
Bagram News Express



Fighting Terror, Building Peace

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A few lessons learned

By Col. John Powell

455 Air Expeditionary Wing vice commander

Many of us are at the end of our AEF deployment. However, unlike most of you, I'm also at the end of my Air Force career. On July 3, I will retire after 21 years of military service and transition to a new career and a new life.

As I look back across this magical adventure and my breadth of jobs and experiences, when asked to write this article, I was hoping to find a specific "nugget" or truism that proved most relevant during my career...some meaningful gem relevant to our efforts here at Bagram.

I have learned many lessons during my career, most through trial and error. For example, I've learned a leader must lead from the front, set the standard, and make the tough calls. I also learned a true leader must recognize the gap between what an organization is doing, and what is should be doing; then realign it to eliminate that gap. Realigning an organization means it must embrace change; but organizations resist change because change equals pain and discomfort. A leader needs to know how to cre-

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ate change while protecting people from too much pain.

Another thing I've learned is to "celebrate" discipline. I believe that discipline is the key to flexibility which, of course, is the key to Airpower. Organizations that build their foundation on basic and solid discipline, i.e. adherence to tech orders, tactics, or procedures, are the most effective in times of stress. Similarly, when I pattern my life around fundamental disciplines of fitness, health, and personal balance, I become more effective under stress. Maintaining discipline is absolutely essential to my mission effectiveness and personal satisfaction.

Although maintaining discipline is important, adhering to our core values is just as essential. Our core values simultaneously set a standard yet create an ideal. Personally, the most difficult part of retiring is leaving my service and Service. Although it took a while, I discovered that through the service of others

we find ourselves. Ultimate fulfillment sneaks upon you when you remove yourself and focus on the needs of others. I often reflect on the irony of this simple truth—only by removing yourself do you find yourself.

I probably have a hundred of these simple thoughts I would love to debate and discuss. I could write a long list of leadership lessons, such as "Put your eyes on target," "Manage by walking around," "Trust but verify," and "Empower with authority and responsibility." Then there are other organizational principles we don't truly understand like "LEAN," "Theory of Constraints" or "Continuous Process Improvement."

However, what I think is most relevant here in Afghanistan is something entirely different. One of my greatest Air Force memories was accompanying former Secretary of the Air Force James Roche to a

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Reapers integrated in Afghanistan



BAGRAM AIR FIELD, Afghanistan - Flight Lieutenant Duncan Swainston, 42nd Expeditionary Attack Squadron MQ-9 pilot, performs a preflight walk around of an MQ-9 Reaper. Flight Lieutenant Swainston is deployed from 39th Squadron Royal Air Force, Creech Air Force Base, Nev. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Demetrius Lester)

By Tech. Sgt. James Law
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Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIR FIELD, Afghanistan – One year after its first training mission at Creech Air Force Base, Nev., the MQ-9 Reaper is well engrained in combat operations.

Since taking flight for the first time here in October 2007, Reapers have flown more than 320 missions and 2,400 combat hours throughout Afghanistan, providing close-air-support and precision engagement.

The unit contributing to this effort is the 42nd Expeditionary Attack Squadron, a combined unit with Reapers from the United States and the UK's Royal Air Force.

“It’s awesome working with the Brits,” said Maj. John Myers, 42nd EATKS commander. “We work well together.

“We have split crews. We have a British pilot and an American sensor operator and another crew is an American pilot and a British sensor operator,” said Major Myers.

“We are truly integrated, even down to the crew level.”

Major Myers explained the combined unit pilots the unmanned aircraft during launch and landing on a flightline in Afghanistan and turns control of the Reaper over to personnel at Creech after it has reached altitude.

“Our main mission is to launch and recover airplanes that are flown primarily from the states from the MCE, or mission control element,” said Major Myers. “The units we

support at Creech are the 42nd Attack Squadron and the 39th Squadron, which is a RAF squadron.”

Although the unit’s inventory consists of aircraft from both countries, there is no distinction between which Reapers the pilots fly.

“From here I fly both the American airplanes and the British ones,” said Flight Lieutenant Swainston, a RAF MQ-9 pilot. “I enjoy it.”

Flight Lieutenant Swainston said the relationship between the two air forces was symbiotic.

“It’s great working along side another nation; we get to see how two different doctrines approach the same airframe,” said Flight Lieutenant Swainston. “The Brits get to see how the Americans operate and the Americans get to see how the Brits operate.”

In addition to piloting the aircraft during take off and landing, the 42nd EATKS also provides air-base defense and close air support for units in the vicinity.

