

Air Force legacy -- it's all in the family

Airmen follow in familiar footsteps

By 2nd Lt. Sandra Seidel
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Fifty-seven years ago, when President Harry S. Truman created the United States Air Force as a separate armed service, a legacy was born.

Just as the Air Force legacy holds generations of tradition and heritage, several Team McGuire members have Air Force family legacy stories of their own.

Called to serve

Although Senior Master Sgt. Tom O'Boyle, 35th Aerial Port Squadron first sergeant, joined the Air Force Reserve through the draft, he said after hearing many stories from his father, an Army World War II veteran, he was influenced in many ways.

"I knew the Air Force was the only place that offered training and experience that I couldn't get anywhere else," he said.

As a young boy he said he was always fascinated with flight and working with his hands. As an auto mechanic, his father exposed him to working on machines. The next step would be to work on aircraft.

Sergeant O'Boyle's career began as a C-141 aero repair technician. His daughter, Capt. Wendi Duffy, 305th Maintenance Squadron maintenance flight commander, said she knew she was called to serve in the Air Force and aircraft maintenance was in her blood.

The advice her father gave her during her high school senior year is something she will never forget. She received an academic scholarship to La Salle University and said she was torn between college and the Air Force.

"My dad then told me the Air Force will always be there, but my college scholarship won't. He said I should go to college and then become an officer."

Captain Duffy carries on the military family tradition not only as the only officer, but also as the only woman.

"My dad was a huge influence for me to join the Air Force and serving with him is great."

She said they attend functions together and most importantly he can relate in a way no one else can when in comes to deployments, life in aircraft maintenance and being stationed away from family.

"He gives me a little side tutoring on different aircraft systems that I'm not aware of or not familiar with," she added. "He's a great hip-pocket spare!"

Sergeant O'Boyle said he is very proud of his daughter's service in the Air Force.

"She brings with her a foundation of enlisted service with a desire to lead people by doing the right things and helping people succeed," he said. "Seeing her develop into an outstanding

officer makes me feel great knowing there are good, young people ready, willing and able to carry on the service to our country," he added.

On Sept. 17, 1974 Tom O'Boyle entered Building 2217 and began his career at McGuire as part of the C-141 maintenance career field. His daughter carries on as the C-17 arrives — a new airplane for a new generation.

Uniform just like dad's

Tech. Sgt. Corinne Alvord, 305th Air Maintenance Squadron C-141B crew chief, also joined the Air Force after her father, retired Tech. Sgt. Ray Alvord.

Born on Glasgow Air Force Base, Montana, Sergeant Alvord said she always knew joining the Air Force was what she was meant to do.

"Growing up I was always watching my dad go to work in his fatigues, and I remember wanting to have a uniform like his," she recalled.

She said when her younger brother, Tech. Sgt. Brett Alvord, 31st Operational Support Squadron, air traffic controller, Aviano Air Base, Italy, joined the Air Force one and a half years before her, she was very proud of him.

"I remember reading his letters while he was in basic training and wishing I was there with him," she said. "Later, I even went to the same recruiter he had."

"I always thought it would be so neat to call up to the control tower for engine run clearance and have the other Tech. Sgt. Alvord answer the call."

"Having family members in the Air Force is very comforting especially when we are constantly losing relationships that we've forged due to PCS or separation," she explained. "It's important to know that I have someone in the military who I will never lose touch with."

Sergeant Alvord said her dad gives her advice on how to handle supervisory issues and she loves to ask him about what the Air Force was like when he was in.

Although Sergeant Alvord has never been stationed with her brother they had the opportunity to deploy to the same location.

"We had the chance for the first and probably the only time to hang out with each other in a foreign country while TDY," she recalled. "We had a blast!"

All three Alvords were stationed at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, during their careers, just not at the same time.

"When my dad medically retired as a tech sergeant, both my brother and I were excited to see who could get dad's rank first," she said.

Both brother and sister sewed on the rank of Tech. Sgt. in the same year.



Courtesy photo

Brothers, Capt. Jess Melin, B-52 aircraft commander, Minot Air Force Base, ND and 1st Lt. Mark Melin, 2nd Aerial Refueling Squadron, KC-10 co-pilot, said although they have never flown together, Lieutenant Melin was a student at Laughlin Air Force Base, Texas, while his brother was an instructor. They agree the Air Force is an experience they will never forget.

Father and sons pilots all

For another family, flying aircraft in the United States armed services has become a tradition.

1st Lt. Mark Melin, 2nd Air Refueling Squadron KC-10 co-pilot, said he considers it an honor to share a common uniform with his brother, Capt. Jess Melin, B-52 aircraft commander, Minot AFB, ND and a common career with his father, a retired Army gunship pilot.

"My father was the greatest influence in my decision to join the profession of arms," he said. "I always knew that I would someday follow in his footsteps and serve in the military."

"Seeing him grow and have great experiences in the Air Force gave me a desire for the same," he added. Lieutenant Melin said having a brother in the Air Force is a great source of strength for him. In times of doubt, he turns to his brother for support.

"I was ready to quit after my first flight in training," he recalled. "I thought I would never be able to do all that was necessary to get through the check-rides and earn my wings. My brother was there to help."

