



The Bag Dragger Newsletter

July – October 2023



A Note from the President

I hope this finds all of you safe and healthy. I am also hoping everyone had an enjoyable summer. I am not sure that anyone was spared from the heat as records were set throughout the country as well as the world. I know we set a record in San Antonio for days over 100 degrees. Fall and cooler temperatures are welcomed and can't get here soon enough.

Thanks to Sal Lagudi for getting the word out to our members about when the Recruiting School graduations are and getting volunteers to attend and assist in presenting the Top Graduate Award. Also, a big thanks goes out to a couple Air & Space Association (AFA) Chapters for donating funds to purchase the Top Graduate awards for the next year. Thank you, AFRAA member CMSgt (retired) Vance Clarke for making this happen.

I will soon be sending out an email for the election of our Board in October. The new board will begin their two-year terms beginning January 1, 2024.

We have voted to provide the meat and buns for the Recruiting Service Appreciation Day to take place on October 6, 2023. We have done this for several years now and is our way of contributing to and saying “Thank You” to those that provide all the “behind the scenes” support at the headquarters. Many of you worked at the headquarters during your tenure in Recruiting Service and are aware of all the hard work that is done there to make the job of the field recruiters, Squadrons and Groups easier. It can’t be done without the support of the headquarters staff.

Just a note about Blue Suit XLV. The dates have been set and Recruiting Service will honor this year’s Top Recruiters and their spouses from March 18-22, 2024. More will come as the planning is completed.

We are also getting ready to plan for our General Membership meeting that will take place at the Cantu Ranch and will be disguised as our Annual Christmas Gathering. More to come on this soon and I’m hoping that many of you will be able to attend.

Until next quarter, stay safe, healthy and AIM HIGH.

Thoughts From Your 1st Vice President, Fortunato (Tino) Tinoco, III

Greetings my fellow AFRAA members. It’s difficult to fully articulate the need for this organization and the profound impact it has on the future of Air Force Recruiting, Operation Blue Suit and the pursuit of one day establishing a lasting tribute to Air Force Recruiting. Each of us has had great and lasting memories of our time in Air Force Recruiting. We’ve made lifelong friends and continue today to enjoy the company and association with many of these friends. Air Force Recruiting to us, was a brotherhood/sisterhood, a camaraderie of individuals working together for a common goal, the success of the AirForce meeting its mission. Thousands of young NCOs volunteering to be one of the Air Forces best. Many of us decided to make it a career and served many years as a member of this elite team of go getters. Now, though many of us have long been retired from active duty, I know the flames of recruiting still burn in our hearts.

About two years ago I was asked to fill the position of 1st Vice-President of the AFRAA. To be honest, I hadn't really thought much about it before, thinking there's so many retired recruiters and I'm sure the organization will thrive and continue to promote Blue Suit and other recruiting activities. Much to my chagrin, I was wrong. There's only a small group of the same members who are active in supporting and organizing needed activities as the board. Of the thousands of former recruiters, there are only 76 dues paying members. Of these active board members, most are in their 70s and a couple in their 80s. For the survival of the organization, we need more members, and we need some younger members to help on the board. In recruiting we always would hear the saying "if it is to be, it's up to me". Given our need, I'm modifying it a bit and saying, "if it is to be, it's up to *we*". We can do it.

I think we all know about the criticality of meeting the armed forces' manning requirements. Our organization is recognized by the Air Force Recruiting Service (AFRS) as an association with its stated intention to assist in certain AFRS endeavors. The two biggest projects are insuring the survivability of the annual Blue Suit program and completion of the recruiting monument on the Basic Military Training parade field. These projects take time and money. I'm asking each member to help by bringing in as many former recruiters as possible. We need to increase our ranks. Blue Suit is an annual expense, the Air Force will only pay to bring in a limited number of winners and one additional companion. All other expenses and awards are arranged or paid for by the AFRAA. The monument is ongoing. If you'd like a lasting memory for your service, I suggest you go to our website and consider purchasing a brick to be placed at our monument. If you or your company, business or organization would like to donate to the monument, it would be greatly appreciated.

