



With COVID in  
mind, Travis ...

# ADJUSTS

PAGES 10-11



**TAILWIND**



# Squadron leader reflects on career as officer, gay man

Nick DeCicco  
60TH AIR MOBILITY WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS

On the morning of Sept. 21, 2011, Justin Hickey didn't have to hide anymore.

At the time, Hickey was a captain and an operations officer with the 60th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Travis AFB, California. That morning, however, he was a gay man who no longer had to conceal his identity thanks to the repeal of the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, which barred lesbians, gays and bisexuals from serving openly in the United States military.

At the close of a meeting that morning, Hickey said a chief master sergeant told attendees, "Remember everyone, now you have to treat the gays right." Hickey decided this was the moment to make his reveal.

"I said, 'Yeah, that's right. You never know, chief, who might be gay, like, you never know, your ops officer,'" Hickey said. "You could've heard a pin drop. ... I was feeling liberated because I could finally say something without fear of losing my career."

Indeed, Hickey kept his career. Nearly a decade after his first tour with Travis' 60th AMXS, he returned to the same squadron – this time as a lieutenant colonel and its commander.

Unlike Hickey, many other military members were unable to fulfill their time in service.



U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Christian Conrad  
**U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Justin Hickey, 60th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron commander, left, and his husband, Brett Buckland, 60th Civil Engineer Squadron firefighting captain, pose for a picture June 24 inside the 60th AMXS building at Travis Air Force Base, California. Following the 2011 repeal of the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, Hickey was able to serve openly as a gay man in the military without fear of repercussion against his career.**

More than 12,000 service members were discharged during the 17-year observance of DADT, according to a 2008 Associated Press report.

Concealing his identity during DADT began from the moment Hickey began his path to service. Hickey said his time at the Air Force Academy in the

early 2000s taught lessons in and out of the classroom.

"The Air Force Academy was good training in how to blend in because nobody would just assume that I was gay," he said. "You kind of learn how to assimilate."

Hickey employed numerous strategies to keep details

about his personal life cloudy. One was a mutually beneficial friendship with Lyndsey Ballinger, a lesbian and fellow officer whom he met at Sheppard AFB, Texas, during training in the mid-2000s.

Ballinger, now a lieutenant colonel and squadron commander with the California

Air National Guard, said gossip about them started during training. To conceal their truths, the pair was happy to let imaginations run wild.

"This really was when everyone was like, 'ooh, you guys are dating,' and we were like, 'Sure!'" she said. "In this case, it was beneficial for both of us."

The two reconnected in 2009, when Hickey came to Travis after assignments in Germany and South Korea as a maintenance officer with the F-16 Fighting Falcons.

"Everybody thought that we were dating," Hickey said. "So we just let them think it. When ('don't ask, don't tell') went away, everybody had their 'aha' moment, and we both laughed about it."

It was during this period of time, reconnected with Ballinger and prior to the DADT repeal, that Hickey struggled with his decision to stay in the Air Force.

"I think he struggled with it because he's an incredible officer and had a bright future, but didn't see a path in how to be true to himself and also serve," Ballinger said.

Hickey said it was vital under DADT to maintain a veil of secrecy about his personal life in order to preserve his professional life.

"Your work life and your social life had to be very separate or else people would catch on,"

See CAREER Page 19

# Airmen carve way forward for racial equality

Senior Airman Christian Conrad  
60TH AIR MOBILITY WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS

*"The moral arc of the universe is long, and it bends towards justice, but you have to pull it to bend; it doesn't bend automatically."*

– The Rev. Jesse Jackson

"I go home and look at my kids and my husband every day and I almost want to cry."

Master Sgt. Asia Cook, Cultural Consciousness Committee advisor, pauses, pans her gaze slowly over her audience – all silent – and continues.

"Because although those on base know my husband as the international powerlifter and a sweet man, he is going to leave this base – he is going to leave that gate, and he is still 5 foot 8 inches, 230 pounds of 'Let's just shoot him.'"

Dozens of others in attendance at the June 19 town hall, hosted by Travis' newly formed Cultural Consciousness Committee, expressed similar feelings of anxiety and fear through vignettes of what it's like to be a Black person in not only America, but the Air Force, too.

The committee organized the town hall to both celebrate the abolition of slavery and discuss what work must still be done in the United States and in the Air Force to ensure a racially equitable society.

