or great grand-children of any current chapter member (as of the 14 Dec 22 National AFA Chapter 335 Roster). To be eligible, children must be **at least 9 years old** as of 25 May 2023, but **not older than 14** as of 31 August 2023. The application requirements were described in an information sheet and application form sent via email to all chapter members by Rick Driesbach on 17 Dec 2022. The application form and 1-page narrative must be submitted per the instructions **no later than Saturday, 14 Jan 2023**. (Previous chapter scholarship winners cannot re-compete.) **If you have any questions, contact Rick at rick.driesbach@gmail.com.**

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*Annual Giving Levels: Ace: \$500, Wingman: \$250, Basic: \$90
 Want to become a Community Partner at the Ace, Wingman, or Basic level? Contact George Krym at george.krym@yahoo.com.*

UPCOMING EVENTS

19 Jan: Executive Council Meeting

16 Feb: Executive Council Meeting

16 Mar: Executive Council Meeting

Chapter 335 Officers

• **President**

John Pennell

johnpennelljr@aol.com

• **Treasurer**

Jack Royster

jroyster@knology.net

• **Vice President**

Guy Broadhurst

Broadhurst.guy@gmail.com

• **Secretary**

Eric Jackson

eric.jackson1969@gmail.com

Chapter 335 Special VPs

• **Aerospace Education:** Bob Hovde

• **Community Partners:** George Krym

• **CyberPatriot:** Bob Hovde

• **Webmaster:** Eric Silkowski

• **Newsletter:** Kathleen Mason

• **Veteran's Affairs:** Zig Jastrebski

• **Communications:** Rick Driesbach



Conditioned Air Solutions has a special offer for AFA Chapter members. Just mention that you're a member when calling and receive a \$39 diagnostic service.