Again, in summary, we are asking for and needing new members now. \$25 a year is a deal to help keep the organization strong. If each member just brings in one additional member, we can continue to build our membership and build a better US. Air Force. "Aim High"

Physical Medicine Direct Accession Program

By MSgt Matthew Garza, AF Recruiting Service

During a conversation with CMSgt Jon D. Garcia Jr, Physical Therapy Air Force Career Field Manager, MSgt Lee Steinberg and Mr. Alfonso Aguilar, his career expectations and what is expected as a future Airman were discussed.

As the Air Force is looking to enhance the Direct Accession Program, this type of accession is an option for qualified applicants. Mr. Alfonso Aguilar, of Lubbock Texas, was approved by CMSgt Jon D. Garcia Jr, Physical Therapy Air Force Career Field Manager. Mr. Aguilar left to attend Basic Military Training (BMT) on September 19, 2023. Once BMT is completed, he will bypass the Physical Therapy initial skills course (3-level) and report directly to his first duty assignment!



MSgt Steinberg and Mr. Alfonso Aguilar converse with CMSgt Garcia and then stand together as they complete the final process for his Direct Accession Application to bypass technical training.

“Ask an MTI” informs recruiters and helps bridge the gap for recruits heading to Basic Military Training

Published October 12, 2023 by Christa D'Andrea 37th Training Wing Public Affairs

JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO-LACKLAND, Texas – For recruits heading to Basic Military Training (BMT) at Lackland Air Force Base, connecting with a Military Training Instructor (MTI) online prior to their departure is proving to help ease the transition from civilian to Airman.

“Ask an MTI” is a BMT-led program managed by Tech. Sgt. Sarah Bento, MTI and the 737th Training Group Chief of Protocol, that connects recruits, recruiters, and instructors online to open lines of communication to better prepare the Air and Space Force’s next generation of trainees and Guardians for the rigors of training. “The program gives recruits and recruiters real-time information about BMT and the many changes,” said Staff Sgt. Ruth Elliott, who has been an MTI for over 2 years. Elliott is one of several MTIs who are volunteering their time to engage with recruits and recruiters online in a relaxed forum that encourages open discussion.

The program began as a grass-roots effort in 2021, but Bento said that over the past several months, the program has increased significantly in terms of participants and all 25 recruiting squadrons across the country are now participating in a formalized program. Bento, who collaborates with the Air Force Recruiting Service (AFRS), said recruiters also benefit. She has received feedback from recruiters that they now feel more confident providing current information about BMT [to the recruits]. “They benefit from hearing the answers to questions submitted by other recruits on topics they didn’t even think to ask about,” she added.

The call starts with giving MTIs and recruiters a 30-minute window to talk amongst themselves and to share relevant information that benefits both. Following, recruits will join in for an hour-long discussion. Tech. Sgt. Lacie Tadych is an enlisted accessions recruiter who recruits out of Bowling Green, Ky. She is the 369th Recruiting Group’s lead for the program and stated that she has seen a drop in the Delayed Entry Program (DEP) discharge rate since the program began. She described that those in the DEP that are seniors are most impacted, “They are in the DEP for a much longer period and these calls have kept them motivated and excited. They constantly tell me that they can’t wait for the next one.”

“Ask an MTI” is held 25 times per quarter, once for each enlisted Recruiting Squadron. On average, there are more than 55 recruits on each call. According to Bento, recruits will ask questions that range from what to bring to training, to what food is served in the dining facility to how they should prepare for BMT.

Since the program began, Tadych said the feedback received from recruits has been positive. “The applicants feel more at ease and prepared. There has also been quite a bit of feedback from the recruiters regarding how much they are learning as well,” she added. “This is helping us prepare our applicants better and is all around improving the communication between the recruiters and MTIs. To learn more about the journey of becoming an Airman in BMT, visit our "BASIC: Journey to Airman" series on YouTube.

