

FORGED IN ONE FURNACE

By Otto Kreisher

The Air Force is integrating its Active, Guard, and Reserve officer training programs.

the separate commissioning source for Air Guard officers.

In the past, candidates for commissions in the Active Duty Air Force and the Air Force Reserve were trained at the Basic Officer Training program, the 24th Training Squadron, commanded by Lt. Col. Ryan J. Aerni. Air Guard candidates were trained at the Academy of Military Science Det. 12, commanded by Lt. Col. Reid F. Rasmussen.

In January, both units were to receive the mix of officer candidates from all three components and be instructed by a faculty also made up of Active Duty, Guard, and Reserve personnel.

"I think there has been a lot of vision shown by the TAGs of the states to be able to provide us this opportunity to be able to go forward and build with one furnace, one metal and go with a common crucible for all the officers

going through officer training school so they can be leaders of moral character and go on and lead the world's greatest airmen that the world has ever seen," Lockwood said.

The Army National Guard provides three sources for officer candidates: 16 to 18 months of weekend sessions at state regional training institutions, an accelerated process at several National Guard Bureau facilities, and at the Regular Army's OCS at Fort Benning, Ga.

The unification of Air Force commissioning programs has been a gradual process that began as far back as 2006 when then-Chief of Staff Gen. T. Michael Moseley stated a goal of "a shared common experience" through a single site for Active Duty, Guard, and Reserve officer candidates.

In 2009, the Air Guard moved the Academy of Military Science from

McGhee Tyson Arpt., Tenn., to Maxwell as part of OTS.

AETC took the next step, starting a rotation between Active Duty and Air Guard officers as OTS commandant. Lockwood, who received an Active Duty commission through OTS and later switched to the Air Guard, is the second Guard OTS commandant.

Officer Training School then took several symbolic actions in 2014, first bringing candidates from the three components together for a ceremony called "crossing the blue line," during which the officer aspirants were sworn in to start their training in the two separate programs, and later holding a combined commissioning ceremony for the two schools.

During that phase, the OTS leadership was asking for the unified training because "we want a common officer training experience" to give Total



Force officers a shared foundation for their service, Aerni told *Air Force Magazine*.

The idea was welcomed by Mark Gunzinger, a retired Air Force colonel and former B-52 pilot, who thinks “bringing officer training together like that is a really good idea.”

Gunzinger, now a national security analyst with the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, noted that to help build the Total Force concept, the Air Force leadership wants to make it easier for officers to move across

the components at various points in their careers if they want.

An Air Force Academy graduate, Gunzinger said, “It never mattered to me, or any officer I knew, what the source of the officer’s commission was. What mattered was can that officer do his or her job? Are they proficient in their mission? Could they lead? That’s what really counts.”

If the commissioning unification “can help tear down artificial barriers between the reserve components and the active component, I’m all for it,” Gunzinger said.

REAL BENEFITS

Lockwood said it was important to educate the Active Duty force about the Air Guard because they will be going to war together.

The Regular (Active Duty) Air Force, or “RegAF” understood “much less about the Air National Guard than the Guard understood about the Regular Air Force,” he said. “The reason for that is, there are a lot of Guard members like myself who were 10 years Active Duty before we jumped ship and went over to the Air National Guard. But you don’t have it going the other way. You don’t have Air National Guardsmen going back over to the RegAF. So their understanding was probably lacking.”

Airmen at the first combined class of Basic Officer Training and Academy of Military Science—the former for Active Duty and Reserve and the latter for the Air National Guard—in October at Maxwell.

L-r: Then-acting Air Force Secretary Eric Fanning, OTS Commandant Col. Scott Lockwood, and Lt. Col. Taran Hickie, then commander of the 24th Training Squadron, review newly commissioned Air Force officers in 2013. The first fully integrated Total Force class at Maxwell is scheduled to be commissioned in mid-March.

Lockwood said the merger of the two programs provides “real benefit” for the Air Guard in that “they will get more opportunities to get trained at different times throughout the year, as opposed to just four or five classes a year. They will have a continuous opportunity to send officers in, a better matchup with other training down the line, for follow-on training.”

