

# AFA 335

## TENNESSEE VALLEY FLYER

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## BJHS Rocket City Commander's Cup Drill Competition Support!

At the Chapter's Executive Council Meeting on 19 January, Cadet Major Carolyn Horne and Cadet Captain Logan Jackson of Air Force JROTC AL-20021 presented Chapter President John Pennel with a Plaque thanking the Chapter for contributing to the success of the Rocket City Commander's Cup Drill Competition held last November at Bob Jones High School. The cadets informed the Council that over 10 JROTC teams participated from across Tennessee and Alabama, and that there were over 300 participants, coaches, parents, and spectators in attendance.



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**Outback Adventures**

A Heritage Article by a Brenda Armstrong

Many of you may have known some dual-military couples throughout your career, but I thought I'd share one of our unique experiences that my husband Tom and I were able to enjoy as a dual-military Air Force couple. My career was in space operations (13S), and Tom was in computers/communications (back then a 33S). Fortunately, anywhere I could be assigned, for the most part, there was usually a junior officer slot in his AFSC at the same base. However, we faced the probability of a remote (unaccompanied) assignment in my field, particularly at the Captain level. So as we approached what was to be my 3rd assignment (about the 6-year point), we started researching what options existed to keep us assigned together, or at least not too far away geographically. We found out there was a potential assignment we could both take to the outback in Australia, and it was classified as an accompanied short tour overseas, which could count for my "remote" and take that risk of being separated off the table for us. By that time, we had our first child, so separation as a family was a critical planning factor for our assignment preferences.

Now, getting to Australia, when not many people knew what was entailed for the assignment, was the challenge. The location was formerly classified, so not much information existed. We used our "friends network" to find out more information, and discovered that it was highly competitive for my 13S assignment options, but no 33S (Tom's field) wanted to go to the outback when they had other options! So, in the spirit of leveraging all your relationships, Tom talked his assignment officer into sending him to the outback - Woomera, Australia. From that, my prioritization as a "join-spouse" went close to the top of the list, and before you knew it, we were both heading to Australia in late 1994.

The assignment proved to be even better than we could have imagined! We were literally in the outback - our government-sponsored community only existed due to a Joint arrangement between the United States and Australia. The installation was called Joint Defense Facility Nurrungar, where the word Nurrungar comes from the Aboriginal language and meant "listen." Our USAF unit was the 5th Joint Defense Space Communications Squadron. A unit name was the generic name, as the mission used to be classified, and later it was renamed to the 5th Space Warning Squadron. Our mission was missile warning in defense of the United States and its allies. We ran a 24/7 operations center and were completely self-sufficient for our power generation on-site. Assigned with the USAF personnel were Australian Air Force, Army, and Navy officers and enlisted. For them, it was a choice assignment due to the bi-national mission.



**Above:** The "Site" as it was referred to by those who worked at the JDFN. You could drive your car there, about 10 miles from the village of Woomera, or a government bus was available as a shuttle bus.

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**Left:** The town of Woomera. A perimeter road around it was approximately 3 miles long, to give you a feel for the small size. When we lived there, the town held about 1500 residents, to include the Australian nationals running the local businesses. All residents were screened before living or working there due to the mission significance.

**Right:** Not exactly a scenic entrance to our little town, but it wasn't designed to attract tourists. Building on the left was a former controlled access point, converted to a gift shop. In fact, it was known to be the place where visiting General Officers would stop there to buy opal jewelry for their spouses.



The unaccompanied Airmen usually tried to get a bus trip (sponsored by MWR) to Adelaide, for more lively entertainment than our village could offer. However, we had as many "watering holes" as Alabama has churches in most small towns! So no one went thirsty, and many enjoyed the social aspects of the many pubs. After 5 pm local, the stores would close so you really had to plan for groceries. In fact, one of the critical trips MWR hosted was the twice-weekly shopping expeditions to Port Augusta, about 2 hours away. This is where the large grocery stores were, in a town of approximately 20,000 people. Most people would either make that trip or have a grocery delivery arranged from Port Augusta to Woomera. (Yes, we had grocery delivery in the mid-nineties, long before Instacart!)

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**Right:** The local movie theatre was critical to social time for individuals and families. Our Squadron Booster Club benefitted from the concessions - our SNCO Corps ran it well!



