

GULF DEFENDER



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Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla. *Gulf Defender*

Jan. 9, 2004

In brief

Welcome, commanders

Team Tyndall welcomes Gen. Don Cook, commander of Air Education and Training Command, and all attendees of the general's AETC Commanders' Conference, which takes place here this week.

TAFB organization meetings

Tyndall professional organizations meet according to the following schedules:

Tyndall Active Airman Association – 1 p.m. on the second Thursday of the month in the community activities center; Focus 56 – 3 p.m. on the third Tuesday of the month in the NCO Academy Auditorium; Top 3 – 3 p.m. on the third Friday of the month in the enlisted club; and Air Force Sergeants' Association at 4 p.m. on the third Wednesday of the month in the enlisted club.

Metallic nametag

As a reminder, effective Jan. 1, the metallic nametag must be worn on the service dress uniform and the pullover cardigan sweater.

Guidance for proper wear can be found in the frequently asked questions link on the AFPC Web site at www.afpc.randolph.af.mil.

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Lisa Carroll

43rd Fighter Squadron pilot reaches milestone

Maj. Michael "Troll" Hoepfner is doused by fellow pilots after completing his first check ride at Tyndall AFB in Raptor 18. Major Hoepfner is the first pilot to qualify in a Tyndall-stationed F/A-22. For more information on the pilot and his training, see page 8.

Special NASCAR event comes to Tyndall

2ND LT. ALBERT BOSCO
325th Fighter Wing public affairs

In the sport of NASCAR racing, fractions of seconds can mean the difference between reaching victory lane and simply taking a Sunday drive at the track. Likewise, for Air Force flight operations, seconds can mean the difference between mission success and failure – even life or death of those involved.

So, what do the two have in com-

mon? Both teams boast the support of dedicated professionals charged with ensuring their respective high-performance machines are in top-running condition at all times.

For those who have never had the opportunity to watch a NASCAR pit crew or an Air Force maintenance team "race the clock," there will be an opportunity to do so Monday from 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., when Tyndall Air Force

Base hosts the Wood Brothers Racing Team and NASCAR veteran driver Ricky Rudd for a "reverse pit stop."

The event, which is open to the base populace, takes place on the west side of Hangar 3 and features nine six-person Team Tyndall honorary "pit crews" comprised of members of the 325th Operations Group, 325th Maintenance Group, 325th Mission Support Group, 325th

●SEE RACE PAGE 3



Larry McTigue

Ricky Rudd and the Wood brothers visit Tyndall Monday.

Training the best air dominance team for America

Reflections on 2003, projections for 2004

BRIG. GEN. LARRY NEW

325th Fighter Wing commander



Welcome back. I hope everyone had a safe and enjoyable holiday season. Before we put 2003 in the rearview mirror,

I'd like to take a moment to reflect on a year of tremendous accomplishments and thank all of you for your hard work.

Last year presented Team Tyndall with several challenges as well as many opportunities. I am proud to say we met them head-on and allowed everyone to see what makes Team Tyndall so great.

Topping the list of accomplishments for '03 is the Operational Readiness Inspection that took place in July. I knew going into it we would do well because of the tremendous effort each of you put into preparation.

As a result, we received a strong excellent rating with many "best seen to date" and "benchmark program" comments from the inspection team.

Another noteworthy 2003 accomplishment is our unmatched support for our Expeditionary Air Force for the global war on terror and other contingencies. Team Tyndall provided unparalleled support to operations including Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and Noble Eagle.

It is nothing short of amazing that despite sending folks to support these endeavors, we were able to fill in the gaps and ensure we continued our mission of producing the world's best air dominance team, many of whom have already contributed to successful combat operations.

2003 also marked a historic first as we received the Air Force's first operational F/A-22. The entire wing and command contributed countless hours working toward that moment, as we transitioned from the home of air su-



"Last year presented Team Tyndall with several challenges as well as many opportunities. I am proud to say we met them head-on and allowed everyone to see what makes Team Tyndall so great."

BRIG. GEN. LARRY NEW

325th Fighter Wing commander

riority to the home of air dominance.

Looking forward, 2004 will certainly be busy as the Checkertail Clan will be involved in numerous activities throughout the year. I'd like to highlight some events that will occur this year and provide you with a glimpse of what I envision for Team Tyndall in 2004.

We will be hosting some highly-visible events and people this year. This week we'll host the Air Education and Training Command commander's conference.

And later in the month, we'll host the Secretary of the Air Force, along with other distinguished visitors. Team Tyndall has some very dynamic and important missions, and interest in our operations is sure to be high.

Also, you can mark your calendars for this year's Gulf Coast Salute open house and air show March 27-28.

This year's event will feature the U.S. Navy Blue Angels aerial demonstration team. Additionally, there will be numerous military and civilian aircraft aerial demonstrations and various activities and events the entire family will enjoy.

The beginning of the New Year also marks implementation of the new Air Force fitness program. With fitness becoming a vital part of our Air Force culture, senior Air Force leaders have deemed it important we are doing what

it takes to ensure we are in the best physical condition possible to meet future challenges.

To meet this goal, we will begin baseline testing here this month and in February, with follow-ups for each unit testing throughout the year. As we move forward with the new fitness program, I encourage units to continue group exercise sessions and for everyone to create and maintain a personal routine.

I am confident Team Tyndall will do well when the testing begins.

Team Tyndall people are our most important asset and healthy people are the key to ensuring mission success.

Speaking of Team Tyndall people, as always, we will continue to work on improving ways in which we take care of folks here.

That said, one of our goals is to develop people more effectively through training and mentoring to help them achieve their goals, and we will look for every opportunity to recognize deserving people for the work they do.

Additionally, we will continue to work to improve the quality of life for service members and their families.

To improve the quality of life for folks in the workplace, we have spent tens of millions of dollars for base infrastructure improvements.

Some of these improvements can already be seen, such as the ongoing gate

construction, which will enhance force protection and alleviate some traffic issues.

There have also been several facility improvements throughout the base.

Other projects include construction on an Air Operations Center for 1st Air Force/Continental NORAD Region, completion of the new communications facility, and renovations to the base operations facility.

All of these projects will aid us in our ability to graduate F-15 and F/A-22 pilots and crew chiefs, air battle managers and intelligence officers.

Additionally, the new facilities will allow us to fully develop F/A-22 training and continue to bed down the 43rd Fighter Squadron and 43rd Aircraft Maintenance Unit.

Finally, we will round off the transition by adding data link capability that will provide realistic team training for our F-15, F/A-22 and Air Battle Manager crews.

Aside from carrying out our training mission, we will continue to support our nation's efforts in supporting the global war on terror.

As Air Expeditionary Force Silver winds down, we will see a return to a more normal AEF rotation schedule.

Additionally, we will continue to pledge our support to 1st AF/CONR and Operation Noble Eagle in support of defending our nation's airspace.

As you can see we have a lot on our plate, and this year promises to be as busy as 2003, if not busier.

I am confident Team Tyndall will rise to the occasion and meet each challenge head-on, showing once again that there is no finer Air Force organization. This time next year we'll all be able to look back with pride on our accomplishments in 2004.

Thank you for all you do for our Air Force.

Gulf Defender Editorial Staff

Brig. Gen. Larry New 325th FW commander
 Capt. Chris Karns chief, 325th FW public affairs
 2nd Lt. Bosco chief, internal information
 Airman Sarah McDowell editor
 Tech. Sgt. Daniel Neely staff reporter
 Christine Sullivan staff reporter
 Airman Sarah McDowell staff reporter

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The deadline for article submissions to the *Gulf Defender* is 4 p.m. Friday, prior to the week of publication unless otherwise noted. Articles must be typed and double-spaced, preferably on a 3.5-inch disc. Stories should be submitted directly to the public affairs office, Building 662, Room 129 or mailed to: 325 FW/PAI, 445 Suwannee Ave., Tyndall AFB, FL, 32403-5425 or emailed to editor@tyndall.af.mil. Public affairs staff members edit all material for accuracy, brevity, clarity, conformity to regulations and journalistic style. The delivery of the *Gulf Defender* to Tyndall base housing sections is provided by the *Panama City News Herald*.

For more information, or to advertise in the newspaper, call (850) 747-5000.

● **FROM RACE PAGE 1**
Medical Group, 325th Maintenance Operations Squadron, 325th Maintenance Squadron and the 1st, 2nd, 43rd and 95th Aircraft Maintenance Units.

The teams will compete against each other by performing various maintenance tasks on Mr. Rudd's No. 21 Motorcraft Racing/Air Force Ford Taurus race car, performing such tasks as changing two of the car's tires, cleaning the windshield and simulating refueling the car, allowing Team Tyndall

people to see what goes into keeping a professional race car on the track and in the race.

Once all of the Tyndall crews try their hand on Mr. Rudd's car, the winning Team Tyndall crew will face-off against a team consisting of Air Education and Training Command commanders in the afternoon.

"This will be a fun event and will demonstrate how NASCAR and Tyndall teams are similar with a group of hard-working, dedicated professionals working

together to win," said Maj. Ron McAfee, 325th Maintenance Squadron maintenance operations officer and event project officer. "I'm not much of a NASCAR fan, but I do like fast cars, loud engines and competition, and events like this build morale among all of Team Tyndall, which is essential to the health of the organization," said Col. Sean Murphy, 325th Medical Group commander and honorary Team Tyndall pit crew member.

