

National Guard Issues

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Director of the Air National Guard

15 September, 2008

LtGen McKinley: Thank you, Bob. I appreciate being invited. Thank you very much. Thank you all. Good afternoon. I know it's right after lunch, but it's great to be with everybody and it's great to speak about a branch or component of the United States Air Force that I love dearly.

A couple of introductions, and I'm going to save the formers for just a second. My right-hand person throughout my two years in the job has been our Command Chief. He is finishing up four years of service to the Air National Guard, representing 93,000 Airmen, and Chief Dick Smith and his wife, Debbie, if you'd stand up and be recognized, I'd like to acknowledge your service.

[Applause].

I know we've got Chief Murray in the audience, and you always grade all these guys, right Gerald? So, I know Dick's here for a reason because you're in the audience, but we've got a lot of formers here that mentored me, and everybody in this room has folks who got them through the hard times and the good times.

I'd like to introduce General John Conaway, who was a former Chief and a former Director, Sir, from Kentucky. This is order of service. General Phil Killey from South Dakota, former Director and former Commander of First Air Force; and General Danny James from the state of Texas. Everybody knows Danny, and it's great to have everybody in the room. I don't know if Bru is here. Brubaker worked for us for awhile, but we know we have a lot of folks in here.

Thanks for coming to hear just a brief update on your Guard. We're part of the total force team. We're very proud of that. Along with Rusty and the Air Force Reserve, we make up with the civilians what the Chief and the Secretary have been calling the mightiest Air Force in the world, and there's no doubt about it. Your Guard is strong. The health is good. We're kind of recovering from the 2005 BRAC, which was a very traumatic experience for all of us, probably no more so than General James, who had to live it and breathe it.

But we're actually at a point in history where things have actually turned the corner. Some new missions, which you probably saw this morning in the press, are coming our way. The mission that was announced yesterday for Meridian, Mississippi, is the Project Liberty RC-12 mission. That'll be the training

schoolhouse. General Schwartz made that announcement to the Mississippi delegation yesterday, and that's a great mission for the KC-135 unit that was BRAC-closed. So, a lot of that's happening around the country. Maybe some of that will be of interest to you to ask some questions later.

But let me go through, just briefly, for those of you who want to kind of see where your Guard is today, some slides. I've got a couple of videos, which are current events of what your Guard is doing, and then at the end we'll take any questions you may have.

So, first slide please.

Everybody in this room, not all of us, go back this far. Maybe General Conaway does, but I don't. [Laughter]. But Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, way back when, wanted to fly airplanes, like a lot of us in this room, or work on them, or be around people who do. He tried to join the Army Air Service at the time; couldn't get in because he was too old. Didn't have a college degree, so he joined the Army.

Just to refresh everybody's memory, he became a driver for Black Jack Pershing. The guy was a very talented mechanic. He grew up using his hands. He convinced Pershing that he had great skill sets. He also met a guy by the name of Billy Mitchell, and Billy Mitchell was the CFAC of his day, commanding the forces for World War I. And so, he convinced Billy Mitchell to let him go fly.

For those of us who have spent years of our service learning how to fly airplanes, or work on them, or be around those who do - I hope I'm hitting all the spots here - he took exactly 17 days to check out before he went into his first combat. And he became an ace with 26 victories in World War I, and he, along with a lot of other pioneering spirited people who we all grew up with as fathers, grandfathers, great-grandfathers, created this age of aviation, which is just a little over 100 years old.

That's kind of where our roots started too, in the Army Air Corps and some of the observation units that we built around the country. So when you go to General James' home state of Texas, and you go to Ellington Field, they have celebrated their 90th anniversary of flight, because that's where our roots, that's where our heritage of about 26 of our organizations started a long time ago.

In fact, in New York - and there are a few New Yorkers in the room, I'm sure - those folks actually went out and put down their own money, bought their own airplanes, and formed the first aero squadron up in New York. And they were part of the response force when Pancho Villa came across the border in 1916. They

went down as part of that aerospace contingent that went down on the border, and that actually was the prelude to what we just finished up doing, which was guarding the southwest border. They did it from an aviation perspective.

