

HQ INDIVIDUAL RESERVIST READINESS & INTEGRATION ORGANIZATION

The Readiness Report

Be there before the call

By Master Sgt. Wendy Barraza

When the phone rings in the middle of the night, it's like an alarm going off in your brain. No one calls at one in the morning to say they were "just thinking of you."

I received one of those calls 13 years ago and woke to my mom telling me my dad had died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. The words didn't sink in right away; I had to ask her to repeat herself. I can't image the difficulty she endured to do this.

My dad was a Navy veteran, and a high performer. He was incredibly successful as a nuclear power engineer. Unfortunately, he was not able to tackle life's challenges without substance abuse or an addiction. These varied over the years, from gambling, to drinking, to smoking, to overeating; he would replace one with another in a constant struggle to adapt to life. I don't know for sure, but I suspect he filled the void with those substances because he didn't have anyone to help him. As the breadwinner for the family, I think he felt he had to appear strong and deal with things on his own. This left him alone with no one he could just open up to about how he was feeling.

At the time of his death, it was very difficult for me to process my dad's suicide without resentment. I felt he had damaged my mom. I felt he had committed a horribly selfish act. I felt angry that my mom and brother missed him so much when I didn't find him to be a particularly good person. It never occurred to me how alone he felt in that moment; alone enough to see suicide as the only solution to end his pain, and everyone else's.

A few years after this, I became a first sergeant and received extensive training on how to help those struggling with suicide. I also began counseling with suicide survivors and victims. These encounters educated me and gave me a new perspective on how people think when they are considering suicide, and how to respond to them. When someone's arm is cut off, we don't just tell them to change their frame of mind and they'll feel better. When someone is diabetic, we don't tell them it's unhealthy to take medication every day to survive. When someone has the flu, we don't ask them "have you ever tried not having the flu?"

What I came to understand is that we should never minimize someone's struggle and that we need to be there for our Wingmen when they are going through rough patches. Isolation and hopelessness are dark times, and the permanent effects of decisions made in those times can create a ripple effect of sadness through families and organizations. If I were to hold a glass of water in my hand, and stretch it out parallel to the floor, I could hold that glass for a while but at some point, my arm would get tired and I would want to lower the glass. *(Continued on page 5)*



All Individual Reservists must receive their flu vaccine no later than Jan. 1, 2017. Members who fail to do so will be required to get vaccinated on their next set of orders, or may risk being placed in a no-pay, no-points status. The FluMist variation of the vaccine is no longer authorized for Department of Defense personnel. (U.S. Air Force photo)

All Individual Reservists must obtain flu vaccine by Jan. 1

By Master Sgt. Timm Huffman

Flu season is back and all Individual Reservists (Individual Mobilization Augmentees and Participating Individual Ready Reservists) must obtain their vaccination by Jan. 1, 2017.

Members who receive the flu vaccination from a civilian provider must ensure they submit proper documentation in order to have their Individual Medical Readiness (IMR) updated.

Additionally, all IRs must be in duty status (pay and points or points only) to utilize a Military Treatment Facility. Only the inactivated (no live virus) vaccine, administered intramuscularly in those up to age 65, will be provided by MTFs. IRs should note that if they receive the vaccination from a civilian provider, the FluMist form is no longer approved for DoD personnel. Any other form of the influenza vaccine is acceptable. Additionally, the member must provide one of the following documents to their servicing MTF or the HQ RIO/IRM (afrc.rmgsg@us.af.mil):

- Civilian proof of vaccination, or
- a letter from a doctor recommending the vaccine not be received and why.

In accordance with AFI 36-2254, Vol. 1, Reserve Personnel Participation, if a Reservist's IMR status turns red (overdue), their HQ RIO detachment commander may disapprove any further participation, or subsequent orders may direct them to obtain the vaccine while in status. Historically, the Air Force Reserve Command vice commander has also called for members who fail to receive their vaccination to be placed in a "no-pay, no-points" status until they have received the vaccine.

Members should direct any questions to their servicing MTF or the HQ RIO/IRM office. Questions regarding orders should be directed to the member's servicing HQ RIO Detachment.