Rasmussen has reworked the entire syllabus at OTS, Lockwood said, so the Air Guard candidates “will get specific Guard training. A great example is the defense support for civil authorities,” a significant National Guard mission.

OTS also runs a third program, the Commissioned Officer Training course, providing the initial military indoctrination for individuals receiving a direct commission to serve in nonline specialties as lawyers, medical and dental professionals, and chaplains.

Although those directly commissioned officers “have always been Total Force,” Lockwood said, they have “always been trained separately, in a shorter program for accession than regular line officer training.” But the school officials would like to bring them together with the line officers with whom they will serve in the future.



USAF photo by Melanie Rodgers Cox



Aerni said he has met nonline officers who appear to consider themselves separate from the line officers in their units. This can weaken cohesion, and Lockwood said, “As we look back over the last 12 years, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan, we find that those individuals need the best leadership training that we can afford to give them. By virtue of the position they find themselves in, they simply need to be going through ... integration with the rest of the line officers training. That has not happened.”

Although OTS has proposed integrating directly commissioned officer training with the line officers, “right now they still are stand-alone. They are training in the 23rd Training Squadron in a five-week program, 23 training days, [as] opposed to 47 training days” for the line officer candidates, Lockwood said.

The reaction to the proposal has varied among the leaders of the different specialties, he said. Some have agreed that the direct-commission officers could benefit from “a little bit better leadership experience” and that it would “be better for the entire officer if we integrated training from the very beginning.” However, there are “some logistical concerns” about the time some of the doctors can afford between their educational programs at the universities and their Air Force duties, the colonel added.

Nothing that OTS is doing will affect the other two sources of Air Force officers, the Air Force Academy and

the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps at universities.

An Air Reserve Component Volunteer Program initiative began last July. It gives ROTC cadets the option of joining a Guard or Reserve unit on commissioning, rather than entering Active Duty, explained 1st Lt. Jose Davis, a public affairs officer at AETC headquarters at JBSA-Randolph, Texas, which manages the AFROTC program. That program runs only through Dec. 31, 2015, he said.

Because of reductions across the Air Force, the Air Staff decided last April to reduce the annual line officer production from AFROTC from 1,700 to 1,350, Davis pointed out.

EXPEDITIONARY TRAINING

A significant change in the OTS training experience, completely separate from the Total Force integration of the two schools, is the addition of Air Expeditionary Training. AET matches the exposure to infantry-like field training that now is part of basic training for enlisted airmen. The training began several years ago in response to the increasing deployment of small Air Force units to austere locations, frequently in developing countries that lack the living quarters and other amenities usually available at US or allied permanent air bases.

Prospective officers go through the OTS rope exercise conditioning course at Maxwell’s Jeanne M. Holm Center for Officer Accessions and Citizen Development.

“The AET site we have is 2,020 acres in Titus, Ala., where we will actually mobilize individuals and deploy them, and they will go out and train in a scenario, much like an Afghanistan or Eastern Europe scenario, with Blue on Red Forces, with an indigenous population, with all of the nuances that they’re likely to run into,” Lockwood explained.

“So they will get the full-up experience. They will be living in tents and have to plan and come up with a strategy and run a program out there and kind of go on dealing with the indigenous population, as well as fighting the Red Forces.”

Lockwood called it “very excellent training.” There was nothing comparable when he went through OTS 25 years ago.

But most of the officer candidates who currently are coming to OTS already have some experience in that kind of life, because about 85 percent of Air National Guard candidates and 45 percent of Regular Air Force trainees are prior enlisted, Lockwood said.

As a result, “when you ask the question, ‘Who’s been downrange in Afghanistan or Iraq?’ more than half the room will raise their hand.” ✪

Otto Kreisher is a Washington, D.C.-based military affairs reporter and regular contributor to Air Force Magazine. From August to November 2014, he also served as this magazine’s senior correspondent. His most recent feature article was “Rising Safety” in January.