So, our roots are sound. They're deep, and then you put on that the militia and National Guard that goes back hundreds more years, and that's our country, and that's our great republic, and that's why this nation is so strong. But these wings, guys like Rickenbacker, the first aero squadron, that's what makes us who we are.

Slide.

We're going to show a quick video, I think, at this moment in time. If we can queue that up, talk a little bit about our heritage, show a little visually of where we've been and where we're going.

[Video shown].

Voice: "We use the camera to find targets to locate and identify and we give positive ID to the guys on the ground. We're big in Afghanistan and Iraq right now. We help find threats and allow our guys to stay safe. We have a strong group of people, and we're going to make great things happen."

Voice: "Obviously, the associate wing and what we're doing here is not a completely new concept. What we are building here today really is shaping how we're going to operate, how we're going to deploy together and how we're going to fight together, which ultimately contributes to the defense of this country, which is why we're all here in the first place."

[Applause].

LtGen McKinley: Thanks. It's a great video. It kind of captures, in essence, what we've done for the past ninety-plus years in aviation. A lot of what we can't show you is things that are as a result of some of the new missions and the total force integration initiatives that General Schwartz and Secretary Donnelly talked about yesterday, and we can do that in Q&A also.

I think what's important, though, is to recognize that when General Conaway was the Director, we took a militia, an organized Guard that flew very old aircraft. We started building through a programmatic process a way in which the Air Force and us could modernize those aircraft, so by the time General Killey and General Sheppard became our Director we were able to integrate with our total force partners, the active duty, so that by the time Desert Shield and Desert Storm came along many of our units were able to integrate seamlessly with the active component, and

since then, in the seventeen years, eighteen years that we've been doing Global War on Terror or our CAPS overseas, those aircraft with our industrial partners, who many are in this room today representing some of the great folks who work with us every day, we have pretty much the best equipment that we've ever had in the Air National Guard, and it allows us to do the kind of things that let us be considered for units like associated units down at Langley.

The association concept, which we touched on briefly in the video, talks to the heart of how we fly in the 21st Century, how we're going to use scarce resources, maximize their potential, use all the core components of that potential to make our Air Force even better. So that video, in just a few short minutes, covers from where we started - much of that equipment hand-me-down, unserviceable, hardly able to be maintained. But with the experienced work force that we have, we are able to take care of the equipment, fly it longer, push it harder, and use it for the betterment of our nation.

We've talked a lot about, in the last few weeks, our core values. General Schwartz talked about them extensively yesterday in his remarks. The Air Force's core values are our core values. We believe in them strongly.

Remember that the composition of the Air National Guard, much like Rusty's Air Force Reserve, is about 75 percent former Active Duty service members who have separated from the service, joined the National Guard, become members of their local units. About 25 percent of our population of about 107,000 are people that we recruit, train, and send to school by ourselves, but the real efficiencies, again, of what the National Guard and the Reserve bring are we're able to be a repository for those members of the active component who leave, who separate, and we can continue to challenge them, motivate them, and they make us a better organization. So we've got a quote here from John Paul Jones, again going back to the beginning of our republic, of why it's important to do service to our nation.

Slide.

Let me just take a second to talk about the modern-day Air National Guard, if I could. In the upper left-hand corner is our California MQ-1 squadron. They're out at March Air Reserve Station, and they transitioned from a KC-135 Air Refueling Wing, not BRAC, but programmatically they saw an opportunity in California to seize upon new technology and an emerging mission or sunrise mission.

Thirty-three percent of the Predators that we fly in the Air Force today are flown by members of the Air National Guard. That mission set will grow. We look forward to it. It's a nice fit.

We have units at Fargo who used to fly F-16s, units down at Ellington who flew F-16s, DM with our Arizona Air National Guard, and soon to be up in Syracuse. That's where we're headed in the unmanned vehicle business.

It's important for everybody in this room to know that you can take those great citizen Airmen who work for corporations or work in the civilian community, they can come do this mission as a traditional Guardsman or someone who doesn't work full time for us and, therefore, only when they're working, only or if they are mobilized are you the taxpayer paying that salary. So as we go in deeper into this century and try to work out and squeeze every efficiency we can, the Guard and the Reserve offer that great repository.