HQ RIO Leadership



Col. Carolyn A. Stickell
Commander



CMSgt. Dolores Colella
Superintendent



MSgt. Wendy Barraza
First Sergeant

[Enlisted leader biographies](#)

HQ RIO Quick Links

- [HQ RIO Website](#)
- [Detachment Directory](#)
- [The Guide for IRs](#)
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- [Wingman Toolkit](#)
- [MyPers](#)
- [AROWS-R](#)
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www.arpc.afrc.af.mil/hqrio.aspx



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News briefs

Freedom Award nominations due by Dec. 31

Nominations for the Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award (a.k.a. the Freedom Award) are due no later than Dec. 31.

To nominate an employer, visit <http://www.freedomaward.mil/> and select "Nominate Employer." Nominations must come from a Guard or Reserve member who is employed by the organization they are nominating, or from a family member.

The Freedom Award is the highest recognition given by the U.S. Government to employers for their support of their employees who serve in the Guard and Reserve. The award was created to publicly recognize employers who provide exceptional support to their Guard and Reserve employees. It is the highest in a series of employer recognition awards given by the Department of Defense.

The Freedom Award was instituted in 1996 under the auspices of the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve. The ESGR is a Department of Defense program established in 1972 to promote cooperation and understanding between Reserve Component Service members and their civilian employers and to assist in the resolution of conflicts arising from an employee's military commitment. To learn more, visit www.ESGR.mil.

Blended Retirement System leader training available

The new Blended Retirement System is a hot topic of conversation across the Defense Department, and most total force members have questions on how it will work and who is eligible.

The online BRS leader course, released in June, is designed to educate leaders on the new retirement system. The training provides both military and civilian leaders of Airmen with a working knowledge of the BRS and the DOD plan to educate the force prior to implementation on Jan. 1, 2018.

The course is available both online and through a mobile version for a smartphone or tablet via Joint Knowledge Online (<https://jkodirect.jten.mil/Atlas2/page/login/Login.jsf>), course number P-US1330. The course is also available to those without a Common Access Card via http://jko.jten.mil/courses/brs/leader_training/Launch_Course.html. The mobile version has a login option that provides a training certificate, which will be necessary for the required opt-in training next year, as well as a public access option for spouses and parents of current or prospective Airmen.

"The public access option of the JKO mobile app for smartphones also makes the BRS leader course an easily accessible pocket version of BRS for questions on the fly from Airmen seeking more knowledge," said Col. Brian Anderson, the military compensation policy chief at Headquarters Air Force. "Many leaders may not be eligible to opt-in to BRS themselves, but they will need to be knowledgeable about the new system in order to respond to questions from eligible service members."

Leaders can download the app from their respective app store for free.

The leader role is to provide information and access to education but not to provide specific financial advice. Leaders who take the course will gain an understanding of the new retirement system, educational opportunities that will be made available to Airmen and the available resources to answer questions.

"In the future, Airmen will be able to seek individual information and education from a personal financial expert at their Airman and Family Readiness Center before making a final decision," Anderson continued. "The Air Force has a plan to train personal financial managers and make them available to assist members and spouses on the financial aspects of the current and new retirement systems."

According to Anderson, quality education and training are key to an Airman's ability to make an informed decision about retirement plans. Airmen will be encouraged to research their options during 2017 and may elect to opt-in to BRS on or after Jan. 1, 2018. Elections must be completed during 2018 and an online course, tailored to those who are eligible to opt-in, will be available soon.

BRS information is available and continuously updated on myPers. Click "Retirement" from any military landing page.

Did you know? | Tips for the Individual Reservist

Did you know you can check your Individual Medical Readiness (IMR) by logging into ASIMS through the Air Force Portal? Once in myIMR, you can check the status and due dates for the following medical readiness items: dental, vaccinations, health assessments, labs, profiles and medical equipment .

Please note that items will remain green until their due date, at which point they turn yellow for 90 days before turning red. In order to avoid becoming overdue and possibly encountering restrictions on your orders, it is important to pay attention to due dates for each item. Also, it is a good idea to accomplish each medical readiness item as soon as you know it's due. For example, if you know you need an HIV blood draw in August but you are only performing duty in April, accomplish that test in April when you have access to a military treatment facility (MTF), as you must be in a military status to utilize an MTF.

Questions regarding your IMR should be directed to your servicing MTF.