Aside from watching Team Tyndall crews tote

tires, jacks and fuel cans around the ramp, spectators will have an opportunity to get up-close and personal with the Wood Brothers' Air Force-sponsored race car, complete with an Air Force paint scheme. Additionally, Mr. Rudd's pit crew will have an opportunity to see what goes into keeping a high-performance fighter in the air by performing a "pit stop" for a Tyndall F-15C Eagle.

In addition to "pitting" for Tyndall, the NASCAR pit crew will receive tours of various maintenance facili-

ties, including the "hush house," where they will witness an F-15's 25,000 pound thrust-class Pratt & Whitney F100-PW-100 engine run in full afterburner.

In 2002, the Wood Brothers attended a similar event at Dover AFB, Del., and are looking forward to bringing NASCAR to Tyndall.

"I have a lot of respect for the Air Force and the military in the way they do everything," said Mr. Rudd. "We all enjoy visiting the bases, seeing how they work and meeting all the men and

women."

The racing team's car, and the transport vehicles used to haul it to the track, carried the Air Force paint scheme numerous times during the 2002 and 2003 racing seasons, highlighting the Air Force logo and mission to an audience of avid fans who are passionate about fast and loud machines. Additionally, the car and transport vehicles will be on display at the Base Exchange Saturday and Sunday during normal operating hours.

Action Line

Comment:

I have an idea for base housing. I would like to see lighted house numbers put on the homes in the housing areas. I think anyone responding to an emergency would be able to see the addresses better. I recently left Warner-Robins Air Force Base and they had lighted house numbers. I would like to see if this is possible here.

Response:

Thank you for offering your suggestion to make housing a better and safer place to live. Tyndall emergency responders agree that placing illuminated house numbers on each unit will make finding the unit in the dark much easier. Due to the current housing privatization initiative at Tyndall, adding the illuminated numbers immediately is not a cost-effective solution. However, this is a perfect suggestion to add to the list of desirables in our housing privatization statement of work. I will ensure your suggestion is included when we put together the list of desirables during the next month. Thank you again for a proactive solution to make housing safer for all occupants.

Larry D. New

BRIG. GEN. LARRY NEW
325th Fighter Wing commander

Action Line: 283-2255
Fraud, waste and abuse 283-4646

MyPay advantages

1ST LT. GARY SMITH
325th Comptroller Squadron

MyPay is a new tool that allows users to make changes to their pay account via the Internet, and can be accessed 24 hours-a-day, 365 days-a-year.

MyPay provides handy account alterations such as viewing, printing, and saving leave and earnings statements. Hard copies of LESs can also be stopped in myPay, providing greater security and privacy to the individual. Account-holders can also change their federal and state tax withholdings. Other features include bank account and electronic funds transfer information update capability, personal and address information editing, and Thrift Savings Plan administration. Encryption and other technology safeguards all account information.

By using myPay, individuals are able to make instant account changes. MyPay is also expedient. LESs are delivered to myPay up to a week before hardcopy printouts are received. Input errors are avoided in myPay because users are able to make revisions themselves.

Those who don't have myPay personal identification numbers can come to the financial services office to obtain a temporary PIN. Individuals can also simply log on to the Web site and click on "need a new PIN." The new PIN will be mailed to the address maintained in the financial system, so it is important to ensure your mailing address is correct prior to using this option. In addition, the financial services office is currently visiting squadrons to issue myPay PINs to members.

MyPay Web site <https://mypay.dfas.mil>

For more information regarding myPay PIN issuance, call Master Sgt. Bruce Gress at 283-4117.

Tax woes?

TECH. SGT.

ALPHONSO OVERTON
Base legal office

Tax time is quickly approaching. Luckily, the Tyndall Air Force Base Volunteer Income Tax Assistance center will provide valuable tax service free of charge. The centers staff of Internal Revenue Service-trained VITA representatives will render tax services Feb. 2 through April 15 in the Marsh Room

of the Tyndall Community Activities Center. During this period, assistance will be offered 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. every Monday through Thursday.

Unfortunately, with the exception of base home daycare providers, the

VITA tax center cannot offer assistance to private business owners or rental property owners.

Once your filing is complete if you can't wait to get your refund, the IRS is also offering *free* online electronic filing to qualified filers. This year specific criteria are posted on the IRS Web site at www.irs.gov.

Free electronic filing, electronic payment, fast refunds and a convenient

location are great reasons to let the tax center file your 2003 tax return. Why pay for tax services being offered for free? Take advantage and let the VITA tax center assist you with your tax preparations.



November re-enlistees

Senior Airman Beau Baker, 325th Air Control Squadron
Staff Sgt. Phillip Bonadonna, 325th Operations Support Squadron

Staff Sgt. Kejuan Bostick, 325th Maintenance Squadron

Tech. Sgt. Jerry Burks, 325th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron

Senior Airman William Cecchini, 325th Communications Squadron

Tech. Sgt. David Fischer, 325th Maintenance Group
Senior Master Sgt. Raymond Graber, 325th Comptroller Squadron

Senior Airman Aliah Griffin, 325th Communications Squadron

Senior Airman Ryan Hill, 325th Operation Support Squadron

Tech. Sgt. Daniel Holman, Headquarters Air Force Civil Engineer Support Agency

Master Sgt. Howard Marshall, 83rd Fighter Weapons Squadron

Tech. Sgt. Bethany May, 325th Comptroller Squadron
Staff Sgt. Jeremy Moody, 325th Communications Squadron

Senior Airman Shantel Outlaw, 325th Mission Support Squadron

Tech. Sgt. Kirkland Raibon, 53rd Weapons Evaluation Group

Staff Sgt. Crystal Roach, 325th Aeromedical Dental Squadron

Tech. Sgt. Robert Stegemeyer, 325th Fighter Wing
Senior Airman Jacinta Wilder, 325th Air Control Squadron

Chief Master Sgt. Thomas Wilson, 1st Air Force
Master Sgt. Frederick Villareal, Tyndall NCO Academy

Commissary officials ease 'mad cow' concerns



Jim Weslowski

Officials from the Defense Commissary Agency deem American beef safe. For the latest developments on the current situation, and for links to the USDA and information on recalls and food safety, commissary customers can visit www.commissaries.com.

FORT LEE, Va. – Officials at the Defense Commissary Agency are closely monitoring the ever-changing situation involving a case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, also known as “mad cow” disease, identified Dec. 23 in a single cow in Washington state.

Since Dec. 23, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has conducted a limited recall of 10,000 pounds of beef that may have originated from the infected cow and from cows slaughtered at the same time and location.

“No beef in any of our 275 commissaries worldwide has been involved in a USDA recall,” said Col. Mark Wolken, chief of public health, safety and security for DeCA. “The USDA has stated that the U.S. beef supply is safe and that the beef recall resulted from an abundance of caution, not fear that the meat is infected. Should the USDA make a determination that there is a danger, DeCA would be first to react to protect the health of our customers,” he said.

Since the first U.S. case of BSE was identified Dec. 23, commissary customers have raised questions about the safety of beef purchased at their local commissary. Questions range from “should I re-

turn the ground beef I bought last week?” to “has my commissary received meat from the infected cow?”

The answer to both questions is “no” said Colonel Wolken, an Army veterinarian. “As is always the case, customers who wish to return commissary products for a full refund may do so without question. The brain, spinal cord, and lower intestine – where the protein or ‘prion’ that is believed to cause BSE is found – is not generally used in food consumed by Americans. Those parts were removed from the infected cow before any of it could enter the meat supply.”

USDA investigators have determined that the recalled meat went to a few commercial markets in Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana and Guam as well as Washington, Oregon, California and Nevada. “No commissaries received any of those shipments,” Colonel Wolken emphasized.

Mad cow is a fatal disease that destroys the brains of the infected animal. It is caused in cattle by misshapen proteins called prions and is thought to be spread from animal to animal through contaminated feed. The approximately 140 deaths linked to “mad cow” since the mid-90s have mainly been in Britain.



Jim Weslowski

'Earning' a place on the Florida/Bay County Special Olympics team

Special Olympian Jamie serves Airman 1st Class Mike Perez, 95th Fighter Squadron, a piece of cake during a Florida/Bay County Special Olympics fundraiser. Special Olympian volunteers were at the Tyndall Commissary Jan. 6 passing out cake, punch, flyers and coupons donated by corporate sponsors. Proceeds up to \$80,000 are planned to be generated for this year's Special Olympics. The Regional Special Olympics will be held in Marianna, Ga., March 19. For more information, or volunteer opportunities, call Sherry Chuhay, Florida/Bay County Special Olympics coach, at 769-0842.

Adverse actions: month of December

Article 15s:

A senior airman from the 1st Fighter Squadron received a suspended reduction to airman first class, 15 days extra duty, and a reprimand for being absent without leave more than three, but less than 30 days.

A senior airman from the 325th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron received a reduction to airman, suspended forfeiture of \$200 pay per month for two months and 45 days extra duty for wrongful use of marijuana.

