

Local Heroes

Target Audience: All Personnel

Purpose	To remind all personnel of the heritage, pride, esprit de corps and unit cohesion created by those that served before us.
Description	Want to reconnect to your Air Force identity? Every community has local heroes that live among us. Some are highly decorated veterans that won medals and awards. Others are all-star professionals that worked in the background quietly making all the difference in the world. Others fall somewhere in the middle. No matter where they fall on the spectrum, the heroes living in our communities all provide a link to our history and heritage through their experiences and wisdom. Share the connection to living history and heritage by inviting our local heroes to visit, tour, speak, and interact with today's Airmen.
Employ	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compile a list of heroes in your local community• Heroes can be veterans, civil servants, community leaders, recognized experts, etc.• Contact local agencies to begin to learn who lives in your community<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ VFW, Chamber of Commerce, Retired Colonel or Chiefs groups, Commemorative Air Force, local museums, local colleges, industry, honorary commanders, and even newspapers published by your wing or local city (see images below)• Maintain your list of heroes and their contributions to and connection with our heritage• Invite local heroes to events, activities, speaking engagements, brown bag lunches, ceremonies, etc., anywhere they can have contact with our Airmen. Most will gladly speak or attend for no money or other compensation• Tailor your invites based on the local hero and what makes them unique• Spread the invites out to as many local heroes as possible in order to increase contact with our Airmen and our local community• Check with legal authorities before offering any form of compensation• See the examples on the following page

A lifetime of steadfast service, commitment

By Annette Crawford
Air Force Recruiting Service Public Affairs

It's a common practice among Air Force members, both active duty and civil service, to brag about how long they've been assigned somewhere, and there's no difference in Air Force Recruiting Service.

But for anyone who thinks they hold the record at AFHS, they better check with John "Jack" Burns first. He retired July 1 with 60 years of service to the U.S. Air Force — 41 of those with recruiting.

Born and raised in Youngstown, Ohio, Burns enlisted Oct. 10, 1955 — before Alaska and Hawaii became states. It was also before then-Lackland Air Force Base became the new Air Force Basic Military Training base; he completed his training at Sampson Air Force Base in Geneva, N.Y.

His first assignment was at Kirtland Air Force Base in the upper peninsula of Michigan where he served as an administrative clerk. Then it was off to the U.S. Territory of Alaska at Eielson Air Force Base.

"Recently I viewed photos of Eielson Air Force Base and the only building I recognized was the huge flight hangar. I knew, as at the time, it was the highly top secret U2 spy airplane that would land at night and park in that hangar. During my two years assigned to Eielson and for many years after, base Airmen never knew of this highly classified mission," Burns said.

After enlisting in 1959, he served at Selfridge Air Force Base, Mich., and then to Minnesota, where he met his wife, Mary.

"I met Mary when I first got assigned to the air station in April of 1961," Burns said. "Mary was a nurse who worked at St. Mary's Hospital Emergency Room. We were married in 1964 and had a wonderful 49 years and seven months of marriage, until she passed in 2013."

Later assignments included Egan Air Base, France; Royal Air Force Alconbury, England; and Minot Air Force Base, N.D., before he volunteered for duty overseas in Vietnam. He was assigned to the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam — Construction Directorate adjacent to Tan Son Nhut AB on the outskirts of Saigon.

When he returned stateside to K.I. Sawyer Air Force Base, Mich., Burns volunteered for duty with AFHS. He was selected to be an administrative supervisor in Pittsburgh in August 1971, starting his 41-year stint with the command. Six years later, he was transferred for the position of operations assistant in the command section at AFHS, Randolph Air Force Base.

"Back in 1977, Headquarters AFHS was located at the back of the base where the hangars were located. We were housed in five World War II open bay barracks," Burns said. "When we moved to the headquarters to a present location in July 1978, we were impressed. I have now worked in 25 different offices in the headquarters since 1978, all in the operations division."

Burns retired from active duty in December 1981, then began his civil service career in November 1981 with the Military Personnel Center at Randolph. He returned AFHS in March 1984 and initially worked in the



Master Sgt. John E. "Jack" Burns and his family at his Air Force retirement ceremony in December 1981.

Courtesy photo

collected accession branch. A year later, he moved to officer accessions in 1995, the line officer and health professions officer accession programs were combined, and in 2005, he was assigned exclusively to processing applications for all health profession programs.

"I have to say so myself," he said. "My strengths is not high-tech, but I'm on Facebook and the amount of data I have entered in the line officer and health professions data bases is really impressive, even if I have to say so myself."