Lawyer finds path to service in Reserve

By Master Sgt. Timm Huffman

Rumbling tanks, riot police, tear-gas grenades and hungry citizens standing in lines for bread and meat rations.

These could be scenes from many war movies or deployments, but they are not. These are Capt. Tomasz Nowak's memories from his childhood in Communist Poland in the early 1980s.

Nowak, who is an Individual Mobilization Augmentee Judge Advocate at the 7th Bomb Wing, Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, immigrated with his family to the United States as refugees in 1985. He was six at the time and his homeland had just undergone a period of social unrest, government crackdown and martial law.

"Waiting in line for food at the meat market or bakery was commonplace but I didn't know it was different anywhere else," he said. "I didn't want for anything but at the same time I didn't know what life was like [in the United States]."

The contrast he found in his new life near Dallas, Texas, complete with supermarkets and NASCAR, helped shape a worldview that would lead him to become a lawyer and develop into a desire to serve his adopted country.

The path Nowak took to military service was unlike those taken by many other officers, such as Reserve Officer Training Corps or the Air Force Academy. Instead, Nowak established an entire legal career prior to entering the Air Force.

After earning his legal degree from Baylor Law School, where he met his wife (she's now a federal magistrate judge), he served for a number of years as a felony prosecutor, specializing in the areas of child abuse and drugs.

Nowak said that despite his success, military service was always in the back of his mind as something he had to do. He ties that urge to a desire to make his grandfather, a World War II veteran, proud. He also felt he "owed it to America" for the life and freedoms his adopted country provided him after emigrating from Poland.

However, it wasn't until he found a direct-to-commissioning opportunity with the Air Force Reserve as an Individual Mobilization Augmentee that he found his path to service. He said he was searching online for opportunities and all of his research pointed him to the Individual Reserve as the best fit for his life and career.

"[The IMA program] allowed me to stay on my legal career path, keep my day job with minimal disruption other than Commissioned Officer Training (COT) and Judge Advocate Staff Officer Course, and [they were] actively looking for the trial skill set I possessed," he said.

Nowak interviewed with the legal staff at Dyess Air Force Base and was hired. He attended Officer Training School in 2012. He said the new military lifestyle was completely foreign but he loved everything about it "except the first two days of COT."

Not only did the commissioning opportunity offer Nowak a path to service, it also provided the Air Force a highly skilled and qualified Airman; Nowak came to the Air Force having already tried over 100 cases as a civilian prosecutor.

Since joining the Air Force, Nowak has shifted gears in his civilian

practice and is now a defense attorney, working with some of the worst criminals in Texas. His Air Force career has also grown. In addition to supporting the 7th Bomb Wing Judge Advocate's office with their day-to-day operations when he's on duty, he has also earned his Air Force trial certification.

"I go from meeting clients in the jail to meeting with Airmen about their wills and offering legal assistance," he said.

Being a Citizen Airman allows Nowak to bring all of his civilian experience, including expertise on state and local laws, to the team at Dyess.

Lt. Col. Justin Dalton, the staff judge advocate at Dyess, said Nowak's contributions to the mission at the 7th Bomb Wing are many.

Dalton, who came to Dyess only a year ago, said he had never led a legal office that consisted of both active-component Airmen and Reservists. What he quickly found was that Reserve support was critical to mission success.

"I can say... we could not have accomplished the mission at Dyess without the Reserve Component, including Capt. Nowak," said Dalton.

Nowak happened to be pulling duty during Dalton's first week in the office, and the Reservist quickly proved his worth to his new boss by stepping in to support a special court-martial trial. The deputy staff judge advocate was deployed and two additional judge advocates were away attending training, leaving only two active-duty captains. Even though Nowak only had one other military trial under his belt, Dalton called on him to serve as a third trial counsel based on his extensive experience prosecuting criminals in the civilian court system.

Dalton said the captain skillfully handled preliminary examination of witnesses, responding to defense motions, the direct examination of a sixteen-year-old victim, multiple cross examinations, and the sentencing argument. He added that the military judge praised Nowak's extensive experience in the civilian sector and noted how well-prepared, professional, and confident the Citizen Airman was in the court room.