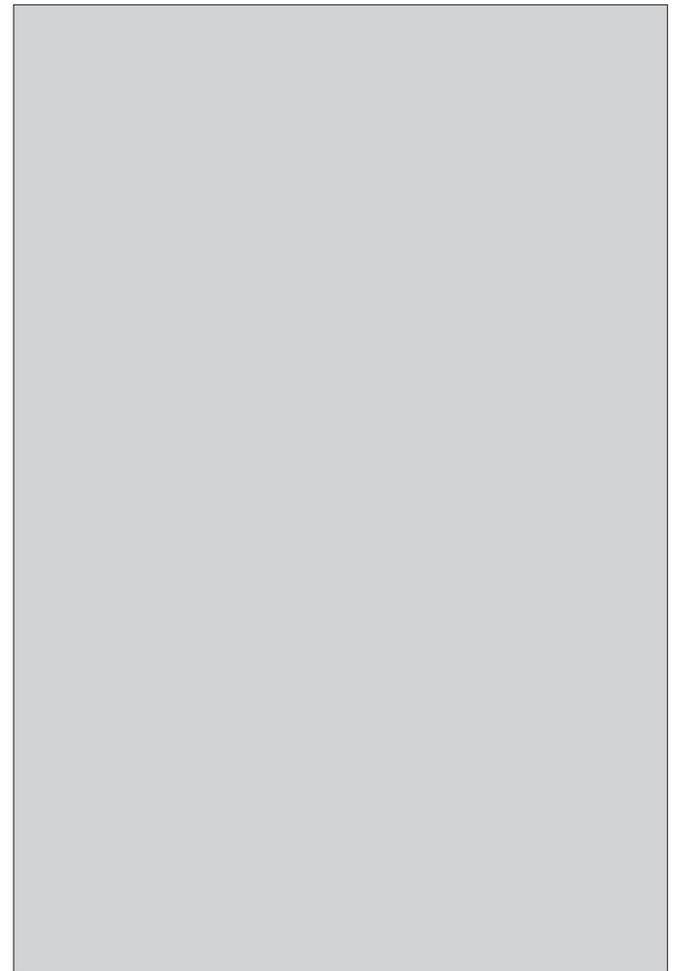
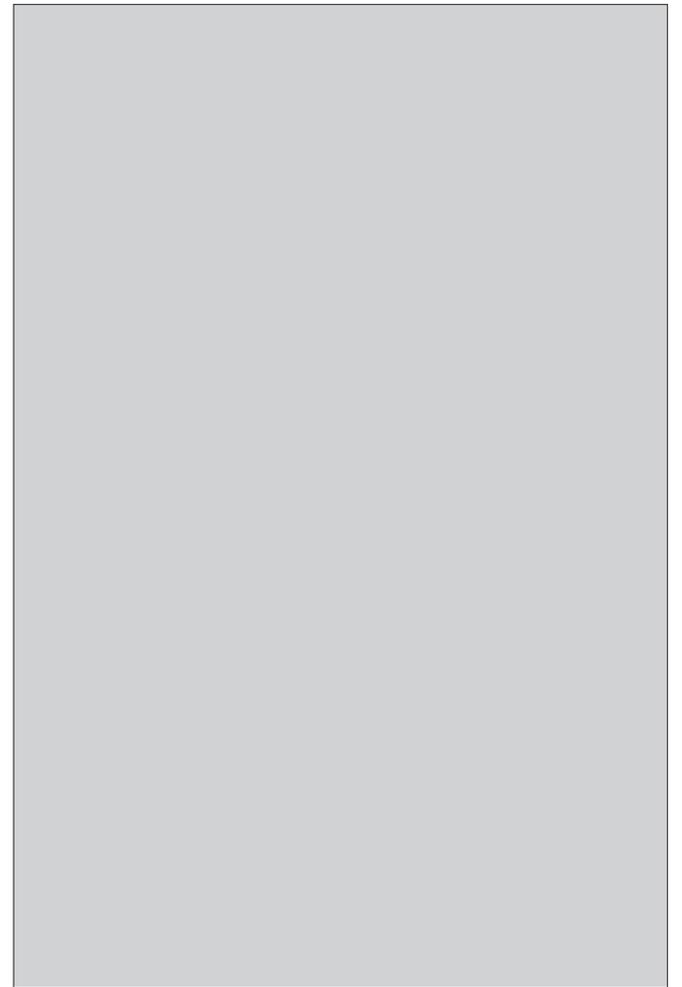
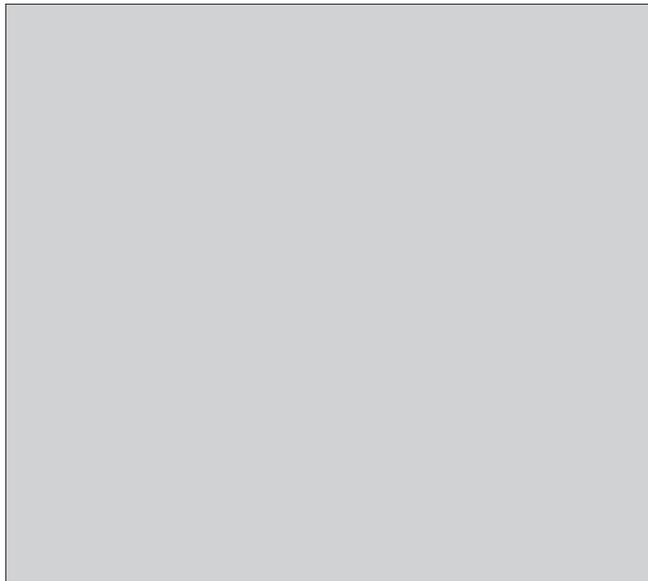
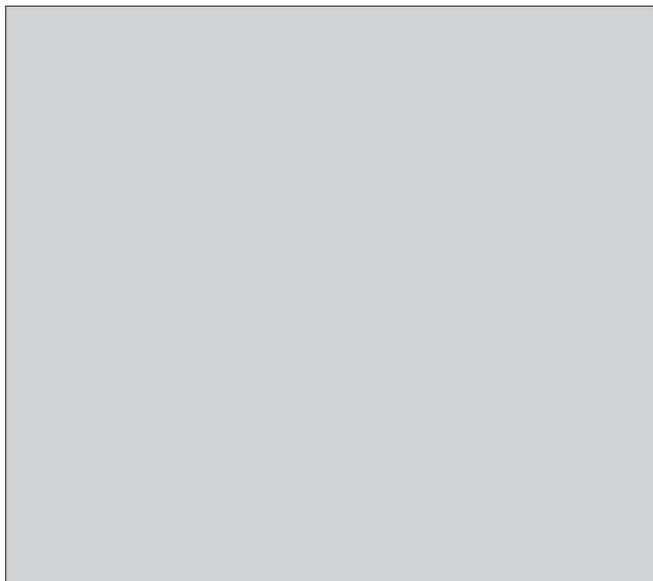
A senior airman from the 325th AMXS received a reduction to airman basic for drunk driving and dereliction

of duty (no proof of drivers license and open container of alcohol).

A senior airman from the 325th Maintenance Squadron received a suspended reduction to airman first class, suspended forfeiture of \$50 pay per month for two months, 30 days extra duty, and a reprimand for failure to go.

Administrative discharges:

An airman basic from the 325th Civil Engineer Squadron received a general discharge for minor disciplinary infractions.



NASCAR visits Team Tyndall

The Wood Brothers' No. 21 Motorcraft Racing/Air Force Ford Taurus show car and team hauler (18-wheeler) will be on display outside the Tyndall Base Exchange 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday. For more information about other NASCAR events coming to Tyndall, see the story on page 1.



Air Force Recruiting Service

Stripes for Exceptional Performers: 2004



Photos by Lisa Carroll



Brig. Gen. Larry New, 325th Fighter Wing commander, presents Stripes for Exceptional Performers promotion certificates to: (Top left) Tech. Sgt. Matthew Dahlin, 325th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron aircraft electrical and environmental systems craftsman, (Top right) Tech. Sgt. Gina Watson, 325th Medical Operations Squadron non-commissioned officer in-charge of the ADAPT program, (Bottom left,) Master Sgt. John Mangelsdorf, 325th Medical Support Squadron NCOIC of medical materiel. Commanders can promote a limited number of airmen with exceptional potential to the grades of staff sergeant through master sergeant.

Tyndall trains first Raptor Pilot

43rd FS major graduates Tyndall schoolhouse



Lisa Carroll

Maj. Micheal Hoepfner completes his checkout flight in Raptor No. 18 as the first local F/A-22 fighter pilot to finish his training here.

CHRISTINE SULLIVAN

325th Fighter Wing public affairs

Maj. Michael "Troll" Hoepfner says he has the greatest job in the world, and as the first local fighter pilot to complete his F/A-22 Raptor training at Tyndall Air Force Base, few would argue.

"I feel so lucky that I got to be the first to qualify," he said.

The assistant director of operations for the 43rd Fighter Squadron is one of only three Team Tyndall fighter pilots currently qualified to fly the F/A-22, and he is the first pilot to qualify in a Tyndall-stationed Raptor. Lt. Col. Jeffrey Harrigian, 43rd Fighter Squadron commander and Maj. Steven Luczynski, 43rd FS flight commander, both completed their training at Nellis AFB, Nev.