"Sixty years of service is hard to fathom for most of us," said Col. Robert W. Traves, Jr., chief of the Operations and Marketing Division at AFHS. "After a distinguished active duty career and retirement, most move on to other things. Not Jack — he loves his Air Force too much to leave."

Traves said it's been an honor to serve alongside Burns and hear some of his great stories.

"We always say that the Air Force keeps right on rolling when any of us leave or retire, but there is no doubt in my mind the Air Force is losing a treasure next month," Traves said.

But as many years as he served in recruiting, Burns considers the most exciting day of his career was in the summer of 1956. He was only 17 years old.

"I was a clerk working for the chief of maintenance in the fighter interceptor squadron. This lieutenant walked in my office and says to me, 'Come with me. We are going for a ride.' He got me issued a parachute, got on a runway taxi and arrive at the T-33 trainer jet. Off we

went Pete Knight. On Oct. 3, 1967, Pete Knight set a world aircraft speed record for manned aircraft by piloting the X-15 to 5,220 miles per hour — a record that still stands today," he said.

"He flew 257 combat missions over Vietnam and flew more than 7,000 flight hours. I was Col. Pete Knight's copilot. It does not get any better than that."

Burns' plans for retirement include traveling back to Ireland, he and his wife visited there for two weeks in 1999. He also hopes to visit family and friends all across the United States.

His eldest daughter, Ann Stefanek, did the honors of retiring her father in a ceremony at Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph July 10. She is a senior civil service public affairs executive in the office of the Secretary of the Air Force. She served nine years on active duty and recently retired as a colonel from the Air Force Reserve.

His daughter, Diana, is a vice president at Randolph-Brooks Federal Credit Union, and son, John, is a senior information technology executive at USAA in San Antonio.

"My family and I are so proud of my dad for his six decades of service to this great nation," Stefanek said. "The quiet commitment and steadfast service have been an inspiration to us and the Airmen he has helped over countless years in recruiting. His children, a host of my BPTC brethren and many O'Neals are a testament to my dad's guidance and counsel."

Stefanek said her father helped navigate many people through their "firsts" in their military journeys.

"His heart has always been in mentoring young people in the military and the Randolph community," she said. "I don't think he will ever realize just how many lives he has touched."

Tuskegee Airman celebrates 90th birthday with 99th FTS

By Senior Airman Alexandria Slade
Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph Public Affairs

Dr. Granville Coggs, a documented original Tuskegee Airman, celebrated his 90th birthday in the skies during a "fini" flight and ceremony with the 99th Flying Training Squadron July 30 at Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph.

"Dr. Coggs is an American hero and a pioneer," Lt. Col. Oliver Johnson, 99th FTS commander, said. "This is a huge day for the 99th FTS and 12th Flying Training Wing. We get to celebrate with Dr. Coggs, one of approximately 150 Tuskegee Airman pilots left out of the 992 pilots originally trained in Alabama, all while showcasing our mission."

In regard to spending his 90th birthday in the air, Coggs said he had "no words for his excitement."

"I am impressed and challenged the more I associate with the 99th FTS," he said. "I am impressed that the actions of the Tuskegee Airman during the war years are credible enough that the 99th FTS has chosen to model themselves after them."

Following his flight, Coggs was presented with 99th FTS memorabilia and had his name badge "retired" during a ceremony in his honor.

An all-African-American pursuit unit of the U.S. Army Air Corps established in 1941 and based in Tuskegee, Ala., the Tuskegee Airman included pilots, navigators, bombardiers, maintenance and support staff, instruc-

tors and others who kept the flying mission running.

After joining the Tuskegee Airman, Coggs was trained as an aerial gunner in 1944, commissioned as a bombardier and flew a B-25 Mitchell bomber, but finished training too late to be deployed into war.

"I hope Americans remember the Tuskegee Airman as a group of role models, that this group will inspire young people to know they can accomplish anything and overcome any obstacle," Coggs said.

Johnson said he and other members of the 99th FTS are proud to uphold that heritage.

"It is the greatest honor of my life to be part of the history and heritage of this squadron," he said. "Every time I come to work I'm humbled to know what they did to blaze a trail, overcome adversity and they refused to fail. They knew the criticism they would face and still fought to fight for their country."

Consistently athletic throughout his life and a multiple gold medalist at the Texas State Senior Games in the 400 meter run, Coggs said his "sprinting days are past."

"I regret that I'm not the physical specimen I was 10 or 20 years ago, but I'm glad I got to where I am now," he said. "I'm still doing everything I can."

For more than 30 years, Coggs worked as a diagnostic radiologist, focusing on breast cancer detection and inventing two ultrasound devices.

Coggs lives in San Antonio with his wife, Maud.



