



# *The Enlisted Perspective*

*By CMSAF Rodney J. McKinley*

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## **Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force #1 Paul Wesley Airey**

Forty years ago today the Air Force installed Paul Wesley Airey as the first Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force. Chief Airey forged new paths for the enlisted Airmen and has made a lifetime of lasting and significant contributions to our nation and to the Air Force since.

Forty years later Chief Airey continues to serve the Airmen he led so well. At the Air Force's 20th Anniversary ceremony in 1967, Chief Airey said, "I have seen many changes as we progressed from simple air power to today's aerospace force. The enlisted corps has kept pace with that progress, for it is pride and dedication that keep enlisted men at their posts, not the lure of an easy life and secure future. It is the desire to serve our country that motivates today's Air Force." Those words spoken 40 years ago echo true during our Air Force's 60th Anniversary, and also accurately describe the actions and continuing efforts of our first CMSAF.

The first CMSAF has always been a leader. During WWII he flew as a B-24 radio operator and additional duty aerial gunner. On his 28th mission, then-Technical Sergeant Airey and his fellow crewmen were shot down over Austria. He was captured, and during his time as a Prisoner of War he spent his time working tirelessly to meet the basic needs of fellow prisoners, even through a 90-day forced march.

Chief Airey has never stopped working for Airmen. During his CMSAF tenure, he advocated for an Air Force-level Senior NCO Academy. His vision became reality when the academy opened in 1973, becoming the capstone in the development of our Senior NCOs. Since then, Chief Airey has attended almost every AFSNCOA graduation, leading the Former CMSAF Panel as they address the students on the past, present and future of our enlisted force. Additionally, he usually talks with the Gunter NCO Academy students during those trips and is a frequent speaker at professional military education schools throughout the Air Force.

During his CMSAF tenure he worked to change loan establishments charging exorbitant rates outside our air base gates and to improve low retention during the Vietnam Conflict. Chief Airey also led a team that laid the foundation for the Weighted Airman Promotion System, a system that has stood the test of time and which we still use today.

He has always continued his fight for the rights of our Airmen by serving on the boards of numerous Air Force and enlisted professional military organizations throughout the years. He is currently a member of the Board of Trustees for the Airmen Memorial Museum, and a member of the Air Force Memorial Foundation and the Air University Foundation.

So on this day, as we celebrate the establishment of the position of CMSAF, let us also honor the man who so successfully gave a voice to hundreds of thousands of enlisted Airmen who served with him, and to those who have served since.

Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Paul Airey - we salute you.



*Rodney J. McKinley*  
**RODNEY J. MCKINLEY**  
**Chief Master Sergeant**  
**of the Air Force**