

Airbus Advantage

The February issue, with its tanker update, Reaper program details, and superb Phillip Meilinger essay on air supremacy, stands out as especially informative. The article “Tanker Time Is Tight” [p. 24] notes that Boeing hopes to recoup its KC-46 investment through foreign sales. Such sales also would serve to keep the line warm in the event of a need to exceed the original 179 plane buy. Although the article states that Boeing has but one foreign tanker customer, Japan, the picture is not quite that bad—Italy took four KC-767s as well. The point is well-taken, however. As “Tanker Time” relates, Airbus has won quite a few of the recent tanker competitions. The 767-based tanker has sold less than 10 planes to customers other than the US Air Force.

A little comparative analysis may shed some light on Airbus’ seeming invincibility. Airbus offers tanker designs based on the 737-sized A319/320 as well as the roughly 777-sized A-330. These meet a wide range of customer requirements. More importantly, Airbus’ offerings are flying. Potential buyers can try them out and look at real data. Thus Boeing with its sole 767 offering is at a disadvantage; figuratively speaking, the customer sees an empty ramp where putative 737- or 777-based tankers might go up against their Airbus counterparts.

As slots are opening up on the 737 and 777 lines as customers wait for the new 737 MAX and 777X, now might be a good time for Boeing to offer credible tanker prototypes of both designs. A choice of three distinct aircraft types—737, 767, and 777—would not only outstrip the Airbus product line but also give the 767 a new context as a midsize tanker. To be sure, a Boeing design win other than the 767 would not meet the goal to recoup 767-based tanker costs.

But a full product line would signal that they are in the tanker business with both feet and might also position them well for the KC-Y and KC-Z competitions.

Steven Agoratus
Hamilton, N.J.

You Think That’s Bad

I was reading “Don’t Fear the Reaper” [February, p. 18] when the caption on p. 21 caught my eye: “Airmen at the JB Langley-Eustis, Va., DCGS often worked 14-hour days, six days straight.” It brought back a memory from my time at Schriever Air Force Base. Some years back, at a wing commander’s call, the 50th Space Wing commander announced the satellite control squadrons would be working 12-hour shifts. One squadron stood and cheered! They had been working 14-hour shifts, so for them 12 was a relief.

Capt. Douglas M. Clapp,
USAF (Ret.)
Greensboro, N.C.

In terms of drone pilot shortages, certainly no manpower shortages can or should be shored up with contractors. It may be time for the Air Force to re-evaluate the warrant officer. The drone program should be advanced with its own manning and career track and career advancement opportunities.

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The Army has used the warrant officer very effectively and efficiently. I believe the Air Force would benefit greatly in terms of costs and careers.

Lt. Col. William Sullivan,
USAF (Ret.)
Seffner, Fla.

In Iraq, the Army had Air Force and Navy pilots flying Army aircraft and transporting Army generals. The Army is downsizing and it would make economic sense to seek to have some of the soon to be unemployed Army soldiers learn to fly UAVs. They are trained, have discipline, and it would just make sense to move them over to the Air Force.

Second thought is about Total Force. For goodness sake, we were working on making Total Force a reality at least 26 years ago. We failed in that endeavor because Active Duty leaders gave it mere lip service. They failed to realize that a majority of Reserve and Guard members were once Active Duty members and not second-class citizens.

Thomas Sullivan
Olympia, Wash.

Bring It

Congratulations on the very fine article by Elise Steinberger addressing the physiological requirements for being a fighter pilot [“What It Takes,” February, p. 52]. But please do not forget that these requirements are not the only requirements for being a fighter pilot. The fighter-bomber pilots, before they strap on their G-suits to carry the iron to places like Hanoi, men like Jim Kasler and Leo Thorsness, had to strap on their mental armor. “Yea, though I fly through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for I am the meanest son of a bitch in the valley.” The chaplain at the end of the runway, reading from the Good Book and praying for your safe return,

reminds these pilots that this would be a good time to trot out your "A" game.

Col. Roger Smith,
USAF (Ret.)
Fort Walton Beach, Fla.