Photo by Harold China

Dr. Granville Coggs, documented original Tuskegee Airman, speaks to members of the 99th Flying Training Squadron July 30 at Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph.

Alamo Wing honorary commanders visit medical and operation units

By Senior Airman Bryan Swink
433rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

Ten 433rd Airlift Wing honorary commanders learned about the missions of the 433rd Medical Group and 433rd Operations Group at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland Dec. 5.

The tour began with a welcome, overview and briefing by both group commanders: Col. Ernest Vasquez, 433rd MDG commander, and Col. Leo Merkle, 433rd OG commander.

"We are excited to showcase what the men and women of our groups do here in the Alamo Wing," said Vasquez. "These amazing Airmen are members of the San Antonio community who volunteer to serve their country and do it proudly."

The first stop for the Honorary Commanders, who are influential members of the local community, was a tour of the 433rd MDG's mission that primarily takes place at the historic Wilford Hall Ambulatory Surgical Center.

They toured many of the areas 433rd AW Airmen have to visit when in-processing to the unit or conducting their annual physicals. They visited numerous places: from the optometry office, immunizations, dental and where Airmen have their blood drawn.

"It's really amazing to see the dedication and passion these Airmen have for their work in the Air Force Reserves," said Dr. Michael Jolla, 26th Aerial Port Squadron honor chief, chaplain and pastor at West End Baptist Church. "One of the really interesting things to find out is many of our medics work in the same or similar career field in their civilian jobs, which gives them an incredible amount of experience."

Before breaking for lunch, the honorary commanders received an extensive briefing from members of the 433rd Aeromedical Sighting Squadron Critical Care Air Transport Team. The briefers, led by Maj. Dana Meyer and Tech. Sgt. James Layless, talked about the equipment they use and the types of missions conducted when transporting wounded battlefield service members.

"To know these Airmen can set up a make-shift hospital on an aircraft that's flying at 30,000 feet and get a patient



Photo by Senior Airman Bryan Swink

433rd Airlift Wing honorary commanders take photos and view the equipment used by the 433rd Aerospace Medicine Squadron Critical Care Air Transport Teams when transporting injured service members on Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland Dec. 5.

from the Middle East all the way to the states without stopping is truly unbelievable," said Dick Holmberg, the 433rd Logistics Readiness Squadron honorary commander and president of Singing Water Vineyards.

After a quick lunch, the honorary commanders visited the C-5 Galaxy simulators to test their skills sitting in the pilot's seat and taking off, flying and landing the Air Force's largest aircraft. The simulators are designed to replicate the exact controls, movement and feeling as one would expect if actually flying in the skies.

"I can't explain how it works, but my stomach sank when taking off and I knew in my head I wasn't flying but it was difficult to convince my body I wasn't," said John Smith, 433rd Security Forces Squadron honorary commander and immigration officer with the Department of Homeland Security. "That was a memorable experience that I will never forget."

The Honorary Commanders Program was developed to encourage an exchange of ideas, share experiences and foster friendships between key members of the local civilian community and the Joint Base San Antonio military community. The program provides a unique opportunity for San Antonio area community leaders to shadow the 433rd AW group and squadron commanders.

For more information about the Alamo Wing Honorary Commander program, contact the 433rd AW Public Affairs office at 925-5194.

DREAMING OF THE MAJORS
LIVING IN THE BUSH

A Life's Journey through
the Negro League with
His Guardian Angels

DICK 'LEFTY' O'NEAL

Posted: Saturday, February 22, 2014 4:20 pm

By JONATHAN PETTY Wayland Baptist University | 0 comments

Wayland Baptist University welcomes Dick 'Lefty' O'Neal to campus on Wednesday to share his story as the only white baseball player to play for two Negro League teams.

O'Neal will speak in Wayland's weekly chapel service at 11 a.m. Wednesday. He will then have lunch with members of the baseball team and spend the afternoon touring the baseball facility and visiting with others who are interested in his story.

O'Neal's story is chronicled in his book "Dreaming of the Majors: Living in the Bush," and is being developed into a motion picture. As a child, O'Neal was driven with a love of baseball. His desire was to play in the major leagues, but in his own words was never quite good enough.

While his story deals with race and race relations more than 20 years after Jackie Robinson broke the race barrier in Major League Baseball, O'Neal's testimony is one of how God worked in his life to bring him to where he is today. His love for the game and love for the people with whom he played gave him a deeper understanding of Christianity.

"In my case, I had to realize that there is more to life than baseball, but baseball gave me a great opportunity to share how it helped me with my walk as a Christian," O'Neal says in the introduction to his book.

O'Neal currently lives in San Antonio and is still involved with the sport he loves.