The C-130s have been a workhorse. Again, I'll refer back to General Conaway, General Killey, General James. The Air National Guard has a great complement of C-130 units around the country. In fact, General Conaway had to transition his RF-4 unit in Louisville, Kentucky, to the C-130s. That's always tough for Guard units to transition to a new mission, as it is for our active-component service, but it's especially tough when you have a culture of aviation like you saw in our video. But once you get into the new mission sets, as we've seen around the country, that's when we shine. We've got a great organization in the C-130, and just for some statistics, in FY-08 alone we've flown 20,000 sorties in the C-130 and about 48,000 total airlift hours. So that's the contribution both the Reserve and the Guard make to the total force in the C-130. And that's a mission set that I hope can continue to grow and prosper.

The RC-26 is an aircraft up there, and it's in the lower left-hand corner. Many of you may have not seen it. It's an aircraft that was originally given to us by our friends on the Hill, and we've got some staffers in the room today and I want to thank you for your service to your members.

That aircraft was designed primarily for counter-drug missions. We used them in the Governor's War on Drugs, the President's War on Drugs, and they predominantly stayed one aircraft in a state using the early ISR pods that were developed by members of industry and we appreciate that. And they've been around since about 1991/1992.

We found in certain major crises, such as floods, fires, the attacks of September 11, 2001, these aircraft are very important to local first responders who need to see an air picture or streaming video from above. Because the Guardsmen who fly this are in Title XXXII status, you're not violating any laws by using these aircraft, and that gives the governor, the first responders

of the states, the territories, the District of Columbia the first eyes on the ground.

Now we've come a long way since the RC-26 was built, and today, if we'd looked down at Hurricane Ike last week, we would have had a Global Hawk, we would have had an MQ-1 flown by an interagency partner. This was a predecessor of all the ISR capability that allows first responders, governors, and now General Renuart at Northern Command to see first and to act first in the response here at home. I think that's vitally important.

I'd like to just, without getting into classifications, say that the RC-26, under the leadership of my boss, Lieutenant General H. Steven Blum, the Chief of the National Guard Bureau and former CENTCOM Commander, and SOCOM Commander General Brown, they worked a deal where this aircraft was put into theatre. We've mobilized air crews to fly them, and they're working with the Army Rangers now over in Iraq. And quite frankly, we've handed out air medals to the pilots of these airplanes working with the Rangers on the ground than we have practically any other weapon system in the last three years. So that's another great partnership that we bring to the fight.

And then, finally, on the lower right-hand corner, this is some new technology that industry is working with General Kehler on. It is a space mission, a mobile tracking station. It's used right now at the 114th Wing down at Patrick, and it's part of the Florida Air National Guard, and it's deployed up in Alaska working some remote shots in this picture. But again, the versatility of the Air National Guard in this modern century.

Next slide.

A lot of folks kind of bristle when they see this, but we've got to get into a little bit of a debate. A lot of politicians kind of steer away from how do you do community service? How do you be part of something bigger than yourself in this very modern day and age? I will tell you that the National Guard, prior to 1901, almost all of our leaders had served in their state militia at one time or another, going back to Washington. Since 1901, I guess probably the most famous Guardsman was Harry Truman, and he really believed strongly as a Missouri Guardsman that the value of the Guard, working together with both the Army and the Air Force was unrivaled. And then up into modern-day times.

The constitutional piece of this, somewhat debatable, is an approach that I think comes back to today and how we encourage young people to serve in a way so that they can continue to work either in school or work in the industry and do that dual citizenship partnership, and the Guard gives us that opportunity, along with the Reserve, to do that. So we go back to the constitutional roots, the statuses that Guardsmen are in that

allow us to do work here at home that other military organizations can't do, and the fact now that the size and the scope of the issues that we deal with is so great.

Take a September 11, 2001, take a Hurricane Katrina or Rita. You have got to put all the assets you can at that scene so that we can relieve the stress and suffering of the civilian population as quickly as possible. Being a victim, I believe nobody would care whether it was an active duty, Guard, or Reserve member first on scene to help me in a flood, a fire, or a natural disaster, manmade, or nature.