June 19, or Juneteenth, marks an important date in American history. It represents the official end to slavery in the

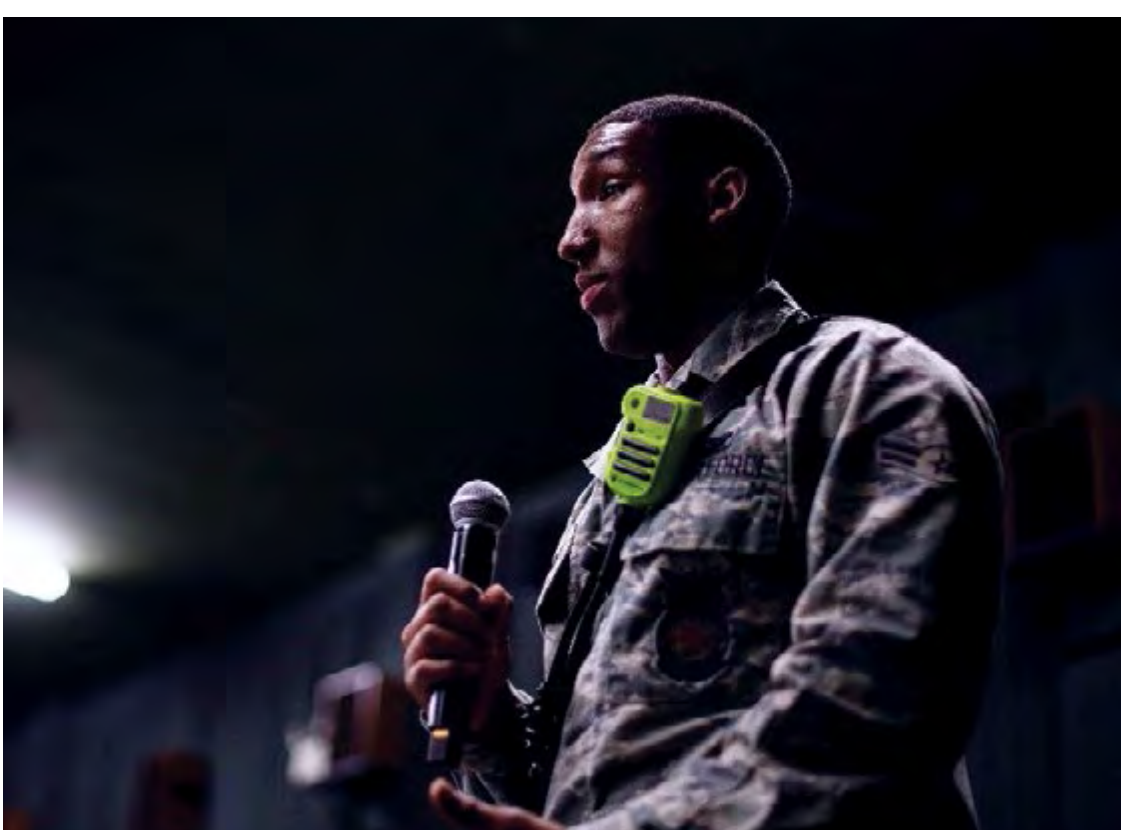
United States when Gen. Gordon Granger of the Union Army arrived in Galveston, Texas, then one of the most remote areas in the United States, to finally declare the slaves there were free – 2.5 years after President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

Because of the delay in news reporting, the freed slaves lost time that could have been spent building their lives and healing from the horrors they had been subjected to, said Cook, one of the town hall's organizers.

"Had that information been spread faster, people wouldn't have been suffering as long," said Cook, who officially serves as the 60th Civil Engineer Squadron dorm management superintendent. "And I think that's kind of indicative of what's happening right now in America – in that spreading the information and spreading the messages that need to be spread, people can start to see a way ahead."

Finding that way ahead has been the purpose of numerous nationwide protests resulting from police-involved deaths in recent months. Most notably, George Floyd, a Minneapolis man, died after an attempted arrest when Minneapolis policemen pinned Floyd to the ground for eight minutes and 46 seconds, while he claimed he could no longer breathe.

In a study conducted by the Washington Post, Black people have accounted for 26% of the 4,728 deaths involving police



U.S. Air Force photos/Senior Airman Christian Conrad  
**U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Christopher Sterling, 60th Civil Engineer Squadron firefighter, speaks during a Juneteenth event aimed at addressing racial inequalities within the United States and the Air Force June 19 at Travis Air Force Base, California. Sterling shared his experiences with racism and the lessons he has learned.**

since 2015 while only making up 13% of the U.S. population.

Wrongful deaths shouldn't be the only causes to speak up about, though, Cook said.