**Left:** One of our many side trips to the Australian coastline.

Our mission was critically important, so morale from the mission significance spilled over to the pride in our community. Everyone helped each other, and most of the Americans knew who was who and especially whose kids belonged to whom. The school-age children had the option to attend the local Australian public school, the Catholic-based private school, or just home school. Most American kids opted for private school or home school. Daycare facilities didn't exist, but fortunately, there were a few military spouses who were willing to take care of children in their homes. This was our only option, and I considered ourselves quite fortunate that our toddler's caregiver was high quality.

JDFN closed down a few years after we left, as the USAF did some mission consolidation enabled by improved satellite technology and ground systems. We will be forever grateful for our opportunity to serve both of our Nations during that assignment. Tom and I learned a lot about another country, and how much its military members take pride in their duties to Australia. Additionally, we were able to travel to many wonderful places in Australia and New Zealand. Outside of my Cape Canaveral assignment where I was part of the rocket launch squadron, I'd put this one at the top of my list of overall great experiences!



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## Chapter Supports Air Force Junior ROTC Earn His Wings!

The Tennessee Valley Chapter has been a longtime supporter of the AFJROTC program at Bob Jones HS. Working closely with Major Melissa Lacey, Senior Aerospace Science Instructor (SASI), the Chapter has sponsored drill team events, and provided information briefings on aircraft, Air Force careers, pilot training, mission planning, and aviation weather. Last fall, the Chapter took on an additional task when Major Lacey told us Cadet Major Elian Castaneda had been selected under the AFJROTC Flight Academy Scholarship Program to obtain his Private Pilot's License (PPL) at Air Force expense. However, due to weather and scheduling issues, he was unable to complete the program to obtain his PPL while at Emory Riddle University in Prescott AZ.

To complete the program, Cadet Castaneda needed to accomplish a 1.5-hour cross-country flight and to take the PPL evaluation. The Chapter contacted Dr. Cobb Alexander, a local surgeon, and Certified Flight Instructor, Instrument Instructor (CFI-I) to obtain Cadet Castaneda's necessary instructions and authorizations. Dr. Alexander donated his instructional time to the cause. Dr. Alexander also contacted Max Gurgew, a local Designated Pilot Examiner (DPE) who also agreed to donate his time to give Cadet Castaneda his exam. That left only the expense of renting the aircraft for the instruction, cross country, and exam.

The chapter contacted FlyQuest, a local non-profit specializing in assisting young people to understand and appreciate aviation, and to assist with funding aircraft rentals. For 10 years, FlyQuest, has been awakening dreams and providing opportunities for young people to pursue aerospace education and aviation careers and to experience the joy of flight! Like the Tennessee Valley AFA Chapter, FlyQuest, has worked with Maj Lacey over the years in helping inspire students about the excitement of flight. Helping Cadet Castaneda was a natural fit with FlyQuest's mission.

FlyQuest and the Chapter each donated \$250 to raise the \$500 needed to pay for rental of the aircraft.

With these combined efforts and Cadet Castaneda's skill and perseverance, he passed his flight exam on 18 November 2022. On 27 January 2023, David Knies of FlyQuest and John Pennell, President of the Chapter, presented Cadet Castaneda, and his mother, Ms. Brenda Castaneda, the \$500 check. Tim Davis, our chapter's liaison with the Bob Jones HS AFJROTC Program and who headed up this project, was also present.

For more information: 

On the Web: [www.FlyQuest.com](http://www.FlyQuest.com)

Phone: 256-400-1088

Visit us:  
2002 Houston Goodson Way  
Huntsville, AL



**(Left to Right):** David Knies, Flyquest; Ms. Castaneda; Cadet Castaneda; AFA Chapter President John Pennell; AFA Project Sponsor Tim Davis



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**Two Trips to the Sandbox**

A Heritage Article by Ginger Pohlmann, USAF (Ret)

There I was flat on my back at 35,000 feet...asleep, spread out on two seats in the middle of a 17-hour non-stop flight on a KC-10 from McGuire AFB to Al Dhafra Air Base.

As a woman in the military, deploying to the Middle East comes with its own set of challenges. During the seven years I spent on active duty, I deployed twice to the Middle East. Both experiences were similar, but also very different.



From March through June 1999, I deployed to Al Dhafra Air Base in the United Arab Emirates. Due to low manning, I was a Second Lieutenant filling an enlisted forecaster slot in support of Operation Southern Watch. Our two-man weather shop consisted of myself and a salty Tech Sergeant. We worked every day based on the morning and afternoon sortie schedules, briefing the aircrews on takeoff, landing, and in-route weather. I also briefed the base leadership at the weekly staff meeting. When we didn't have "birds in the sky," we didn't man the office.