"Training Major Hoepfner provided a tremendous sense of pride for everyone in the 43rd Aircraft Maintenance Unit and the Raptor team as a whole to include all our contractor support," said Colonel Harrigian.

Major Hoepfner arrived at Tyndall in May 2002. As an F-16 Falcon veteran, he continues to fly out of Eglin AFB, Fla. in support of operational testing.

"As an F-16 pilot, I think it's one of the most beautiful planes on earth and does so many different things. We call ourselves the jacks of all trades and the masters of none," said Major Hoepfner. "In the F/A-22 though, we'll be the masters of all."

Being able to get up high and fast stacks the fight in the Raptor's favor as the fifth generation of fighter jet, he said. The mantra of the F/A-22 program is stealth, integrated avionics, increased maneuverability and supercruise leading to an increased precision and attack capability.

"The big difference is in the aircraft's capabilities," said Major Hoepfner. "The F/A-22 is two steps above the F-16 in every area I can think of. It's an absolutely amazing jet."

The F/A-22 also out-performs the F-15, proving to be more maneuverable, more reliable and less detectable than the Eagle. Essentially, the F/A-22 elevates U.S. tech-

tinues their impressive work in providing us with awesome jets."

Major Hoepfner says the biggest challenge right now is maintaining a progression over time. Everyone is helping to keep the program going and sustaining its momentum.

All the things that apply in a 24-person squadron have to get done and currently

"As an F-16 pilot, I think it's one of the most beautiful planes on earth and does so many different things. We call ourselves the jacks-of-all-trades and masters of none. In the F/A-22 though, we'll be the masters of all."

MAJ. MICHAEL HOEPFNER

43rd Fighter Squadron assistant director of operations

nological advantages and updates '70s technology, providing first look, first shot, first kill capability.

Initial flight training for the single-seat aircraft included a trip to the Boeing headquarters in Seattle, Wash. for ground school academic training that lasted two weeks. Then he traveled to Atlanta, Ga. for training on the high fidelity tactical simulators.

Emergency procedure simulator training was conducted at Tyndall and after numerous sessions, he felt more than ready to take the Raptor up for the first time.

According to Colonel Harrigian, support personnel in the squadron played key roles in getting him airborne.

"From intelligence to aviation management and life support; they all provided crucial training and support, without which we would have been unable to accomplish this training," he added. "Our AMU also con-

only seven pilots are assigned. Even though they're busy, it's all being done as a function of the people they are surrounded with.

"Every single person in this unit from the airman that works behind the desk all the way up to Colonel Harrigian, is first rate," Major Hoepfner said. "You don't have to follow up on anyone, because you know it will be taken care of."

"It's not a coincidence that we're here together because the requirements to enter the program were pretty competitive," Major Hoepfner added. "We all see eye-to-eye on just about everything."

When he flew his first Raptor sortie November 12, he realized he'd been working toward that day for two and a half years.

"At Eglin, I kept saying I want to fly that jet someday," said Major Hoepfner. "Finally getting to do it was purely amazing."

"I'd heard all the stories how maneuverable the jet was and how the radar performed," he added. "But until you see it yourself, you really don't get an appreciation for the ability of this jet to do whatever you ask it to do."

So, what does the future hold for this fighter pilot?

"I want to finish up my syllabus check-out and then the 43rd needs to get up on step and start teaching everyone else so we can get Langley up by our goal of December 2005," said Major Hoepfner.

After the core cadre of seven pilots at Tyndall gets checked-out by early spring, three other F-15 pilots are scheduled to arrive at the 43rd for transition. Tyndall is expecting to bring in an initial cadre from Langley with small classes being held and progressively stacked.

According to his own predictions, the fighter pilot known as "Troll" hopes to be here a minimum of three years.

While he's here, the primary goal for Major Hoepfner and the 43rd FS is to have a solid cadre in place at Langley by December of next year and continue the F/A-22 training at both bases.

"Tyndall is going to get the job done and get these jets and everyone on step," he said. "The syllabus and the check-outs are coming along and that by December 2005 we're going to be as far along in the program as we can be."

"Team Tyndall should be proud of Major Hoepfner's accomplishment, because as with all training here at Tyndall, it's a team effort," said Colonel Harrigian. "From the firefighters to the folks in the tower, it's the concentrated efforts of all that allow us to accomplish the mission."

Comptrollers cash in at AETC awards competition

SENIOR MASTER SGT. ROB FULLER
325th Fighter Wing public affairs

The New Year arrived with great news for one Checkertail Clan unit as Air Education and Training Command announced awards for fiscal 2003.

The 325th Comptroller Squadron took top honors in two unit-level awards; Best Comptroller Organization and Best Financial Services Office. Also announced were two individual award winners; Capt. Craig Harding in the Financial Analysis Officer category, and 1st Lt. Jessi Rozman in the Financial Services Officer category.

"If you look at the Comptroller Squadron, this is a group who has been doing the right things and heading in the right direction for quite some time," said Maj. Lester Weilacher, 325th Comptroller Squadron commander. "I'm honored to be their commander."

Some highlights of the squadron's award-winning year included the \$670 million in expenses guaranteed and \$29 million underwritten in F/A-22 beddown and global war on terror projects. The unit also received an overall "Excellent"

rating in the 2003 Headquarters AETC Operational Readiness Inspection.

Additionally, the comptrollers also achieved 100 percent travel pay accuracy and 99.5 percent timeliness rating while cutting the card delinquency rate by 18 percent from fiscal 2002 levels. More importantly to the 20,000 customers served annually, the unit received a 98 percent satisfaction rating in surveys, mentioning "outstanding professionals," and "great staff."

"You know your folks are doing great work when members of Team Tyndall stop you while you're out walking your dogs in the neighborhood and tell you about the fantastic service they receive at finance," said Major Weilacher.

The Financial Services Office took the top award in that category with strong achievements such as "Outstanding" flight and deployment ratings during the 2003 HQ AETC ORI. The office also teamed with the military personnel flight to take care of customers by reenergizing problem pay case review processes, helping wing leadership focus on the core problems.

The office disbursed \$50,000 in travel

and morale funds to students, which focused on training versus finances.

Finally, the flight manually computed and paid \$710,000 in military pay entitlements, ensuring troops got paid correctly.

According to Major Weilacher, the key to the unit awards are the people who accomplish the day-to-day mission. In fiscal 2003 two 325th CPTS members won individual award recognition.

Captain Craig Harding won AETC Financial Analysis Officer of the year based on achievements both at home and deployed. While deployed in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, he executed \$505 million at 26 sites and worked support needs with host-nation leaders such as fuel, water, facilities and telephones.

Back at Tyndall, Captain Harding managed fiscal matters for the wing's \$2 million aircraft sun shelter buy to protect F-15s and F/A-22s. He was also recognized for being a key leader in Tyndall's \$220 million fiscal 2004 financial planning process.

"We're extremely fortunate to have Craig," said Major Weilacher. "Bud-

get officers with Craig's blend of leadership skills, personality, and comptroller expertise are hard to come by."

1st Lt. Jessi Rozman also took honors as Financial Services Officer of the year.

She was recognized for superior performance during the ORI in July and for wartime readiness.

Lieutenant Rozman assured support of the wing's Operation IRAQI FREEDOM deployments with cashiers 100 percent trained and prepared for deployment. She also accomplished on-time travel pay for 20 reservists supporting Operation NOBLE EAGLE, disbursing \$13 million in travel payments.

Lieutenant Rozman further implemented a new pay system which slashed data input burden, improved input accuracy rate and customer satisfaction. "Far and away Jessi is the most mature and disciplined non-prior service lieutenant I've ever served with," said Maj. Weilacher.

"A natural leader, Jessi took the reins of our Financial Services Office and led them to their consecutive selection as the best in AETC."

Checkertail Salute



Lisa Carroll

During the time Ms. Roberts has been a member of the 325th Medical Operations Squadron staff, she has been the Medical Group's center of gravity regarding medical performance improvement, provider privileging, risk management and patient safety activities.

Katherine Roberts

Duty title: Credential/ patient safety/ risk manager

Unit: 325th Medical Operations Squadron

Time on station: Six years

Time in service: Four years active duty, two years civil service

Hometown: St. Paul, Minn.

Hobbies: Working out, reading

Goals: Earn a certificate in risk management

Favorite book: The Bible

Favorite movie: "Top Gun"

Favorite thing about Tyndall: The people

The Checkertail Salute is a 325th Fighter Wing commander program designed to recognize Tyndall's Warrior of the Week. Supervisors can nominate individuals via their squadron and group commanders. Award recipients receive a certificate, letter from the commander and a one-day pass.



A1C Nichole Adamowicz

High-wire act

Airman 1st Class Gordon Lam, top, (deployed from the 325th Communications Squadron) and two co-workers install an antenna mast and cable on an operations group building in Southwest Asia Dec. 28. All are technicians assigned to the 379th Expeditionary Communications Squadron.

Points of contact for Tyndall's 2004 Gulf Coast Salute

Chairman:

Maj. Joel "Joker" Carey (1st FS F-15 instructor pilot and assistant director of operations at 283-2070) - Primary contact for coordination with all base agencies, military/civilian performers, displays and the local community.

Vice Chairman:

Capt. Shawn "Fritter" Fritz (325th Air Control Squadron chief of weapons and tactics at 283-3296) — Alternate contact for chairman.