"To the Airmen who think they're being singled out for their race or ethnicity, I'd have to say, 'You might be,'" Cook said. "But it doesn't help to stay silent. Unfortunately, a lot of my generation tried to laugh

through it or secretly talk about it to try to find ways around it. That's not a burden any Airman should have when they're entering into an organization that's supposed to be equal across the board. If you feel that way, you have to voice it."

Cook also added that fault often lies more with the institution than simply individuals. She used the example that Air

Force regulations previously prohibited dreadlocks unless it was a part of the Airman's religion, like Rastafarianism, or if the individual received a blessing by a Rastafarian chaplain.

"Funny thing is, there aren't any Rastafarian chaplains," said Cook. "So, thankfully, the Air Force decided that made no sense and reversed it, but it

See EQUALITY Page 20

# Tailwind

Travis AFB, Calif. | 60th Air Mobility Wing

Air Force	
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## On the cover

**U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Eric Vanderford, left, 21st Air-lift Squadron loadmaster, and Master Sgt. Jesse Williams, 21st AS instructor loadmaster, conduct preflight operations in the flight deck of a C-17 Globemaster III May 6 at Travis Air Force Base, California.**

U.S. Air Force photo/Heide Couch

# WARRIOR OF THE WEEK

<b>Name:</b> Senior Airman Mayra Rivera Mendoza	<b>Time in service:</b> Four years.	<b>What are your hobbies?</b> Reading, hiking, visiting new cities, and wine tasting.
<b>Unit:</b> 60th Aerial Port Squadron	<b>Family:</b> Fiancé, Angelo Tendido Invencion.	<b>What are your greatest achievements?</b> Going through my first deployment with several recognitions, completing/graduating CCAF, and becoming financially stable plus being able to assist family.
<b>Duty title:</b> Freight documentation specialist.	<b>What are your goals?</b> Promote to staff sergeant, achieve 98% on a PT test, begin bachelor's in sociology, and become an ALS instructor.	
<b>Hometown:</b> Watsonville, California.		



# Active-duty Airman found dead off-base

**60th Air Mobility Wing  
Public Affairs**

An active-duty U.S. Air Force Airman from Travis Air Force Base, California, was pronounced dead at their off-base residence June 30 in

Vacaville, California.

The Airman has been identified as Senior Airman Zulema Gonzalez-Romero from the 60th Medical Group.

"We are deeply saddened by the recent loss of life within our Travis Air Force Base

family," said Col. Jeffrey Nelson, 60th Air Mobility Wing commander. "We express our sympathies to those affected by this loss."

Travis' priority is to take care of the Airman's family members (next of kin) and

ensuring members of the affected unit are directed to the appropriate helping agencies as needed.

Details surrounding the death are under investigation.

"We are in close coordination with the various

organizations surrounding this situation as we establish further insight," Nelson said. "As a matter of policy, we will not release specific information due to the ongoing investigation. Please respect the family's privacy in this difficult time."

## TRICARE Selected Reserve termination clarified

**Sean P. Houlihan**

AIR FORCE RESERVE COMMAND  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

ROBINS AIR FORCE BASE, Ga. — For Airmen enrolled in TRICARE Reserve Select, there has been a change over the last 60 days on TRICARE coverage payments due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ability to request reinstatement if needed due to miscommunication of policy guidelines.

The June 16 policy change stated TRICARE "will delay terminating coverage for one month beyond the last paid-through date. During the period of payment delinquency, claims will not be paid and coverage will be terminated retroactively to the last paid-through date."

This is in contrast to the April 6 message that said TRICARE would "delay terminating coverage for selected Reserve members until 90 days after the date the COVID-19 emergency has ended as determined by the Director, Defense Health Agency."

"There was no policy change, but rather erroneous information was put out regarding TRICARE coverage for members who defaulted on premium payments," said Lt. Col. Costau Bastien, Force Transformation chief, Headquarters

See TRICARE Page 15

## Crowning achievement: Leadership visits 60th DS



U.S. Air Force photo/Heide Couch

**U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Derek Crowder, right, 60th Air Mobility Wing command chief, uses wax to create a dental crown mold while Robert Silva, 60th Dental Squadron dental laboratory technician watches during Leadership Rounds June 26 at David Grant USAF Medical Center, Travis Air Force Base, California. The Leadership Rounds program provides 60th AMW leadership an opportunity to interact with Airmen and get a detailed view of each mission performed at Travis AFB.**

# Modernization creates need for chief innovation officer

**Tech. Sgt. David W. Carbajal**

621ST CONTINGENCY RESPONSE  
WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS

In an effort to keep up with the demand for innovation, leadership at the 621st Contingency Response Wing recently created a new position to assist the development of innovative ideas and continued process improvement.