Upon landing, I met with the First Sergeant, and I vividly remember him asking me if I could drive a stick shift. I said no, and he replied, "Well, you will get a lesson tomorrow." That is how I found out we were also the aircrew shuttle van drivers. We shared the duty with the Intel Shop and drove the aircrews to and from the airfield. After my "lesson," I was turned loose with the dusty old green van. The aircrews discovered quickly that I was learning so most took pity on me and drove out to the airfield, leaving me to stutter and jerk my way back on my own. Thankfully, it didn't take long before I had it figured out.

Being in the Operations Squadron, I knew the flight schedules and could sign up for incentive flights on the ops office board. I got to see numerous aircraft refueled while sitting next to the Boom Operator, and sometimes I even helped with collecting tail numbers.

In April, we were released to go downtown with strict rules. I was selected to have a driver's license because I was there longer than the rotating aircrews. It was great to get to see the sights, go out to eat, and shop, and I even got to go to a resort with a few of the aircrews and swim in the Persian Gulf! When we went downtown, I was able to wear short sleeve tops with long pants and I remember my blonde hair garnered several looks from the locals.

On base, I lived in a two-woman trailer and when there was another female officer on base I had a roommate, otherwise I had it to myself. While we had running water, we used bottled water to brush our teeth because our running water wasn't approved for drinking. During my downtime, I often found myself teaching interested pilots how to read the coded observation and forecasts at one of the two above-ground pools.

I pinned on First Lieutenant while I was at Al Dhafra, along with a member of the Fire Department. After the short ceremony, we got hosed down by the fire truck!

It was hard being away from home, especially because I missed my brother's graduation from West Point. A few days after it, my trip home, also on a KC-10, was not as quick; it took 3 days and brought me through Bahrain, Sigonella, Italy, and Rota, Spain.



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My second deployment was a year later to Prince Sultan Air Base (PSAB) in Saudi Arabia from March to June 2000. I took a commercial aircraft chartered by the military through Ireland, Germany, and finally to my deployment destination. As we approached our location at night, the pilot told us to close all the window shades, and I watched as our identifying lights went off on the outside of the aircraft. We then descended toward the airfield in a circle staying in range of what the Patriot Missile Batteries could defend. It reminded all of us that we “were not in Kansas anymore”!

At PSAB, I lived in a dorm, took a bus to work, and was part of a regularly manned weather flight. I was the wing weather officer and the flight commander, was a major. We worked six days on and one day off and operated 24/7. The Saudi Arabian Air Force was very interested in expanding their knowledge of weather observation and forecasting. As a female, I was not permitted to have any interaction with them. This meant I covered some of the regular tasks my boss would have traditionally done including briefing weather updates at the weekly staff meetings and to the aircrews.

Most people did not have the authority to leave the base, so they brought in vendors on certain weekends for cultural fairs, and I got to ride a camel! Towards the end of my deployment, I was permitted to travel with my flight commander, the squadron commander, and a few other men to Escan Village in Riyadh. We traveled in a van with bulletproof vests, and I was required to sit in the back of the vehicle. This was a very different experience from the year before when I had a driver’s license in the UAE. After our meetings, we went out to eat and then to the souk for some shopping. I was required to wear a black abaya and have a headcover available to avoid offending the locals. It is common for women to not be allowed in shops, and at the end of the evening I walked into one to buy a bottle of water but found myself being yelled at to leave. I was told I needed to order through a small window at the side alleyway; I opted to skip the drink.



PSAB had a large mix of U.S. personnel, and foreign military (British and French) and had most of the amenities you might find at a U.S. base. It had a few chow halls, a large in-ground pool where I played on our squadron inner-tube water polo team, a large track, and a well-stocked BX. Just as in my time in the UAE, we heard over speakers the time for prayer five times a day. I was able to go on one incentive flight, this time in a UH-60 Blackhawk which was very cool because my dad had recorded over 1,000 hours as a pilot-in-command during his time in the Army.