CMSAF Meets High-Speed Recruiters and Team Sorenson at Formula Drift Event



Published October, 17, 2023 by Staff Sgt. Colin Hollowell, Air Force Recruiting Service

IRWINDALE, California -- It wasn't just any other day in beautiful Southern California. A sunny, picturesque day with temperatures in the low eighties. If you didn't know any better, you would have thought that a fog had rolled in just as the festivities had begun. But no, that smoke accompanied by the distinct scent of burnt rubber is exactly why thousands of fans congregated together at the Irwindale Speedway; it's race day.



Motorsport fans traveled from all over to attend the Formula Drift event. U.S. Air Force recruiters with the 369th Recruiting Squadron, Air National Guard, and Air Force Reserves spent the morning showing the USAF Thunderbird F-16 static display that sat to the left of The Hangar, an interactive recruiting asset that allows the public to try their hand at three Air Force specialties: aircraft maintenance, metal fabrication, and a virtual reality simulation of in-flight refueling operations. The recruiting setup drew attention from a variety of patrons, but it isn't every day when the Air Force's highest enlisted leader pays a visit.

Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (CMSAF) JoAnne S. Bass' first stop of the day was spent meeting the recruiters who were supporting the event, where she had the opportunity to recognize a few Airmen who had been identified by 369th RCS leadership as superior performers.

"These three individuals have really embraced the challenges that we have faced in the Air Force Recruiting Service this year," said Chief Master Sgt. Jeff Kelloway, 369th RCS senior enlisted leader. "They have really strived to master their craft and improve their skills, and really have exceeded on all fronts this year despite those challenges; we couldn't be more impressed with their actions and what they have accomplished."

Tech. Sgt. Aaron Munoz-Case, one of the three recruiters recognized, was celebrated by his leadership for his initiative to lean into utilizing social media to reach a wider audience, something that Bass shared that she could relate to. Munoz-Case said he was excited to meet a senior leader who understands the value of social media as a communication platform.

“I really appreciate that she recognizes the need for Air Force recruiters and leaders to have a digital footprint,” said Munoz-Case. “I think it helps us reach potential applicants from all walks of life and allows us to connect with communities who may not know what being an Airman is all about. Munoz-Case said that her recognition motivated him but he was especially inspired after she joined their team to interact with Formula Drift patrons.

Bass spent time sharing her Air Force story and conversing with several of the motorsports fans who took the time to stop in and experience the recruiting booth. After talking with several potential future Airmen, Bass was in for a thrill as she continued to her next stop of the day’s events.

Chief met with AFRS-sponsored driver Amanda Sorensen, who daringly invited her to join in a joy ride in the Air Force-branded, high-performance car. Amanda showcased her professional driving abilities by expertly balancing speed and control while drifting around the track, filling the stadium with the smoke and aroma of burnt rubber. Amanda exited the track to drive Bass to meet her brother, Branden, who is also an AFRS-sponsored Formula Drift driver, at the recruiting booth where the trio met fans and signed autographs.

“I couldn’t be more excited about the partnership that the Air Force has with Team Sorensen,” said Bass. “I think between that partnership and events like this, it allows us to connect with a diverse demographic of people from all ages and economic backgrounds, and that is important to our Air Force.



Among the fans in the crowd were an especially proud group of soon-to-be Airmen and their families. Chief took a moment to personally congratulate the young men and women who were minutes away from reciting the oath of enlistment on the track during the evening's opening ceremony.

Following the opening ceremony, the crowd roared with a combination of praise for the patriotic introduction and excitement for the day's main event. Bass finished the evening enjoying the Formula Drift event, but she spent the day experiencing something uniquely special. Chief had witnessed two key moments in the recruiting process; an applicant's introduction to the Air Force, and the recruit's reciting the oath that every enlisted service member, past, present, and future decrees to gain admittance into the armed services.

"It was really inspiring to get to spend time with our recruiters who are out there looking for the next generation of Airmen," said Bass. "I particularly enjoyed having the opportunity to meet some of their recruits and hear their 'why' before watching those 18 young men and women raise their right hands and make that commitment in front of 45,000 fans. It's a reminder to everyone of what makes us the world's greatest Air Force."

