



(U) Better for the Stretching: At the Close of an Air Force Career

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(U) Just a little over 30 years ago, I swore an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force. Today, I'm retiring from the Air Force. What an incredible, exciting experience the Air Force took me on in the years between the oath and my retirement! I've been to places I never thought about going to (Korea among them) and places I'd only studied in class: the exact street corner in Sarajevo where the Austrian Crown Prince was assassinated in 1914; the places in Budapest where the fighting during the 1956 revolution was most intense; and Prague, Rome, and Munich. I'm thankful for those incredible opportunities, and for the years of excitement, learning, change, and, above all: service.

(U) As Armed Forces Week and my military career come to a close, it seems fitting that I reflect first on **service**. My 30 years of service have been divided between 10 years of active duty and 20 years' service in the Reserves. At times the reserve service seemed longer and even more intense than the active service, especially in these last 5 years, which have been a real challenge -- for our nation, our agency, and sometimes even for some of my colleagues as they tried to figure out whether I'd show up to work in civilian clothes or a military uniform! Apparel aside, sometimes the distinction between my military and civilian duties weren't all that obvious, but I'd like to highlight some experiences I had while wearing the the U.S. Air Force uniform.

(U//FOUO) Almost all of my military service has been in the world of SIGINT. Yes, there were those 3 years that I spent doing collection management at DIA, and the 30 months I spent working on a graduate degree and waiting to enter on active duty. But aside from those stints and the year I spent at the 6903rd ESG, my entire service in the Air Force has been at or under the command of leaders at NSA. For most of those years, I was working operations in the old AROF (now part of the [MOC](#)) and in ROFA, now [CROFA](#). Even part of the time I spent in JOCCP (Junior Officer Cryptologic Career Program) was operational. Also included were some very busy years at Menwith Hill Station and several months in Italy and Bosnia with NATO operations.

(U) So, what has **changed** in those 30 years? You might ask, "What hasn't?" The dedication of SIGINTers, both military and civilian, hasn't changed. But the focus of SIGINT operations has changed quite a bit. The enemy has changed. The technology certainly has changed. Even the uniform that we wear -- and the fact that we're supposed to wear it every day -- has changed. So, yes, the way we "do" SIGINT certainly has changed, but I believe that most, if not all, of these changes have been for the better. We have found ways to adjust to some changes. We have found ways to serve our nation more effectively by making the right information more readily available to the right people. I am proud to have been involved in some of those changes.

(U//FOUO) Better ways of providing intelligence is just one of the many things I've **learned** in 30 years in the Air Force. I've been lucky enough to learn about SIGINT -- and SIGINT reporting. I've learned what was going on in the world, and I've learned a great deal of geography. I've had a chance to learn first-hand about other cultures. I learned that duct tape really can be used to "lash" a gray phone handset and a KY-3 handset to provide real-time tactical intelligence to "special forces." I learned that I still am learning how to lead a group of young officers. I've also learned that leading a group of 7 young Air Force lieutenants in Korea did not really prepare me to lead 11 AF Captains in today's JOCCP. I've learned, over and over again, that the only way SIGINT gets out the door is through the determined efforts of collectors, linguists, and analyst/reporters, regardless of whether they are military or civilian. I've learned that they are the professionals.

(U//FOUO) The Air Force has stretched me in ways I didn't know I could stretch. I've "led" (or,

more appropriately chased after, trying to keep up with) small teams operationally testing MAROON ARCHER and BEACHMAN; medium teams doing remote operations for our government, and another for NATO; and large teams working with OLYMPIC GAME. I've learned technology (well, some, anyway) and left my arts and sciences comfort zone on many occasions. Always, I've come away better for the stretching.

(U) What I am most thankful for, however, is the opportunity to work with and get to know some incredible service members. Many are reservists like me. Most have families and full-time jobs in addition to their reserve commitments. Some are going to school, too. Almost none of them serve just for the extra pay, and most don't think about ever seeing a retirement check after they turn 60. I got to know a lot of them long before 9/11, when being in the Air Force Reserve was less demanding and sometimes more frustrating. Since 9/11 it's gotten personal for some people, and certainly more intense for many others. I've also worked with many active duty personnel, past and present. Many of them fought in an earlier hot war and then a cold war, at a time when military service was not appreciated. They served, and I was fortunate enough to serve with them.

(U//FOUO) Working with these military and civilian professionals has led to some **exciting** times. Perhaps the most exciting was in ROFA when we covered the hijacking of a TWA jetliner. That was probably also the most immediately tragic experience I was involved in, since a fellow military member lost his life. Of all the awards I've received, the Joint Meritorious Unit Award that ROFA received for that 2-week period in June 1985 means the most to me.

(C) There have been other exciting times as well. I found it very exciting trying to figure out what to do with 150 Korean and Chinese linguists at Osan when the Air Force grounded all its U-2s after we lost two in 4 months. Even though Menwith Hill "fought" the Gulf War in 1990 from over 1,000 miles away, we found it very exciting to know that we literally were in the fight. Doing a real SIGINT mission with and for NATO was exciting. It was also the first time, 21 years after I was commissioned, that I was in a hostile-fire area.

(U//FOUO) Certainly not every SIGINT day was "exciting." It's not exciting to wear MOPP gear (chemical protective suit) for days on end, but it did help keep me warm during that very cold Korean winter. It's not exciting doing OPRs (Officer Performance Reports) after the third edit, but seeing some of the lieutenants make lieutenant colonel and some of the sergeants make chief gives a certain satisfaction. It's not exciting to write a USSID for NATO support; but it sure can make a difference in the quality of day-to-day military support.

(U) Thirty years. They seem to have slipped away. I am proud to have had the opportunity to serve in the Air Force all those years. I'm honored to have the opportunity to continue to serve, even though after today, I'm "just a civilian." But most of all, I'm proud that right now there is another Second Lieutenant [REDACTED] just starting his service in the Air Force: my son, [REDACTED], was commissioned last week upon his graduation from [REDACTED]. One of his first duties will be to officiate over my retirement from the Air Force.

(U) And so the torch is passed.

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