Another recent contribution from Nowak where his civilian experience came to bear happened when the wing commander at Dyess wanted to implement a vehicular concealed carry weapons policy. Dalton said this was a very complicated legal puzzle and his Reservist was the person he turned to for local gun law advice. Nowak's talking paper on the issue was instrumental in Dyess Air Force Base becoming the first in Air Force history to allow members to carry private, loaded weapons on base. Dalton added that Headquarters Air Force is now reviewing that work to provide guidance to other Air Force installations that want to follow Dyess' lead.

Nowak hopes his effort to repay his debt to the United States will help others see that the way of life in his adopted country is worth the effort of maintaining it. Whether it's an Airman who needs a reminder that their work serves a purpose, or a citizen who needs a reason to feel good about where their taxes go, he wants people to see the contrast between life in the United States and places where freedom is suppressed.

Dalton, for one, believes Nowak has achieved that goal, calling him an "incredible ambassador for the Air Force, Air Force Reserve, [judge advocate corps], and America."

For Nowak, though, his service boils down to freedom.

"I had to do it, but [it was] because I live here and I had the choice and opportunity to do so, not because someone else forced me or told me to," he said.



Capt. Tomasz Nowak, right, and sister, Magdalena Nowak-Brodnax, in the early 1980s, prior to emigrating from Poland. (courtesy photo)



Lt. Col. Just Dalton, Dyess Air Force Base staff judge advocate, presents Capt. Tomasz Nowak with his Air Force trial certification. (courtesy photo)



Fitness, teamwork draw Reservist to rucking

By Master Sgt. Timm Huffman

After running a 5K race each month during his deployment in 2014, and improving his time by ten minutes, Air Force Reserve Tech. Sgt. Robert Hattan was looking for a way to stay fit when he came home.

That's when he heard about a new challenge called GORUCK, an events series that focus on the physical and social aspects of rucking, i.e. walking from one place to another with all of your gear.

GORUCK is a movement founded by special-forces veterans that encourages physical fitness, social wellbeing and citizenship, through the shared experience of rucking and military-history themed events.

Hattan, who is an Individual Mobilization Augmentee engineering technician with the 27th Special Operations Civil Engineering Squadron at Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico, first began participating in these events in August 2015. Since then he has participated in 18 events, including his most recent, the Mogadishu Mile, on Oct. 1.

These events put a rucking, teamwork twist on the popular obstacle-course races and can range in difficulty from lite (under 10 hours), to tough (somewhere around 15 hours), to heavy (more than 20 hours). As the difficulty level increases, so does the amount of weight participants have to carry in their rucksack. Hattan said that for the lite and tough events he has participated in, it is 20 pounds and 30 pounds, respectively.

At his first ruck, Hattan said he didn't know what to expect and was nervous. What he found was that the effort to overcome the physical requirements was very rewarding, both personally and for the team.

The team dynamic is what the civil engineer said brings him back to these events over and over again. The number of participants can range from ten to more than 60, depending on the event. Regardless of that number, Hattan enjoys the teamwork and the sense of accomplishment he feels after working through the numerous obstacles laid out by the event cadre. Sometimes these obstacles are carrying water-soaked, telephone pole-sized logs, other times sandbags or river rafts. There's usually a water obstacle. Whatever the challenge, Hattan said a group of strangers must come together, form a cohesive team and solve problems.

Tough, in Phoenix, Arizona. The 12-hour event began around eight at night. The July air was scorching as Hattan and his team worked

themselves to the point of exhaustion moving sandbags and performing other feats of physical endurance, all while wearing backpacks loaded with a 30-pound weight and three liters of water.

The rucking, along with other racing events, have had the positive impact on fitness Hattan wanted.

"I have lost 10 to 15 pounds over the past year, due to my focus on being physically prepared for GORUCK, Spartan and Tough Mudder events, along with 5Ks," said Hattan.

When not at a GORUCK event, Hattan is deeply involved with his community in Shreveport, Louisiana, where he works as a federal employee of Veterans Affairs, doing construction management. In his spare time he is also the district manager for the Boy Scouts, participates with the Civil Air Patrol and was named one of his city's 40 under 40 for 2015.



Tech. Sgt. Robert Hattan, right, and a teammate covered in mud after participating in a GORUCK event. (courtesy photo)



Participants, including Tech. Sgt. Robert Hattan, do hill climbs during the GORUCK USAF Team Cohesion Challenge event held at Little Rock Air Force Base, Arkansas, June 4, 2016. GORUCK events require participants to work as a team to overcome obstacles along a five to seven mile course, all while wearing a weighted backpack. (Courtesy photo)

"You get a sense of accomplishment that you have done something as a team," he said.