So I think that's where we're evolving in this century, that we have always had a close relationship with our service but there is no way in this century that we can be separated apart from it. I know our governors feel that way. I know that members on the Hill feel that way, and I'm very confident that with General Schwartz and us, we'll be able to forge new partnerships, go down new roads, develop new techniques, and be an even more valuable member of the team.

The pictures here, again, I've got to set the stage. It's not Hurricane Katrina this time, but these are Louisiana Air Guardsmen and women taking people out of hospitals in New Orleans for Hurricane Gustav. We moved about 7,000 people along with TRANSCOM and NORTHCOM, a joint venture. This worked really well this time.

We learned a lot from Katrina and Rita. We all were like little soccer players rushing to the ball during Katrina, trying to do everything at once. And since Katrina and Rita, through integration, strong relationships with both TRANSCOM and now with General McNabb and with General Renuart; you know we've had three commanders out at Northern Command now, with General Eberhart, Admiral Keating, and now General Renuart. We are now partnering so that we can apply forces, present forces, the same way we do overseas, here at home.

And so we moved 7,000 people for Gustav out of New Orleans, took them to places like Memphis and Nashville. These are people who could not have probably survived in the hospitals without power, people on ventilators, people in critical need. We put them on airplanes and moved them. That was a tremendous effort. It didn't get a lot of press.

Then in Texas with Ike, we knew we had a formidable storm. The Governor of Texas, Governor Perry, the Adjutant General of Texas, General Rodriguez, virtually did their evacuation from Houston and Galveston to other cities in the state almost by themselves. It was really an amazing situation, assisted with DOD, TRANSCOM, NORTHCOM, with our assets, and of course the Army

and the Navy were prepared to come in after that storm to provide relief.

So if you're going to learn, if you're going to have to have lessons learned, Rita and Katrina gave us those so that we could continue to perform well for the citizens of this country.

On the upper right, a young Airman looking out on the second operation, formal operation, to guard our southwest border, and that was Operation Jumpstart. President Bush felt that the Customs and Border Protection Agency needed some help; augmentation as they recruited new agents. The National Guard stepped up. The Air National Guard partnering with the Army National Guard sent down about 8,000 young men and women for that two-year duration event on the border.

Drug interdictions were up. Illegal immigration went down. Working seamlessly with the Customs and Border Protection Agency, another new adventure for us, but it worked and that's the relationships that we have in our areas.

And finally, if you're Duncan Hunter, you want to see those C-130s come in pretty early in a fire in California. Those fires are growing so large, the magnitude of those are so big that the earlier we can get our modular airborne firefighting systems in from North Carolina, from Wyoming, and from California, and Rusty's unit in Colorado Springs, the sooner we can affect positively the shape of those fires, then we can bring them under control very well.

Chairman Hunter did some hearings last year after last year's fires. We were able to work some of the legal issues, which allow commercial vendors to get in first, and we work this partnership so that we can be more responsive and more resilient sooner.

Next slide.

We've got some great men and women, just as everybody does in their organizations, but I just wanted to talk about two of them. On the left-hand side of the picture as you're looking at it is a young F-16 pilot from Tulsa, Oklahoma. His name is Dan Rudy. If you saw ABC's Person of the Week about two weeks ago, he's a professional golfer, flies F-16s. It doesn't get any better than that, does it, Mark Dougherty? Huh? Pretty good. Wake up over there. I can see you sleeping, by the way.

He established a charity all by himself; it's called Fields of Honor. He does the Patriot Golf Day. I don't know if you're familiar with it. You may have seen it on TV. They collect a dollar from everybody who goes out to the golf course over Labor Day, and this charity raised about a million and a half dollars

this past Labor Day, and that money goes to children of our combat-wounded veterans or deceased veterans in the war. That's the kind of people we have, and I know you all have the same but I'm very proud of this young man.