Operations Officer:

Maj. Mark "Woody" Hayes (1st Florida Air National Guard, F-15 instructor pilot and flight safety officer with the 325th Operations Group at 283-4327) — Primary contact for all military demonstrations, military static displays, civilian performers and the safe conduct of flying operations.

Ramp Boss:

Capt. Joe Deporter (1st Aircraft Maintenance Unit and officer in charge of the 325th Maintenance Group at 283-3145) and Senior Master Sgt. Larry Aderholdt (43rd Aircraft Maintenance Unit lead production superintendent at 283-4316) — Primary and alternate contact for all airfield setup, non-aircraft static displays, maintenance, fuel, ammunition and handling of transient aircraft and displays.

Support Chairman:

Capt. John Silverman (325th Mission Support Squadron's military personnel flight commander and 325th FW Support Group at 283-2488) — Primary contact for all open house support including marketing, contracting, civil engineering, security, public affairs, communications and first aid.

Gulf Coast Salute 2004 ramps up

CHRISTINE SULLIVAN

325th Fighter Wing public affairs

If you haven't already made plans for the last weekend in March, be sure to mark your calendar for Team Tyndall's Gulf Coast Salute scheduled to be held March 27 and 28.

The volunteer project officer and chairman for this year's open house is Maj. Joel "Joker" Carey, 1st Fighter Squadron F-15 Eagle instructor pilot and assistant director of operations. Although his daily duties keep him busy, when he volunteered to serve as chairman for this year's Gulf Coast Salute, he saw it as a challenge and plunged right in.

"I had a pretty good idea of the task at hand after talking with past project officers, but you don't really know until you get going," said Major Carey. "I've been doing a lot of learning over the past several months."

Major Carey is responsible for coordination between all base agencies,



Maj. Joel "Joker" Carey briefs Capt. Shawn "Fritter" Fritz on the upcoming open house events.

military and civilian performers and displays and local community members to present a world-class demonstration of what the U.S. military is all about.

Lt. Col. Bert Dreher, 1st Fighter Squadron director of operations, says he is very confident Major Carey will do a great job.

"When the operations group commander put the word out they were looking for someone that could handle such a highly-visible job such as the open house's project officer, I knew no one was more deserving or better qualified than 'Joker,'" said Lt. Colonel Dreher. "He's the

type of guy that when I task him with something, he salutes and gets it done -- period."

"I volunteered because I knew some folks who participated last year, and they said they met a lot of great people while gaining invaluable experience, said Capt. Shawn "Fritter" Fritz, 325th Air Control Squadron chief of weapons and tactics, and vice chairman of this year's Gulf Coast Salute. "They said they saw the fruits of their labor when the open house went very well."

"We will present a cross section of the U.S. military's capabilities with

an emphasis on the Air Force," said Major Carey. "Headlining the show will be the Navy's Blue Angels aerial demonstration team. Other performers are being solidified but will include flying demonstrations that are a sampling of the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps' fighter and transport aircraft as well as several civilian performers."

Aircraft static displays will include trainers, fighters, transports, tankers, helicopters, bombers, and command and control aircraft.

Other displays will focus on a cross section of the Air Force.

People interested in volunteering for the open house celebration, should contact their unit supervisors as soon as possible.

Any questions regarding Gulf Coast Salute 2004 can be directed to 2nd Lt. Linda Youngstrand, Gulf Coast Salute executive officer at 283-9726, or 1st Lt. Ryan Fitzgerald with the 325th Fighter Wing public affairs office at 283-2983.