The most grueling event Hattan has participated in was the Benghazi

Likewise, as an IMA, Hattan has made the most of his military career opportunities. Since joining the Individual Reserve, he has taken missions to Greenland, Royal Air Force Lakenheath and Mildenhall, in the United Kingdom, and deployed to Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar. He has also supported his unit at Cannon AFB on several projects, including surveying the water depth on the golf course to solve flooding issues and working on hangar roofs.

He said he appreciates the guidance a former supervisor gave him when he was trying to decide whether to continue serving in the Air Force Reserve after leaving active duty. In addition to the travel opportunities it has afforded him, he also appreciates the many benefits he has retained, as well as the stability it provided him as he transitioned to civilian life. There was also the element of continuing his family's military legacy -- His father served in the Navy and his grandfather in the Army.

That appreciation for military heritage is something he also appreciates about GORUCK events. Each event is themed around a piece of military history. He said he enjoys learning about the heritage and said the non-military participants gain a better understanding of what it means to serve.

He believes the combination of teamwork, military history and each person challenging him- or herself, builds better Americans, including himself.

At each GORUCK event, finishers earn a unique, military-style badge. Hattan has collected over 20 of these but wears the same one at every event. He said the patch, which features the Star Wars character Yoda, encompasses his philosophy towards rucking and life. It reads "Do or do not, there is no try."



AFRC launches history coloring book contest

By Staff Sgt. Sarah Hanson

Do you like to learn about history? Do you like to color? Well now you can do both because the Air Force Reserve Command History Office has developed a unique coloring book for anyone who wants to color a century of Air Force Reserve history.

From the very beginning of combat aviation in World War I to today's missions in air, space and cyberspace, the Air Force Reserve has been an integrated and flexible part of the nation's defense.

The AFRC History coloring book, which includes original artwork by 507th Aerial Refueling Wing Reservist Senior Master Sgt. Darby Perrin and AFRC historian Maj. Warren Neary, is the first of its kind.

History doesn't have to be boring. "We love history," AFRC historians said. "And we wanted to come up with a fun way for kids of all ages to learn about Air Force Reserve heritage."

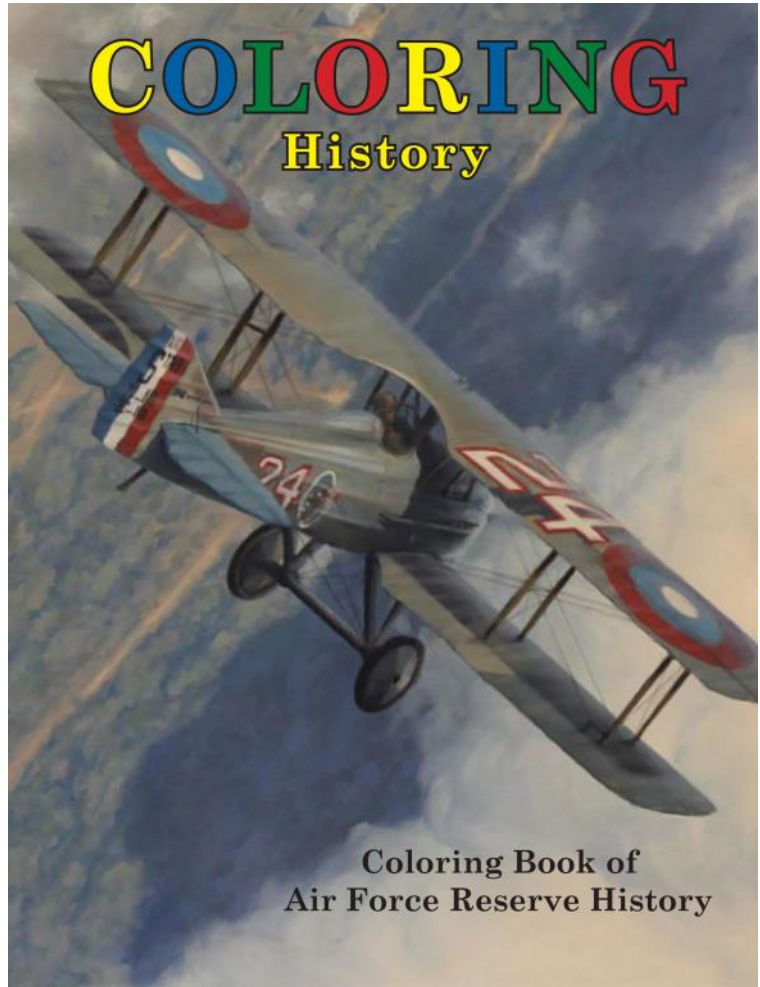
This is your chance to experience that heritage from Frank Luke to the famed Tuskegee Airmen; from the airplane loadmasters nicknamed "Old Shaky" to the stealthy F-22 Raptor.