Larger and more powerful than the MQ-1 Predator, the Reaper is designed to provide the very essence of modern-day persistent Air Power: that ‘unblinking eye’ which provides actionable Intelligence for our decision-makers as well as proportionate and precise firepower in defence of Afghan and Coalition forces.

“I can tell you it’s not unmanned; it’s a lot of work,” said Major Myers. “But the reward is great. Other than being in the cockpit and being out over the battlefield, this is the next best thing . . . being here.”

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summer off-site where many diverse experts debated various worldwide questions. The event included servicemembers, politicians, musicians, poets, teachers, architects, businessmen—slices or representatives from across American society.

The question debated for better than a day: “What makes America great?” The debate was fascinating, but ended up in a simple answer defined as “immigration.” What was the basis for this answer? Well, it was centered on the concept that through immigration, the United States has been forced to embrace diverse perspectives through the democratic process. To recap: these great thinkers concluded the United States is great when it integrates and accepts diversity as its foundation.

You may wonder why this “nugget” is so relevant to me in Afghani-

stan. As “The Vice,” the stress of combat often manifests or cascades into incredible “drama” which often ends up at my door. Most of this is caused by a “clash of cultures” or frustrations with people who were raised or taught differently than ourselves. These clashes come in many forms: the clash between “Civilization as a whole and terrorists,” “GIROA vs. Tribal or Shura law,” “US, Coalition and ISAF forces,” “SOF vs. Regular Forces,” even internal clashes between “Al Qaeda and the Taliban.” Some cultural clashes that are more close to home are between the “military and non-governmental agencies,” “Army and Air Force,” “operations and support,” or even the “active and reserve.” They arise from our ethnocentricity or in other terms, our belief that everyone should think or act like us.

So that brings me back to this realization of “Why is America Great?” The answer was not our

democratic values, capitalism, materialism, Hollywood, or the bill of rights. No, in the great debate I witnessed, the answer was diversity of perspective. So, whether you have just gotten to Afghanistan or are leaving, you must realize that you are going to be constantly barraged by differing cultural perspectives.

It might come in the form of an Army Sergeant Major or from a local national. Their perspective is not wrong; it is just different from yours. And, as we discovered, when we embrace and attempt to understand the basis of that perspective, we allow ourselves the opportunity to evolve and grow.

Embracing diversity and alternative perspectives is hard especially under harsh or combat conditions...but when we do; we model the very essence of what makes America not just successful, but truly great.

News Briefs

POLICY LETTERS

New and updated policy letters have been added to the Bagram webpage. Please take the time to review them.

BILLETING INSPECTION

The Army billeting office was directed to perform an inspection of all billeting areas in each camp. The inspection for Camp Cunningham is scheduled for May 26. The BAF safety office will also be a part of this inspection. Purpose:

- Ensure our compliance with the sand book and current base operations.
- Ensure compliance with all safety standards.
- Inspect living spaces (Common Areas), force protection and the office spaces of each unit.

COMBAT PUSH TIMES

Combat Push times are Monday,

Wednesday and Friday in the Camp Cunningham Rec Tent from 0900L/0430Z to 1000L/0530Z. Services, Comm and PERSCO will be available to sign outprocessing checklists. Personnel must complete your Post Deployment Health Questionnaire on-line and pick up your medical records at Flight Medicine/Public Health before coming to Combat

ATTENTION ALL AIRMEN

The Bagram Airmen Committed to Excellence, or ACE, meet Wednesday at 1700L/1230Z at Camp Cunningham's Town Hall. The meetings provide Airmen an outlet to voice concerns. Contact Senior Airman Vanna Johnson at vanna.b.johnson@afghan.swa.army.mil or Airman 1st Class Rayyuri Powell at 431-4359 for more information.

ATTENTION ALL JUNIOR NCOS

The Bagram AF Route 5/6 meets Thursdays at 1800L/1330Z at Camp Cunningham's Town Hall. The meetings

are open to all staff sergeant selects, staff sergeants and tech sergeants. Contact Tech Sgt. Stephen DeWeese, 431-3212 or Tech Sgt. Charles Heywood, 431-2820 for more information.

HOMETOWN NEWS

Airmen who are deploying or redeploying can “get the word out” about notable events related to their service via the Hometown News Program. The process is easy - individuals simply fill out, sign and return the Hometown News Release (available on the Bagram website, <http://www.bagram.afnews.af.mil>, under “Other Links”) to Public Affairs (paper copy or scanned electronic copy) and PA will take care of the rest by marketing these events to their local media. Some examples of events include: award of Afghanistan Campaign Medal, NATO Medal, arrival for deployment, completion of deployment, etc. For more information, contact public affairs at 455aewpa@swa.army.mil.