Military Recruiting Leaders Gather, Collaborate in San Antonio



Published Oct. 3, 2023 by Air Force Recruiting Service

SAN ANTONIO, Texas -- Recruiting leaders from all United States military services gathered here to collaborate on strategies and discuss policies from Sept. 19-21, 2023. As fiscal year 2024 loomed on the horizon, top recruiting leadership from the U.S. Air and Space Forces, Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and National Guard agreed during the annual Joint Recruiting Commanders Conference (JRCC) that the post-pandemic recruiting climate requires a new approach to identifying quality candidates and welcoming them into service. Sometimes this includes joint Department of Defense policy updates.

Brigadier General (BG) Christopher Amrhein, commander of the Air Force Recruiting Service highlighted the importance of this conference. “Having all of the joint recruiting leadership together with Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) leadership is key to finding common solutions to the joint force for identifying and attracting the best talent for our future total joint force,” Amrhein said.

The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense Personnel & Readiness Directorate sent representatives to provide key accession policy updates to the Services top recruiting leadership. “I think what we are most proud and excited about coming out of FY23 is all the progress we have made, in partnership with the Recruiting Commands and U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command (USMEPCOM) in identifying and updating policies and processes that can have an immediate impact on recruiting,” Mr. Lin St. Clair II, Deputy Director of Accession Policy said.

“The establishment of the Medical Accessions Records Pilot, for example, has led to over 1,200 applicants being able to enlist in FY23 who otherwise would have been initially disqualified. Additionally, working with USMEPCOM, we have reestablished the ability for applicants to bring those most important to them to witness the oath of enlistment. This allows for the community to witness, and be part of, a major milestone in an applicant’s journey from civilian to servicemember.”

Additionally, the Air Force streamlined naturalization during Basic Military Training, reopened college repayment programs, welcomed the community back on bases across the country and built a medical contract program to relieve weight from the medical administration and waiver process.

The services agreed that since the March 2022 launch of Military Health System Genesis, the military’s electronic health record, medical administration work has seen an impact on timelines for processing. While the senior leaders all agree that suggested improvements have been identified and flagged to

higher headquarters, they continue to look at all avenues of process improvements.

USMEPCOM, the unit responsible for physicals and determining initial medical qualification, announced the development of artificial intelligence to address the influx of medical waivers as well. U.S. Army Colonel Megan Stallings, commander of MEPCOM, said her team will use artificial intelligence to help prescreen applicants and identify specific markers in the extensive health records that doctors can focus on. According to Stallings, machine learning will continue to improve the program, but in just one week after launch, her team has seen success.



The services agreed that the other major challenge they face is a decrease in public understanding of the military's mission. Each service was able to provide key updates to their respective department about recruiting and marketing efforts that address the gap in military service understanding.

The U.S. Coast Guard Recruiting commander, Capt. Benjamin Keffer argued the U.S. Coast Guard mission, specifically its environmental work, deeply aligns with Gen Z's values. However, he said because few Americans understand what the Coast Guard does, his command faces a recruiting challenge.

"It's extremely important for services to meet annually, said the commander of U.S. Army Recruiting Command Major General (MG) Johnny Davis. "As our country experiences an overwhelming competition for talent, it's more important than ever for our military recruiting teams to meet, share knowledge, and shape the future of recruiting. Together we can address challenges that have universal impacts on all recruiters."

“The JRCC was valuable to the Marines,” said U.S. Marine Corps Recruiting Commander MG William Bowers. “We got to share our assessment of the dynamic recruiting landscape with our sister services during a period of unprecedented challenges.”

Consensus around the room was that every service understands the recruiting challenges they face, but, as Amrhein concluded, they are dedicated to collaboration to protect and defend the United States by selecting quality applicants into service.

The U.S. Navy Recruiting Command leadership contends the recruiting environment remains an extremely challenging one. “Having service partners to explore and expand the recruiting space makes the journey and the effort easier. “if you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together,” said U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Lex Walker, Commander for Navy Recruiting Command. “Although we are in competition with one another for the same talent, it is a friendly competition born of mutual respect and a common goal, which is to bring people into service, regardless of the Service chosen. Afterall, a rising tide lifts all boats.”