Anyone of any age can put their coloring skills to the test with this book.

Download the coloring book at http://www.afrc.af.mil/Portals/87/documents/20160202_Heritage_Pamphlet_Final.pdf.

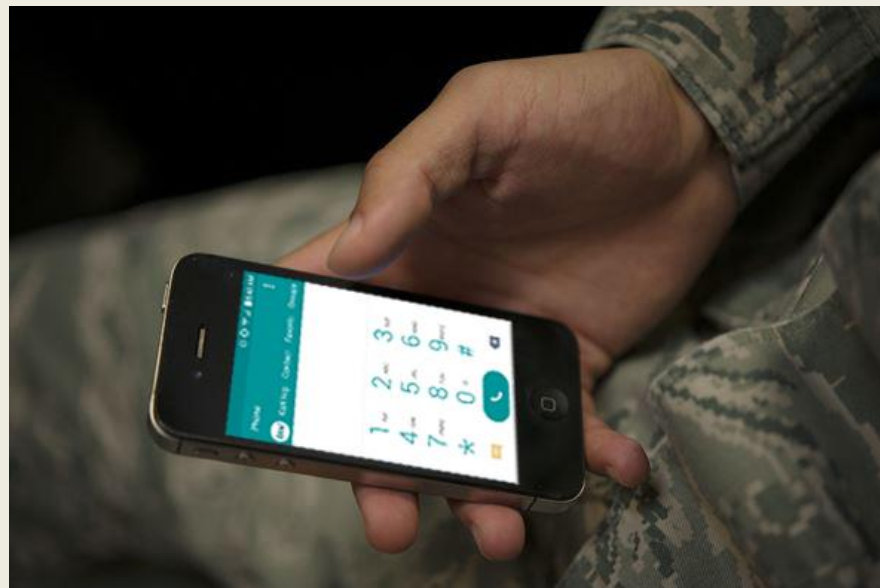
In addition to rolling out this one-of-a-kind coloring book, AFRC will hold a coloring contest. Anyone age five and up can enter and compete in the contest.

For more information, refer to the contest rules (http://www.afrc.af.mil/Portals/87/documents/2016_AFR_Coloring_Bk_Official_Rules.pdf).



Be there, continued from page 1

Life is like this. Everyone has a different point of exhaustion and we must be aware of our own breaking point, and our Wingman's. While we all cope differently with this exhaustion, building our social, mental, physical and spiritual resiliency is at the core of our strength.



The theme of this year's Suicide Prevention Month is #BeThere and it stresses the social pillar of resiliency. This campaign resonates strongly with me because if my dad had just one person to give him hope, he might still be here today. It's no one's fault he is gone, but I believe that if he felt the care from people who did care for him, he would have given life another chance.

My challenge to you this month is to spend time building your community again. Reconnect with a friend and spend time together. I know we all have limited resources that make it difficult to set aside quality time for one another, but those moments build the trust, loyalty and commitment needed to open up to each other when things aren't going well. Think about who you feel comfortable reaching out to, and ask yourself who feels comfortable reaching out to you. Let's mean it when we say "I will never leave an Airman behind." Let's win the battle to save lives so no one else has to answer that call in the middle of the night. Everyday connections with our Wingmen matter.

Editor's note: If you are struggling with thoughts of suicide or depression, seek help immediately. Talk to your Wingman, chaplain or mental health

professional. Confidential help is also available by contacting the Military Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255, Opt. 1, or www.MilitaryCrisisLine.net.