Senior Airman Below the Zone recipients

Adam Barraclough, 325th Security Forces Squadron

Carlie Williams, 325th SFS

Timothy Carlin, 325th Communications Squadron

Courtney Dischar, 325th Air Control Squadron

Nina Butler, 325th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron

Robert Donaldson, 325th AMXS

Michael Hamel, 325th AMXS

Justin Nachman, 325th AMXS

Matthew Rainer, 325th AMXS

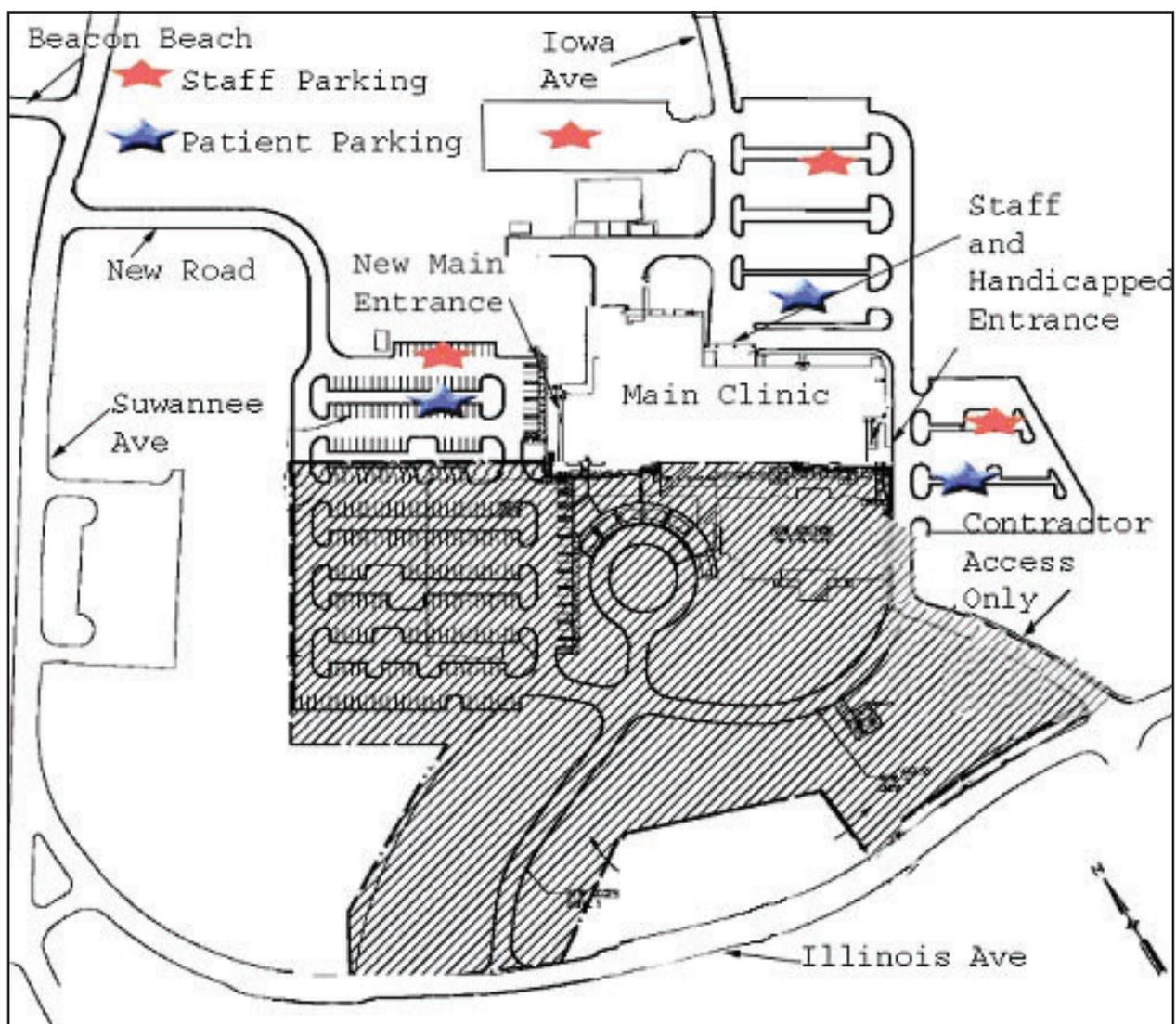
Steven Smith, 325th AMXS

Travis Glick, 325th Maintenance Squadron

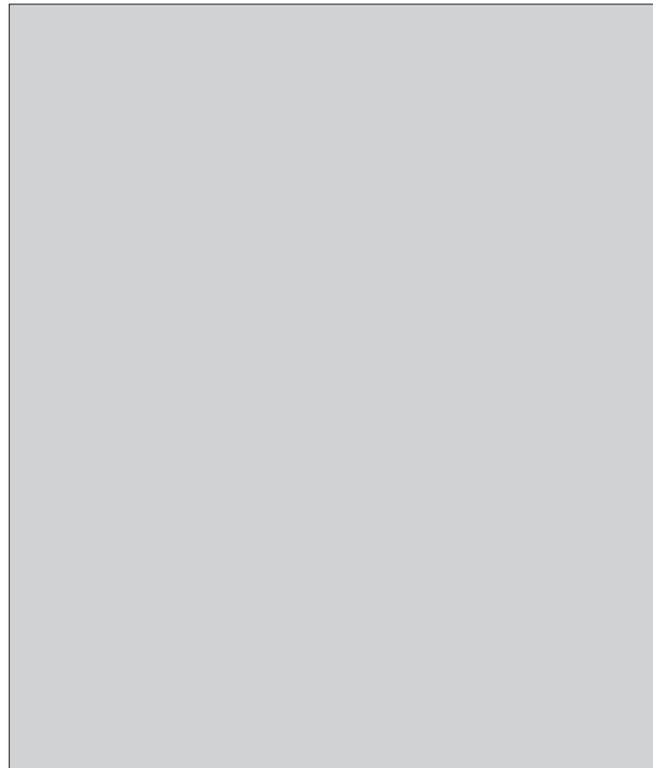
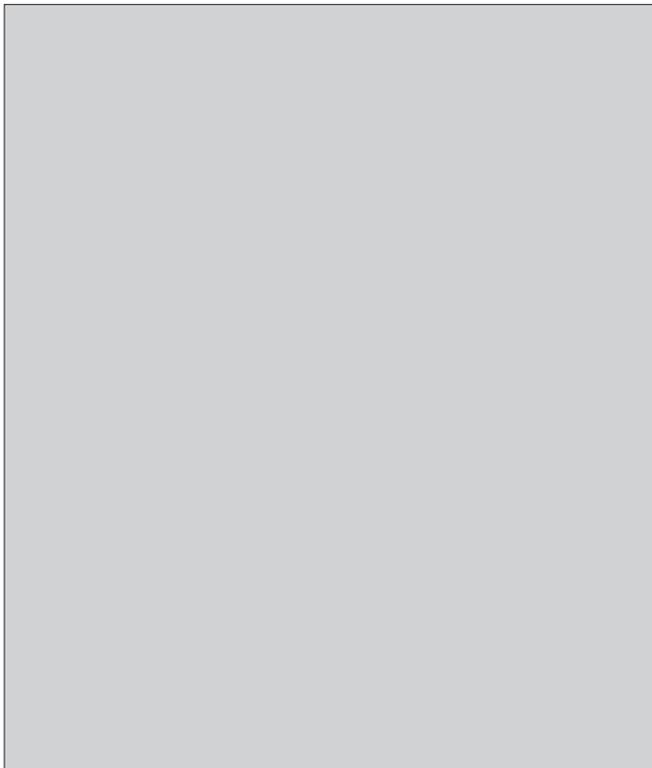
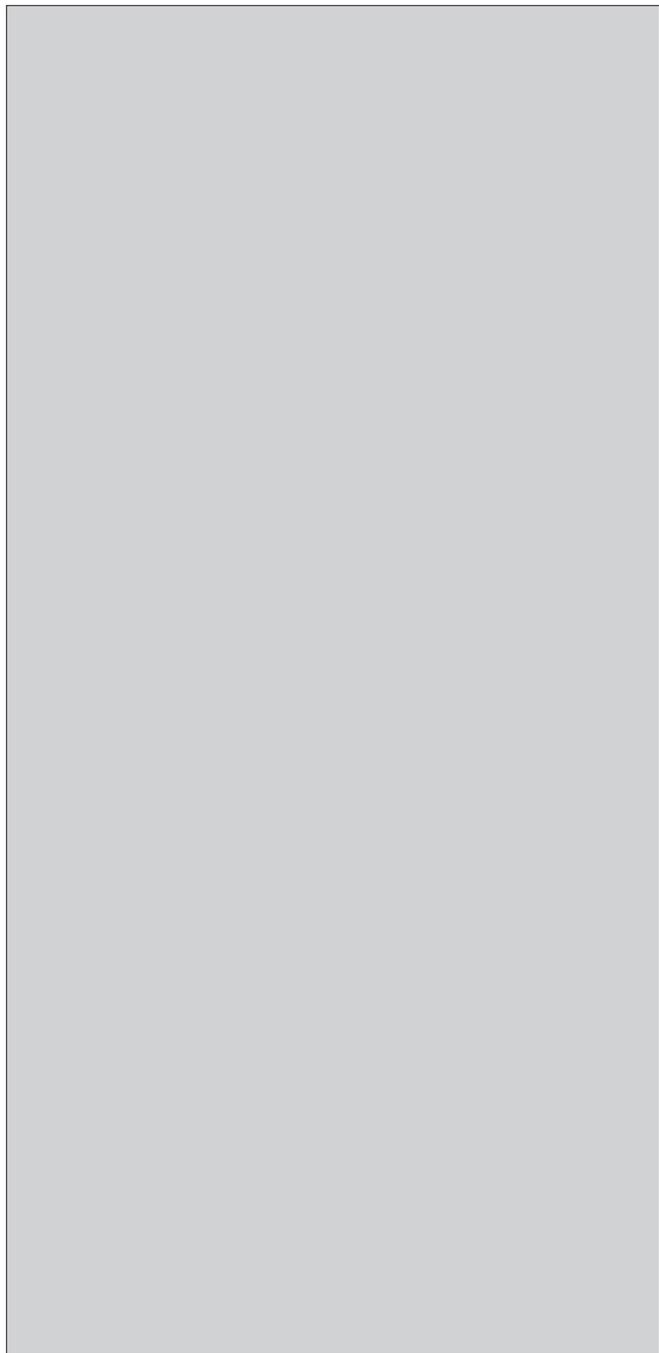
Andrew Smith, 81st Test Support Squadron

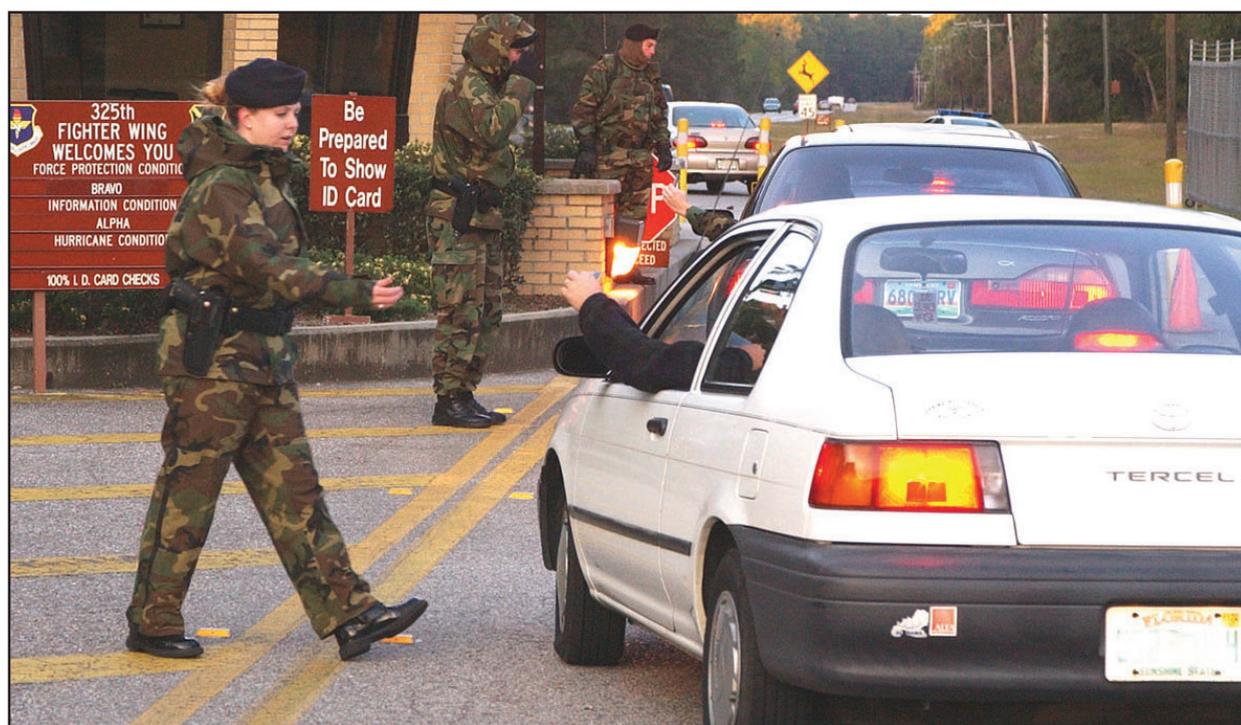
Paul Szymanski, 325th Contracting Squadron

Parking changes at 325th Medical Group



The north end of the 325th Medical Group's west parking lot and the new access road are now open for parking. Also, the existing west parking lot and its access road will be closed.





Tech. Sgt. Daniel Neely

Chilly Duty

From foreground, security specialists Airmen 1st Class Eileena Vining and Patrick Moore, and Army Spec. Justin Hatch check motorists' ID cards at Tyndall's Sabre Gate on a frigid Thursday morning.

RETIREE NEWS

Tyndall Retiree Activities Office

The Tyndall Retiree Activities Office is located in Bldg. 662. The Tyndall RAO provides support and passes on information and guidance of interest to all military retirees and their spouses in a broad area surrounding the base.

Tyndall provides the RAO office space and some funds for office supplies and the RAO Newsletter which is published once a year. However, the office is staffed entirely by unpaid volunteers who work from 9 a.m. to noon weekdays.

Volunteers who can spare three hours once a week, or even every other week, will be greatly appreciated. No special skills are required, and very little training is necessary.

Volunteers will have access to the latest information on active duty and retiree programs. If interested, contact retired Lt. Col. Ed Bultmann, at 747-1300 or one of the office staff members at 283-2737.

EVENTS

Black Heritage Committee meets

The Tyndall Black Heritage Committee meets the second Tuesday of every month. This month's meeting is 11 a.m. Tuesday in the community activities center.