Senior Master Sergeant Donna Goodman, stand up for a second. She's one of our Outstanding Airmen. She is one of the 12 Outstanding Airmen. It's great to have her here. [Applause]. I saw them in the Pentagon today; they were walking around the new exhibits, and all the Air Force memorabilia now is up in the corridors and it really looked great, but it was great to see you all.

Let me just talk about Donna for a second. Donna deployed recently as a superintendent to Baghdad Airport where she managed about a billion dollars worth of airfield navigational radio and support equipment with less than one percent of down time. She ensured that no communication breaks occurred despite over 35 attacks, and she was instrumental in repairing the only airspace radar control system to make it a hundred percent capable after ten months of stalled efforts.

Donna represents, as do all the twelve Outstanding Airmen, the best of our Air Force and, Donna, we couldn't be more proud of you. I know Chief Smith and his board who had to select our Airmen had a very tough time, but you have represented us marvelously and we congratulate you again.

[Applause].

Those are just two of some really special folks that we get a chance to work with every day of our lives. We've got a video, I think, queued up that will show you a little bit more of this dual nature of what a Guardsman is today in this environment, so if we'll play the next video, please.

[Video shown].

Voice: "We're in Winfield, Missouri, where Missouri Air and Army National Guard have been called in to help reinforce the levee. Now behind me you can see the Mississippi River, well, you can see the flood of the Mississippi River. Way in the distance is a tree line. That's where the banks of the Mississippi River usually end. All the water before that is the flood itself. This right behind me is the primary levy system, which has held up. There are no breaches in the Winfield levee as of right now or in the Pin Oak levee as of right now. But there is quite a bit of water in-between the primary levee and the secondary levee where we're standing."

Voice: "Missouri Air and Army National Guard members, along with locals are working to reinforce the Pin Oak levee by

stacking a wall of sandbags and pumping the water away from dry land."

Voice: "The levee is around 38 to 37 feet. We have to raise it up to 40 feet, so basically we're sandbagging to get the levee total height up to 40 feet, so if the water crests at over 39 feet that we can hold back that water."

Voice: "It's an opportunity for the Guard members to help their community but also to work with their sister service."

Voice: "We really appreciate the Airmen and the Air Force coming out here and helping us out. They've been a great asset."

Voice: "It just, it makes me feel like I'm doing such a good thing. I love it. I love the people. I love the place. I just, I love doing this stuff. It makes me very proud and very happy to be an American, happy to be an Airman."

Voice: "Levees north of the Pin Oak levee in Iowa and Illinois have actually eased the burden on some communities here in Missouri. But as you can see, the Pin Oak levee is far from out of danger. The top of the flood is actually only about three feet away from the top of the levee, and when you look out you can't see where the flood ends, let alone where the Mississippi River begins. So the Air and Army National Guard here in Missouri will continue to monitor this levee and make sure that any repairs that need to be done will be taken care of in a timely manner to make sure that this community is safe. For the Pentagon Channel, I'm Tech. Sergeant Melissa Allan."

LtGen McKinley: So another example of that great partnership, that if we can train and fight and deploy overseas and use the great talents and technology that we have, then we can apply it here at home and take care of our citizens. This year, with the 500-year flood in the Midwest, in Iowa and Wisconsin, in Missouri, we got our hands full. So, it was a great partnership.

Last slide, please.

We started out with a heritage. We started about the history. We talked about the unity of effort that we bring to the table. We don't fly the B-52. The Air Force Reserve Command does with the Air Force, but we certainly partner with the nuclear enterprise every day we're in the air. We're proud to be part of the total force team. We're proud to support our governors and our states.

We're proud to have that great seamless relationship that we worked on for years, from the days of General Conaway, who I still claim is the father of the modern-day Air National Guard.

Some might dispute that and go back to Wimpy Wilson and I.G. Brown, but in my mind General Conaway did it. Phil Killey, the king of process; he knows how to work a process. Danny James, the great legacy that he brought to our team, and all the folks in this room who are part of the Air National Guard.

I think I've got some of our Air Force Association council members in the room. Have we got anybody? I know Hugh's in the room. Anybody else still here, or did they have to go home? Fred Sloan is our Chair. General officers in their own right. Hugh is still serving in Delaware; Fred up in Wisconsin is a retired member, with his wife, Nancy.