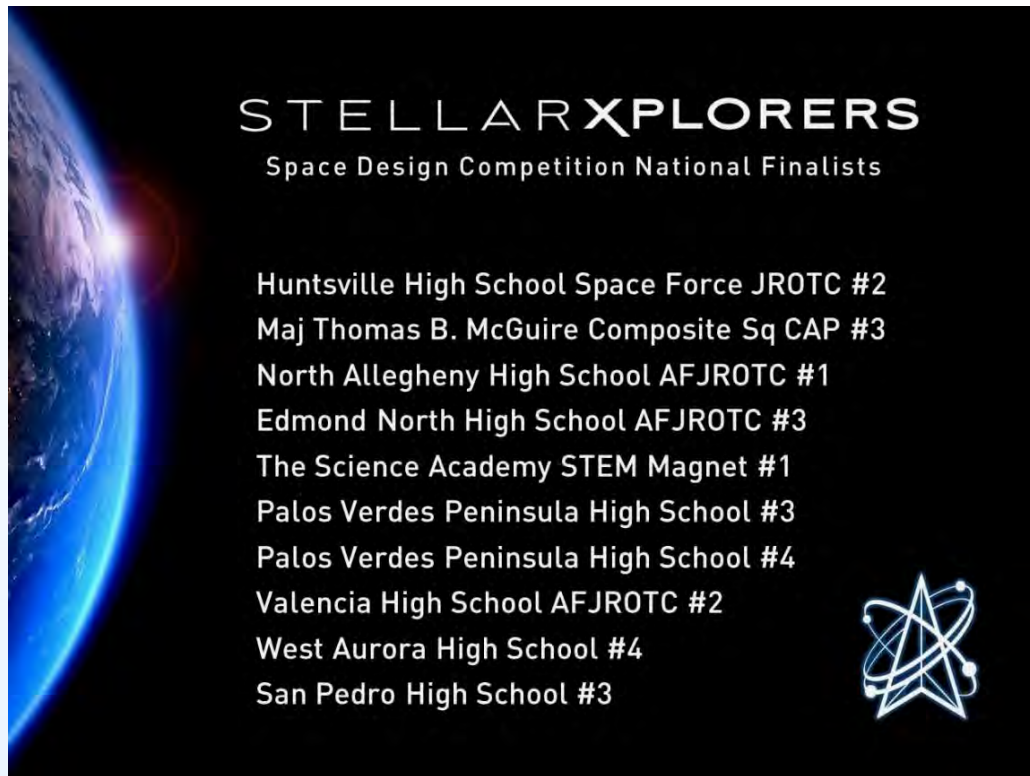
Looking back now, I appreciate the experiences both places gave me. Growing up as an “Army Brat”, I have always had a deep love of our country, but after living in such different environments, it really drove home how thankful I am for the countless freedoms we enjoy as Americans every day, especially as a woman. I have instilled a strong sense of appreciation in both of my daughters for those who served and are still serving. I am proud when they walk up and say, “thank you for your service” to a Veteran. In closing, thank you for your service and the countless sacrifices made by you and your families for this great nation.



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## Huntsville High School Space Force JROTC Qualified for Space Design Competition National Finals!

The Huntsville High School Space Force JROTC Detachment is one of ten Finalists in the annual STELLARXPLORERS Space Design Competition sponsored by the Air and Space Force Association. The team has won an all-expenses paid trip to NASA's Houston Space Center to participate in the STELLARXPLORERS Finals competition scheduled for 19-23 April. All Air Force and Guardians in the Tennessee Valley wish this talented team the best of luck !!



**GOOD LUCK!**





## Community Partners - ACE

# General Atomics Electromagnetic Systems



Scott McWhirter, Executive VP, and Bruce Barnhill, Director of Operations, General Atomics Huntsville, accept their Ace Medallion, and proudly display the full plaque. Thanks for the outstanding support over the past 10 years!

<http://www.ga.com/ems>

## Community Partners - Wingman

### Qualis Corporation



Senior Vice President for Strategy and Growth, Jon Cabra, proudly accepts the Community Partner renewal medallion from former Chapter President Rick Driesbach. Thanks for being a steadfast partner for Aerospace Education in the Tennessee Valley!

<https://www.qualis-corp.com/>

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## Wingman Level

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Basic level? Contact George Krym at [george.krym@yahoo.com](mailto:george.krym@yahoo.com).*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

20 Apr: Executive Council Meeting

18 May: Executive Council Meeting

15 Jun: Executive Council Meeting

### Chapter 335 Officers

• **President**

John Pennell

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• **Vice President**

Guy Broadhurst

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• **Secretary**

Eric Jackson

[eric.jackson1969@gmail.com](mailto:eric.jackson1969@gmail.com)

### Chapter 335 Special VPs

- **Aerospace Education:** Bob Hovde
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