New members and new participants are always welcome. For more information, call Master Sgt. Waldena Schmidt, committee president, at 283-6378.

Individual income tax guide available

Internal Revenue Service Publication 17, "Your Federal Income Tax," is available for reference and download on the IRS home page at www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p17.pdf. This guide provides comprehensive treatment of the general rules applicable to the filing of federal individual income tax returns. The publication closely follows the Form 1040, detailing the issues and considerations raised by each section of the form.

PWOC program

The Protestant Women of the Chapel invites everyone to attend a special program designed to help people beat the "winter blahs" and put their New Year's resolutions into action. Guest speaker Mabelle Kindle, a 20-year member of PWOC, leads this program 9 a.m. to noon Saturday at Chapel 2. She will weave a tale of "tabernacles, pomegranates and gifts that always fit." Door prizes and lunch are provided. For more information call Sarah Gary at 785-7394.

Author seeks women's OIF accounts

The Air Force has approved support for the book "Women Write the War" to be written by Bee Pederson. The author's goal is recount and weave together true stories about the Iraqi war from a woman's perspective. Ms. Pederson is looking for responses from women serving on active-duty during the war as well as the mothers, wives, sisters, fiancés and significant others of those who served. Women who wish to share how wartime experiences have affected them may submit an essay of 3,000 words or less of happy, sad, funny or proud anecdotes, poems, short stories or letters. If interested, please call 2nd Lt. Amber Millerchip, Air Education and Training

Command Public Affairs, Randolph Air Force Base, Texas, at (210) 652-4400 for more details. Submissions are due Jan. 26.

Career Assistance

Due to a temporary duty assignment, Senior Master Sgt. Michael Farley will be the acting 325th Fighter Wing career assistance advisor Tuesday through March 5. He can be reached at 283-4681.

Estate Claims

Brig. Gen. Larry New, 325th Fighter Wing commander, regrettably announces the death of Staff Sgt. Brian McDonald, 325th Operations Support Squadron. Anyone having claims against, or indebtedness to, the estate of Sergeant McDonald should contact 1st Lt. Jason Carnell, summary court officer, 325th OSS, at 283-2263 or 624-8427.

CLASSIFIEDS

2002 PT Cruiser

5 speed, AM/FM/CD, black, cruise, only 19k miles, excellent condition; \$12500 retail., asking \$11500 call 850-785-3449 ask for Philip Kissling

1996 Astro Conversion Van

With raised roof. 7 PAX, TV/VCR, power everything, rear bench seat makes bed. Looks & runs great. Excellent family vehicle. Only 64K miles. \$7200. 850-249-7249.

CHAPEL SCHEDULE

Catholic Services

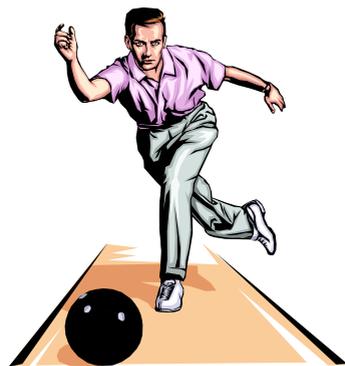
The following Catholic services will be held at Chapel 2: Daily Mass, 11:30 a.m. Monday-Friday; Reconciliation, after Saturday Mass or by appointment; Saturday Mass, 5 p.m.; Sunday Mass, 9:30 a.m.; religious education, 11 a.m. Sunday.

Protestant Services

Protestant services will be as follows: Communion service, 9:30 a.m., Chapel 1; religious education classes, 9:30-10:30 a.m. in Building 1476; general Protestant service, 11 a.m., Chapel 2. Wednesday, 5 p.m. Protestant Family Fellowship, Chapel 2.

Free Classifieds

The Gulf Defender will publish free classified ads here for the one-time sale of personal property excluding real estate for active-duty military, retirees and Department of Defense civilians working on Tyndall. Ads are run on a space-available basis and must be limited to 25 words or less. Duty numbers are not allowed. Submit ads to editor@tyndall.af.mil.



Rockin' rollers

Tyndall bowlers strike gold with AETC championship

STEVE RIDDLE
325th Services Squadron publicist

Tyndall sent its six best bowlers to Lackland Air Force Base Dec. 6, and they brought back the 2003 AETC Bowling Championship.

The Tyndall team, which finished second at last year's tournament, took the victory by the largest margin ever, building a huge lead on the first day of the four-day event, and finishing 434 pins ahead of second place Lackland AFB.

Tyndall bowlers Mike Smith, Gary Hite, Ed Bates, Kelly Baumgardner, Rebecca Carey and Kim Thompson won the team segment of the event, and placed well enough in doubles and singles competition to easily win the championship.

"From day one we pretty much ran away with it," said Smith, this year's team captain. "After that first day, everyone was just chasing us."

Only Hite and Carey, who was last year's AETC women's singles champ, bowled on last year's team.

With four new bowlers, they all had to work together if they had any chance of winning.

That's just what they did.

"It was a challenge at the beginning because we didn't know how we would come together," Smith said about the team building process. "But everyone came together as a team."

Smith also credited the staff at Raptor Lanes Bowling Center with helping the team take this year's trophy.

Smith has been bowling since he was

four, and has spent 16 years in the Air Force. He has seen a lot of bowling centers, and said Tyndall has one of the best.

"Unlike a lot of bowling alleys, Raptor Lanes really worked with us," Smith said. "When we got down there (Lackland), we were ready."

One of the ways the bowling center helped the team was by holding four tournaments instead of one.

Bowlers had to compete in at least three tournaments to have a chance of qualifying for the team.

According to George Fetzko, manager of Raptor Lanes, having a series

"It was a challenge at the beginning because we didn't know how we would come together, but everyone came together as a team."

MIKE SMITH
Tyndall Bowler

of tournaments ensured that the best bowlers would represent Tyndall.

"On any one day, a person can come in and be hot," Fetzko explained. "But

it's going to be hard for them to be hot two weeks later at the next tournament, or two weeks after that. By having more than one qualifier, it gave the good bowler a better chance of making the team."

Lane conditions were another factor that helped get the Tyndall bowlers ready for competition.

According to Pat Dechape, lane maintenance manager at Raptor Lanes, the way the lane is oiled plays a huge role in how the ball acts on its way to the pins.

"Originally, oil was put on the lanes to protect them from ball damage," Dechape explained. "But now the way we put down the oil has evolved."

If we put more oil in the middle of the lane, and less on the sides, the bowler has a better chance to make a strike. We call that a house shot"

Smith said the team is already planning to go to whatever base holds next year's tournament and defend their title, but for now everyone is sitting back and enjoying the win.

"I'm so proud of them all," Fetzko said. "They went out there to Lackland, represented Tyndall, and did a good job."

FDA issues ephedra alert, calls on customers to halt purchases

G.W. POMEROY

Air Force Surgeon General Public Affairs

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Following an FDA alert, Air Force Medical Service officials are once again "strongly advising" airmen to contact their physicians or health-care providers before taking dietary supplements containing ma huang, ephedra or ephedra alkaloids. Food and Drug Administration officials have issued a consumer alert on the safety of dietary supplements containing ephedra that calls for consumers to immediately stop buying and using ephedra products.

Besides issuing an alert, FDA officials are notifying manufacturers that they intend to publish a final rule stating dietary supplements containing ephedrine alkaloids present an unreasonable risk of illness or injury. The rule would have the effect of banning the sale of these products as soon as it becomes effective, 60 days after publication.

"FDA will publish a final rule as soon as possible that will formalize its conclusions that dietary supplements containing ephedrine alkaloids present unrea-

sonable risks to those who take them for any reason," said Tommy G. Thompson, health and human services secretary.

"[The action] puts companies on notice of our intentions, and it tells consumers that the time to stop using ephedra products is now," Mr. Thompson said.

"We are taking action today to notify Americans about the unreasonable risk of ephedra as currently marketed in dietary supplements," said Dr. Mark B. McClellan, FDA commissioner. "Our action is based on diligent and thorough work by the agency as required by the challenging legal standard in the dietary supplement law.

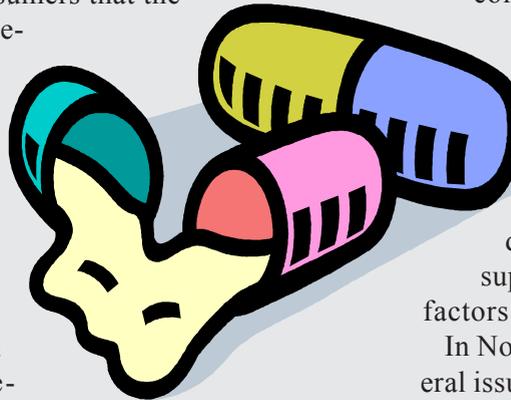
"We worked hard to obtain and review all the avail-

able evidence about the risks and benefits of ephedra, including its pharmacology, studies of ephedra's safety and effectiveness, adverse event reports, and reviews by independent experts," Dr. McClellan said.

In February, a jury in Austin, Texas, determined that ephedra use was at least 50-percent to blame for the death of a 24-year-old Charles Bryant Scurlock II, of Round Rock, Texas. Mr. Scurlock collapsed and later died after a two-mile run for an Army National Guard physical fitness test in 1999. The jury awarded \$1 million to the plaintiffs.