So, that's who we are, that's what we are. I just wanted to give you kind of a portfolio update. Thank you for your support. Thank the members of industry in here today. We couldn't do it without you.

Our airplanes are getting old. They're just like the Air Force's airplanes. Our airplanes are a little bit older. We're going to rely on those great maintenance technicians we have to keep them flying a little bit longer. Our main task right now, along with the United States Air Force is to recapitalize our force to design a 21st Century Air National Guard that makes sense, that works well for its governors, and that integrates sufficiently with the United States Air Force.

So with that, I have done about my 30 minutes. I'd love to take any questions you might have.

[Applause].

Thanks. I appreciate it. A brave soul comes to the mike.

Question: General McKinley, Colonel Steve Beck, California Air National Guard. Thank you for your words and thank you for your leadership, Sir. And General James, thank you for your leadership in challenging times.

The face of the Guard is changing in that we're stepping out into many new missions in California. In addition to C-130, fighter, and rescue missions, we've stepped out into Predator, DCGS, Global Hawk, and Space Ops, and these are missions, full time federal missions that Airmen are engaged in the war every time they show up, every time they come to work, and they're taking to it like a duck to water. With a possibly very interesting 2012 POM coming up, there may be an opportunity to step out into new mission areas even beyond that.

Yesterday, General Kehler said that he would like to see the Guard involved in every mission that AFSPACE does. Do you feel that that applies to the Air Force as a whole or, if not, what

kind of missions should be looking at and to what extent should we be looking to be involved?

General McKinley: I think it's relevant to talk about our emergence into space when General Killey passed the torch to General Sheppard. We've got about 14 states that work with General Kehler now, wear a Space Command patch, but only about 1,400 people in those mission sets.

I think the governors are going to have some tough choices along with leadership in the Air National Guard of how big an Air National Guard is right. Is it the size of our Air National Guard that's important or what it's doing in these new critical mission sets? Fewer people, recapitalize equipment that doesn't take as much maintenance or hands-on maintenance. We are in a transformational time.

I think with General Schwartz everything is on the table right now. He said yesterday he's going back to basics. He will address the National Guard Association next Monday in Baltimore. I think he'll give you some more words about his relationship and what he'd like to see in and from the Air National Guard.

I can tell you from my role, and I bet these gentlemen can too, that our Air Force has not put anything off the table. It's just what makes sense, what fits our culture, and if we get to a point where we become less of a community-based force and a plug-in play force, I think we become less relevant to the governors when they need us in the states. So there is a real happy medium here, a fine balance that we're going to have to go through.

California has stepped out magnificently in the missions you've chosen, but they make sense for you and they work. But we will go through some transformative months and years ahead of us so that by 2025 we hope we have a strategic plan that allows us to be very close to our Air Force, still serving our governors and their needs also. So thanks for the question.

Anybody else with issues for the Air National Guard? Here comes somebody, from Michigan I think. Right?

Question: I'm from Selfridge Air National Guard Base. Right now, the 127th Wing has eight tankers and there's rumors they're going to get more. Could you throw any light on that?

LtGen McKinley: Well Selfridge is one of our largest installations now, now that Otis went through its base realignment and closure issues. Selfridge, I think has about 2,000 acres. Most of our installations, like Rusty's, are a little less than a hundred acres so you are one of our largest facilities. It has enormous room for growth. Your Adjutant General, Tom Cutler, is always looking for mission expansion and

growth, and it's just a matter of how you do that within the TOA that we have with the Air Force and the fact that iron, right now, is really scarce. But if Selfridge were a candidate, it's obviously a great place to grow and to put more missions. So, I'd like to thank you for what you do with ESGR and AFA in Michigan; you do a great job.

Question: Selfridge has 3,000 acres.

LtGen McKinley: Three thousand, okay. [Laughter]. See, I know these guys. They know every acre of their bases. [Laughter]. That's right. I didn't know we had 3,000 acres. Golf course; that's right.

Before I get off the stage, I promised Chief Smith just a second because this will be his last chance as our Command Chief for the Air National Guard to say a few words. Chief, would you like to either use the mike here and just give us your thoughts.