One day, he said, he hopes to refuel his brother's plane in the air. That would be the ultimate experience, he said. Lieutenant Melin said he believes that the family is where we learn the most and is our greatest support in times of need. Nothing will ever replace it, he said.

"Having family in the active duty Air Force brings a lot of support to my career and has helped me in many ways," he said. "My family has forged a path of excellence and success that I feel privileged to follow."

Big brother leads the way

Sometimes all it takes is for an older sibling to join the Air Force and others will follow.

Three of five Thompson siblings made the Air Force Reserve a way of life.

Maj. Brian Thompson, 76th Air Refueling Squadron KC-10 aircraft commander, and deputy command post chief, joined the Air Force under his parents and high school counselors' advice.

"They said going to the Academy was the best way to become a pilot and they were right," he said. "It's been a great ride since day one."

Although the major never came out and told his siblings to join, two of them were inspired.

"Both of my brothers inspired me to join the Air Force," said Capt. Kristy Thompson, 78th Air Refueling Squadron executive officer. "It was when I saw what a positive effect the service had on them as well as the pride my parents had for them, that I knew this was a life choice I wanted to pursue," she said.

"It's nice to be able to say I have a brother and a sister who are both Air Force officers," said Capt. Bradd Thompson, 78th Air Refueling Squadron, executive officer. "There is a great deal of family pride in that fact."

"All of us have had different experiences in the Air Force, and it's rare for one of us to not know how to handle an Air Force-related issue that one of us hasn't already dealt with," he added.

The three siblings stay close and often get together for lunch.

"Being stationed together has been a blast," said Captain Kristy Thompson. "Bradd and I work in the same office, and Brian is with our sister squadron."



Courtesy photo

Left to right: Senior Master Sgt. Melissa Gray, Deputy Chief of Staff, Warfighting Integration, Pentagon, Reserve affairs superintendent; Master Sgt. Terri Haliday, assistant NCO in charge of reserve affairs, Headquarters United States Air Forces Europe, Ramstein Air Base, Germany; Staff Sgt. Kenya Nesmith NCO in charge of plans and operations, Joint Task Force, Armed Forces Inaugural Committee, Washington D.C. and Staff Sgt. Rainey Johnson, 305th Aerial Port Squadron, information manager, all joined the military after Sergeant Gray enlisted.

Following in big sister's footsteps

The Air Force experience has also brought four sisters closer together according to Senior Master Sgt. Melissa Gray, Deputy Chief of Staff, Warfighting Integration, Pentagon, Reserve affairs superintendent.

"I first joined the Air Force because my father, an Army Vietnam Veteran and Purple Heart recipient, told me I had no choice," she explained. "But, it wasn't long before I realized how much I liked and I'm glad I did it."

She said her father's involvement in the United States Army helped influence her decision to make the Air Force a career.

After Sergeant Gray joined the Air Force, she encouraged her three younger sisters to follow in her footsteps.

"We have always been proud of her and the role model that the Air Force has made her," said Staff Sgt. Rainey Johnson, 305th Aerial

Low family tradition



Courtesy photo

Maj. (ret.) Dick Lowe, right, launched a family legacy of Air Force service in 1944 that has spanned seven different decades. Pictured with his son Maj. (ret.) Jeff Lowe, left, and his grandson 1st Lt. Ryan Lowe, 2nd Aerial Refueling Squadron.

The Lowe family has been flying for the Air Force since Dick Lowe graduated from the Army Aviation Air Corps Cadet Program in 1943.

During World War II, Mr. Lowe was stationed at Matagorda Peninsula Fighter Gunnery and Dive Bombing training base, Texas flying several aircraft to include the P-47, B-26 and C-47. After WWII, he finished his 26-year career serving in the Air Force Reserve in Wisconsin, Florida and Kansas.

Mr. Lowe's son Jeff, from Algonquin, Ill., flew C-130 cargo aircraft from 1974 to 1992. He currently flies for United Airlines. Lieutenant Logan graduated from the Air Force Academy in 2001 and began flying KC-10 aerial refueling tanker aircraft in 2003.

Port Squadron, information manager. "She always spoke highly of the quality lifestyle and the adventures the Air Force provided."

All four sisters have a support system for one another that brings their already tight-knit family closer together, said Sergeant Gray. "We've been able to share our personal and military lives with each other and offer advice to enhance one another's career," she explained. "We constantly call each other for guidance, assistance and help to resolve every type of issue."

Sergeant Rainey said she couldn't imagine serving without her sisters.

"It feels great to know that we are all serving our country on a daily basis," she said. "Our contribution to this country is important to all of us, especially after the 9-11 terrorist attacks."

The remaining sisters are: Master Sgt. Terri Haliday, assistant NCO in charge of Reserve affairs, who is currently serving at Headquarters United States Air Forces Europe, Ramstein Air Base, Germany and Staff Sgt. Kenya Nesmith NCO in charge of plans and operations, currently serving in the Joint Task Force, Armed Forces Inaugural Committee, Washington D.C.

As the Air Force continues to fill its legacy with history, Team McGuire Air Force legacy families continue to do the same.