In September 2002, the Air Force surgeon general issued a revised policy covering dietary supplements containing ephedra that strongly discouraged the use of such supplements and highlighted associated risk factors.

In November 2002, the Air Force's surgeon general issued a notice to airmen on the potential risks associated with dietary supplements containing ephedra, following the death of a young airman. These medical notices are released by the AFMS clinical quality management division to disseminate lessons learned from medical incident investigations and other pertinent events.



Funshine NEWS

January 9, 2004

All Ranks Lunch

at the **Officers' Club**

Mon.-Thurs.: \$6.95 ■ Friday: \$7.95
11 a.m.-1 p.m.

Unlimited access to the daily buffet, salad bar, fountain soda, tea & coffee!
Includes Fresh, Hot, Carved Meat Sandwiches on Kaiser Roll

Monday	Chef's Choice
Tuesday	Italian
Wednesday	Oriental
Thursday	All American
Friday	Seafood

*Members, show your club card to receive a \$1 discount!

On Base Food Delivery

■ **Lunch Menu:** Mon.-Fri. 11 a.m.-1 p.m.
Limited to office deliveries (i.e. squadron addresses)

■ **Evening Menu:** Fri. & Sat. 5:30-9 p.m.

Subs & Pizzas

286-2900

Crazy Cash Give-away

at the O' Club Every Friday during Social Hour.

Jackpot starts at \$100. The first member name drawn is for the jackpot. If there is no winner \$25 will be added to next week's jackpot (max. \$500).

Once the name is drawn the winner has 5 minutes to claim their prize. If the winner fails to claim their prize a second drawing will be held from bar receipts for \$25.

283-4357 for details

Tyndall's **Seafood Extravaganza** *All Ranks*

At the O' Club
Friday, January 9
5:30-8:30 p.m.

Snow Crab Station, Peel & Eat Shrimp Station, Oysters on the 1/2 Shell Station, Beef Carving Station, A Variety of Prepared Fish, Breaded Shrimp, Scallops, Seafood Newberg, Clam Chowder, Mashed Potatoes w/ Gravy, Steamed Rice, Hush Puppies, Vegetables, Assorted Desserts, Tea, Water, Coffee.

Market Price: \$18.95*
Children ages 6-11: \$9.95*
5 & Under: \$4.95*

***Members First!**
Show your club card to receive a \$3 discount.



Dorm World

Challenge

Final Event
January 23, at 5 p.m.
Community Activity Center
Dorm 1680 is in the lead!

283-2495

Vet Clinic

☎ 283-2434

Evening Shot Clinic

January 13

New Vet

Our new Veterinarian has arrived! Come in and see our new clinic. We have new appointments available for vaccinations, sick call, and even minor surgical procedures. We are having a special evening clinic for vaccinations on Jan. 6 and 13. We are still offering a Free Starter Kit for puppies and kittens when they are brought in for their booster shots. Don't forget to continue with the Flea, Tick, and Heartworm Preventative during the winter months. We are offering a Free single dose of Frontline when you purchase a 6 month supply. We are expanding our services, so if you have a question or are not sure if we can be of service to you, just give us a call and, we would be happy to help!

Football Frenzy

We have a tie between Robert Fisher and Foley Riley. They will be competing with the Super Bowl.

Sponsored in part by:
AA Military Benefits Group

No federal endorsement of sponsors intended.





283-3222

Enlisted Club

Tailgate Party & Chili Cookoff

Jan. 9



Call 283-4357 for more information.

Youth Center

☎ 283-4366

2004 Baseball/Softball Registration

Open to all youth ages 5-14 yrs. runs until Feb. 14. Early signup is advised as practices for girls softball and little majors 11-12 and dizzy dean 13-14 yr. olds start in Feb. for more information call 283-4366.

Special Free Baseball Clinic

Open to all youth ages 9 years old and older. Saturday Jan. 24 from 1-3 p.m. on the Youth Center ball fields. Baseball coach Darren Mazeroski and his staff from GCCC will give a one-day baseball clinic.

Upcoming Teen Programs

Jan. 10: Keystone Club Meeting: 6-7 p.m.
Jan. 12-16: MLK Jr. Poster Contest
Teen Field Trip: Shopping in Destin: 5 p.m.-12 a.m., \$1 members, \$2 non-members.
Jan. 17: Keystone Club Bake Sale at the Youth Center, begins at 7:30 a.m.

Family Day Care

☎ 283-2266

PCS Day Care

AF Aid for PCS is available in Family Child Care Homes. This program provides twenty hours of free child care within the first/last sixty days of PCS.

Red Cross Babysitting Course

A babysitting course for youth ages 11 to 18 will be held on the Saturdays, February 7 and 14 from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Youth will also receive infant and child CPR training. Cost is \$40 per person. Sign up at the Youth Center.



Eagle Quick Turn

☎ 283-4345

Price Changes	Discount Rate	Standard Rate
Flight Meals		
Large Menu Flight	2.85	3.30
Small Menu Flight	1.40	1.70

Start Flying Now!

For many, flying is just a dream fulfilled by a piece of folded paper. With the help of your Aero Club's Flight Training Center (FTC), you can move beyond paper dreams. You may even qualify to use VA education benefits to minimize the cost for advanced ratings. If you are active duty or retired military, a DoD civilian employee, or a family member of someone who qualifies, then you can join over one million men and women who made their dream of flight a reality.

Introductory Ride \$49

283-4404

All Ranks Super Sunday Brunch!

at the Officers' Club
Jan. 25, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.

\$8.95* Champagne Available - add \$3
*Members, show your club card to receive a \$1 discount!

Menu Includes:

Biscuits & Gravy	Bacon
Carving Station	Hash Browns
Omelets (made to order)	Fresh Fruit
Belgian Waffles	Muffins
Sausage	Danish

283-4357

Family Child Care

☎ 283-2266

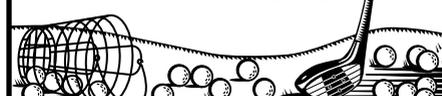
License Requirement

The Air Force requires persons who care for children to be licensed to provide care. Call for details.

Golf Course Pro Shop

Can't decide what to get that special golfer? Remember the golf course pro shop offers gift certificates.

283-4389



Deployed Tyndall NCO shares unique Christmas tale

STAFF SGT. EDWARD GYOKERES
332nd Air Expeditionary Wing

(Editor's note: The following is the first in a series of dispatches from a deployed member of the 325th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom.)

Christmas this year has been one that I will never forget. Many of us have been leaning heavily on our faith to support us, and it has been an amazing opportunity to share our fellowship with others. Our tiny chapel was standing room only for an amazingly moving candlelit Christmas Eve service. As the packed room sang 'Silent Night' we lit our candles off of one another and shared each other's company. I realized that this was the first time in many years that a Christmas service like this had been held in these ancient lands. At that moment I was incredibly moved that I was there and in-

credibly homesick. There are many families that will be having a terribly lonesome Christmas. I began to cry at the thought that while this is a very just and righteous endeavor, it was very selfish of me to volunteer to make my wife sit home alone on Christmas day. It was our first Christmas apart in seven wonderful years of marriage.

Then I looked around. I was stunned and a little shamed into the realization that the whole room was crying as well. There wasn't a dry eye in the house. We all wanted to go home, and we were all volunteers. And then I realized that we are never, ever alone. I have faith in my friends and family back home that they will look after my wife just as my friends look after me here like family. I don't even have to ask, I just know its going to be ok. You just have to have strength, faith, and a sense

of humor to deal with this place. That, and the tight bond of shared discomfort. If misery loves company, this country is the happiest place on earth this year.

Yesterday on Christmas Eve day I saw a sight I will never forget. I have filed it with my thousand other incredible images of this fantastically odd environment that I will take with me and will shape me as a person until the day I die.

A Humvee drove past in a convoy that was departing for the badlands. It was decorated like a gigantic Christmas ornament. Heavily covered in garland and tinsel, the antenna was draped to resemble a tree, and the sides were drawn in brightly colored kids chalk to look like a pile of presents. It was a dazzlingly reflective blast of color that flashed by me so quickly, I didn't have time for a picture, but even if I had the time

I doubt I would have had the ability. For in the back of the Humvee classic Christmas image in a classic Iraqi scene. In a nutshell, it was a normal Iraqi moment, one

And Mr. Kringle was dressed like Rambo's worst nightmare. Yes folks, that's right. And, let me tell you that it's a real double-take when you realize that Santa is

“There wasn't a dry eye in the house. We all wanted to go home, and we were all volunteers. And then I realized that we are never, ever alone.”

STAFF SGT. EDWARD GYOKERES
332nd Air Expeditionary Wing

just screaming to be shared with the world. Was so surprised I just sat there, slack-jawed, and stared for a moment or two.

It was a pretty big guy in a pretty big Santa Claus suit. But, while he was dressed in the standard yuletide attire, he was also ... shall we say, highly accessorized. You see Santa was on convoy duty.

wearing tactical Kevlar and manning a gigantic automatic grenade launcher. Nobody was messing with his load of presents on this convoy. I had to ask myself; did I just see what I thought I saw? Then I began to laugh, and pumped my fist in the air to the widely grinning convoy members as they rumbled past.