Chief Dick Smith: I just wanted to say a few words and just tell you how honored I am to represent the 93,000 men and women in the Air National Guard that wear stripes on their sleeves. We do have the most professional force that I've ever seen in my career in the Air National Guard. They're motivated, they're well-trained, they're professional, and they do the job day in and day out. Seventy-five percent of them are drill status; that means they work someplace else. They sell insurance, they're policeman, they're lawyers, they're dentists, and they still come out to the base and do their job.

My job, working for General McKinley or letting General McKinley know what's going on in the Air National Guard, is taking care of those enlisted men and women so they can do their job, to make sure they're properly trained, equipped, they have the right PME, they have the right awards and decorations, they have the right programs, the right policies, procedures, and money, and programs to do their job.

A total force is a wonderful thing, and it's an honor to represent our segment of the total force, called the Air National Guard, that fits in very, very well.

We've got a generation of airmen who don't remember those good old days that we used to have when I joined, and many of you in this room recall that we drilled one weekend a month and 15 days a year at Alpena or Volk Field or Savannah, and that was the extent. We were called names back then that you don't even hear anymore. We were called weekend warriors and raggedy-ass militia and Sunday gladiators; and the younger generation, those folks that have joined since the Gulf War don't even know what you're talking about when you talk about one weekend a month and 15 days

a year, and those names that people used to point at us and call us. They just don't remember.

We've come a long way. All they know is when they join they go to the same basic training, they go to the same tech school, they have the same requirements for skill levels, and they have the same requirements for PME, and they have the same commitment to serve an AEF or being mobilized. So, it's not one weekend a month. It's not 15 days a year. It's a new era in the Air National Guard, and we're very, very strong because of it.

Our retention rate is stronger than it has ever been. We reached our recruiting goal in the Air National Guard for the first time in five years. We're now about 450 over end strength going in to the end of September. [Applause]. First time in five years.

And all along we've retained a strong retention rate. Our retention rate annualized is about 92 percent a year, which is stronger than it was prior to 9/11 and prior to the first Gulf War. Our folks stay.

In many cases, they go out kicking and screaming at 60 years old because the law says they have to leave. But they don't want to leave. They're there to serve. It's not about the rank. It's not about the money. It's about a commitment to serve. That's who the Guard is, and it's an honor to work for them and it's an honor to work for a boss like General McKinley, who gets it and understands the total force.

So Sir, thank you for giving me a minute. Thank you for your leadership.

LtGen McKinley: Thanks for your service, Dick, and, Debbie, thank you for all you've done for us. Appreciate it. Thank you all very much.

Oops, General James has a comment.

General James: I'd like to add my thanks to you and your predecessor, [inaudible]. It is so challenging to be a leader of a large organization and the dynamics that are involved in that, but when you have people like the chiefs, and partnering with great chiefs like [inaudible], it's really wonderful.

I didn't get the opportunity to say this because I didn't write my script for my retirement. I missed an opportunity there, and it's one of my biggest disappointments.

I'd like to just take this time to thank the greatest enlisted corps, the United States Air Force enlisted corps, and particularly the men and women of the Air National Guard, for

bestowing on me the greatest honor that I have received, more important than the ribbons and much more important to me than the stars that I wore on my shoulders. It was the Order of the Sword, and to see the enlisted corps lining the river walk in their mess-dress uniforms as I went down with my family to receive such awards that night is something that I will never ever forget, and I just wanted to take this opportunity in a public forum to once again say to some of the greatest people that God ever made, thank you.

[Applause].

Bob Largent: General McKinley, thanks so much for spending this time with the AFA Conference this afternoon, giving us a glimpse of what's happening. Certainly, the Guard is in the forefront and Dick, it has been great. This is a tremendous supporter of our Air Force Association, as are all the gentlemen on the front row.

But General McKinley, on behalf of a grateful AFA, accept this small token of our appreciation and that's what we can give you that's under 25. [Laughter].

LtGen McKinley: Thank you very much.

Bob Largent: Thanks, Sir. Thank you all.

[Applause].

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