TACP in Vietnam

Your article on TACPs bought back a flood of memories [*"Wingman: From the Mud Up," February, p. 74*]. Fresh out of ground radio school at Keesler Air Force Base in March 1969, I was sent to Bien Hoa Air Base with the 19 TASS and then on to Phu Loi with a TACP attached to the 3rd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division. When the 82nd left Vietnam in the fall of that year, I went to the Sidewinder FACs, a TACP assigned to the 3rd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division at Lai Khe, and from there to a tactical operations center at an NDP near the Cambodian border a few clicks away from 5,000 NVA regulars. On Christmas Day, 1969, during a "cease-fire," an LRRP unit came under fire from a larger force of VC. Using the FM radio to communicate with the ground troops, I directed an airborne FAC to the coordinates on the VHF and scrambled fighters from Bien Hoa. The radio coordination among the ground troops, the FAC, fighter aircraft, and Bien Hoa was credited by the brigade commander with saving the lives of every member of the LRRP and in destroying and/or repelling the VC. The brigade commander was going to recommend me for the Bronze Star for meritorious service but the paperwork never got filed due to the closure of the NDP at Minh Thanh and turning over Lai Khe to the ARVN early in 1970—a disappointment to this day. But the satisfaction of knowing I helped save the lives of the LRRP members more than compensates. Obviously, this was well before the TACP became an actual specialty. I am happy to see the recognition it deserves.

James T. Ryan
Lakewood Ranch, Fla.

They Can Bid (or Not) If They Want To

In the February issue [*"Air Force World: McCain Calls For Freeze on ULA Payments," p. 16*], you indicated that Senator McCain was calling for an audit of ULA's business systems because he does not believe their explanation as to why they didn't bid on a launch request. In the United States, I believe that it is still a company's right to decide which business opportunities they wish to pursue.

Further, I believe that on numerous occasions the senator has gone on about the amount of waste that occurs in the

DOD. I am certain that he is aware that an unscheduled audit is not free, but costs a sum that could be construed as "waste" if it is spent as a result of an individual's vituperous agenda against a business.

As a side note, he should be aware that the Defense Contract Management Agency accomplishes periodic audits on a regular basis. Perhaps he could be provided with the most recent one. This might help eliminate some of the "waste" that he so often criticizes.

James H. Gill
Manhattan Beach, Calif.

What Is in a Name?

While Mr. Correll points out that Islamic scholars were upset with the naming of the military response to Sept. 11, there were also many Christians who were upset with the term "Infinite Justice" [*"The Lost Art of Naming Operations," February, p. 54*]. My Methodist minister and I were questioning the use of biblical terminology by a nation that prides itself on religious freedom at war with radical Islam, which prides itself on religious intolerance. "Enduring Freedom" did much better in capturing the values of our society in the struggle for liberty and toleration.

Sean M. Mallory
Edinboro, Pa.

Just completed John Correll's artful treatise on the lost art of naming operations. What immediately came to mind, for one who flew some of those air- evac missions, was the memorable repatriation of US Vietnam POWs in what eventually became known for its more appropriate appellation of Operation Homecoming. This noteworthy and moving enterprise began life as the less elegantly named Operation Egress Recap.

Col. "Red" Martin,
USAF (Ret.)
Wimauma, Fla.

Author John Correll has hit the target—a "shack." It is a shocking reflection on today's military that the operations do not have a resounding military overtone. I flew in Rolling Thunder and in Barrel Roll, Steel Tiger, and Tiger Hound. And no one who flew there will ever forget Route Pack 6. Sure sounds a lot better than Just (be)Cause.

Winston Churchill realized this, stating that operation names should have a nobility about them—he said it would be



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Educate the public on the critical need for unmatched aerospace power and a technically superior workforce to ensure US national security.

Advocate for aerospace power and STEM education.

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demeaning to tell a grieving mother her son died in "Operation Bunnyhug." It's not generally remembered that the British-Canadian beaches at Normandy were named after fish—Sword(fish), Gold(fish) and Jelly(fish). Churchill wasn't buying Jelly Beach, but to keep the J it was renamed Juno.

The rot actually started in the early '70s with aircraft call signs. I can remember a cross-country from George Air Force Base in 1973; while filing my flight plan at an intermediate stop at Cannon, I commented to the pilot next to me in base ops that I didn't like my call sign of Vomit 94. He was from Nellis and replied: "What are you complaining about? My call sign is Tyrd 23."

You can't make this stuff up.

Jonathan A. Hayes
Corvallis, Ore.

Fascinating article about operation code names. Early in my Air Force career, I read through a copy of AFR 205-1. In the appendix was a listing of code names that were assigned to each Majcom and other Air Force activities. I was impressed because I recognized several code names that I had read about in Air Force news releases prior to

coming on Active Duty. One code name I did not recognize was Hasty, which was assigned to Air Training Command.

Several years afterward, I was a weapons control systems (WCS) instructor at Lowry Air Force Base (deceased, R.I.P.). At that time, ATC was attempting to save money by streamlining fundamental electronics instruction. The code name assigned was Hasty Spark. Later, a certain unnamed brigadier general commanding Lowry Technical Training Center decided he did not like the word Hasty, and changed the name to Bright Spark. We instructors looked at each other, shrugged our shoulders, and referred to the new code name by its initials.

A question to the community: Does anyone remember the code names assigned to Air Force Systems Command? I spent many years at Edwards Air Force Base, but cannot remember the Majcom code names.

MSgt. Michael R. Betzer,
USAF (Ret.)
Lancaster, Calif.

Airmen Deaths

As a former Air Force officer, I was shocked and saddened by the deaths of

six US airmen killed by a suicide bomber in Afghanistan [*"Editorial: Six Airmen in a Forgotten War," February, p. 4*]. Two of the victims—TSgt. Joseph Lemm and SSgt. Louis Bonacasa—resided in my area and both were stationed at Stewart ANGB, N.Y., my final PCS from 1967-68, which was then called Stewart Air Force Base. Their deaths raise some disturbing questions.

After pledging that all US troops would leave Afghanistan by the end of 2015, President Obama said 9,800 will remain, but in "noncombat" roles. Really? Then why were four OSI staffers and two security NCOs outside the wire patrolling a village near Bagram Air Base on an "advise and assist mission" instead of staying on base as garrison forces? Didn't the Taliban realize their "noncombat" status or did they fail to get the memo? What does noncombat really mean in the real world of war? Was this an extension of the AF's "in lieu" program that assigns airmen to perform tasks normally done by soldiers and marines? If so, how long will this program continue and how many more airmen will die or suffer wounds?

Sergeants Lemm and Bonacasa and their four colleagues are among more

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than 2,300 US military men and women killed in Afghanistan—including 21 recent victims as of Jan. 15—since the war started in 2001. Our Commander in Chief promised to end our nation's longest war when he took office in 2009.

"The Hunger Games" has President Snow. We have President Snow Job.

Richard Reif
Flushing, N.Y.

I was sad to read of the deaths of the six American airmen heroes who lost their lives in Afghanistan. Thank you for keeping their continued work in the forefront. But, please, why in the world are you printing the sexual choices of one of the airmen who lost her life? Additionally, you just had to let us know this airman was an "outspoken critic of DOD's old "Don't Ask-Don't Tell" policy." Why are you telling us this? What does this have to do with them losing their lives in Afghanistan? You didn't tell us the sexual preferences of the other five airmen who lost their lives. What gives? You are a professional, private organization who DOESN'T have to pander to certain groups, nor are you compelled to promote whatever this current Administration has forced upon us.

CMSgt. Jerald Akers,
USAF (Ret.)
Big Island, Va.

Reader to Reader

In the letters section of the February issue of your fine magazine, as is Commander Mersky, I, too, am an admirer of "Airpower Classics" [*Letters: Airpower Classics*, p. 6]. Seeing the F-15 highlighted in the December 2015 issue was especially pleasing for me. During the years 1968 and '69, I was a member of the USAF Source Selection Evaluation Board (SSEB) for that fine weapon system. Our job was to select the best from three contract finalists, which were Republic Aviation, North American Aviation, and McDonnell Douglas. I think, and I am sure the results show, we chose the best airplane.

In the same issue, I offer my sincere kudos to retired Master Sergeant Lighton for his comments regarding the December "Verbatim" item on Mr. Trump [*Letters: You Never Know*, p. 7]. His comments are dead-on. Sergeant Lighton, I'll choose you for my team any day.

CMSgt. Billy F. Reid,
USAF (Ret.)
Sun City West, Ariz.

Senior Staff Changes

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To be Brigadier General: Michael A. Guetlein, Brook J. Leonard.

To be ANG Lieutenant General: Robert S. Williams.

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Index to Advertisers

Boeing.....	Cover II, Cover IV
MASA.....	63
USAA.....	3
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AFA Member Benefits.....	Cover III
Air & Space Conference and Technology Exposition	19
Air Force Memorial.....	78
Air Warfare Symposium 2017.....	63
Avis	8
Hangar Store.....	74
Join AFA.....	35