"Innovation is not a necessity. It's a necessity," said Lt. Col. Lindsey Bauer, the newly appointed 621st CRW chief innovation officer.

The roles and responsibilities of this new position are still being solidified, but they will revolve around three main principles, said Bauer.

"First and foremost, I want Airmen to come to me with their ideas," said Bauer. "My job will be to assist Airmen to get their ideas moving forward."

Airmen of the CRW are no strangers to innovation. In 2019, a Devil Raider placed second out of 64 submissions to the Air Mobility Command's Phoenix Spark Tank competition.

"A few small leaks can bring down a dam. Therefore, no idea is too small," said Capt. Kyle MacDonald, former wing innovation coordinator and currently the 321st Contingency

Response Squadron aerial port flight commander at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey.

Bauer's second priority will be partnering with off-base companies to take advantage of their creativity.

"I'll also be working with small businesses to seek out new products that we can employ for our dynamic missions anywhere around the globe," said Bauer.

Devil Raiders on the East Coast have been partnered with Pvilion, a small business based out of Brooklyn, New York, over the past year to develop solar panels that can be mounted on top of the tents used for joint or tactical operation centers.

"This can help us in many ways," said MacDonald. "But one of the biggest benefits is it allow us to be less reliant on fuel to power the electricity needs of the JOC and TOC, which can be critical especially in remote areas."

The third priority for the CIO is on-going processes improvement.

"The use of CP2I (continuous process improvement and innovation) is very important to ensure the Airmen of the CRW can respond even faster to the ever-changing environment," said Bauer.



**U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Lindsey Bauer, the newly appointed chief innovation officer for the 621st Contingency Response Wing, asks Master Sgt. Bryan Rodvold, 821st Contingency Response Squadron, a question during her meeting with unit Airmen June 30 at the squadron's building on Travis Air Force Base, California.**

U.S. Air Force photo/Tech. Sgt. David W. Carbajal

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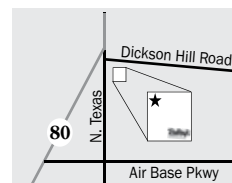
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# Air Force stands up new division

**Toni Whaley**  
AIR FORCE'S PERSONNEL CENTER  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO-RANDOLPH, Texas — The Department of the Air Force stood up a new division at the Air Force's Personnel Center to integrate three Exceptional Family Member Program components – medical, family support and assignments.

The new Exceptional Assignment Program division will provide Airmen and their families with a singular point of contact to be more responsive and expedite their requests.

There are plans to add more EFMP core components to the division, such as legal support, special education liaison and TRICARE support in the future.

“Your voices were heard,” said Kimberly Schuler, Humanitarian, EFMP and Expedited Transfer Reassignments chief. “Integrating all EFMP components under one division prevents families from having to navigate through a complex process and engage multiple organizations to respond to a singular EFMP request. Our goal is to improve the customer experience of our Airmen and their families during challenging times,” Schuler said.

The new division will also handle Humanitarian and Expedited Transfer assignment requests and execute the enhanced Air Force Family Member Travel Screening, or FMTS, process. The process allows Air and Space professionals the ability to virtually accomplish, track and communicate with medical personnel on their permanent change of station family screening requests.

Overall, EFMP will continue to evolve for the betterment of families with several processes already implemented to enhance the program. For example, Family Support coordinator training has been standardized to provide families with better and consistent information. Additionally, face-to-face orientations are available for EFMP families at all Air Force installations along with an online orientation for geographically separated units and leaders.

There are approximately 33,400 active duty Air and Space Professionals sponsoring more than 55,000 family members currently enrolled in EFMP.



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Thomas B. Fargo  
Admiral, U.S. Navy (Ret.)  
Chairman of the Board, USAA



## Puzzles

**STR8TS**  
No. 497 Easy

Previous solution - Medium

4	3				5		
				9	7	4	
				6		7	
3			5				7
			4	6			8
	9						
7	5			2		1	
				1			
5			8			3	

You can find more help, tips and hints at [www.str8ts.com](http://www.str8ts.com)

How to beat Str8ts – Like Sudoku, no single number can repeat in any row or column. But... rows and columns are divided by black squares into compartments. These need to be filled in with numbers that complete a 'straight'. A straight is a set of numbers with no gaps but can be in any order, eg [4,2,3,5]. Clues in black cells remove that number as an option in that row and column, and are not part of any straight. Glance at the solution to see how 'straights' are formed.

**SUDOKU**  
No. 497 Tough

Previous solution - Medium

			6			9	
6		3					8
		1			7		3
		5	6	4			1
	2			9		5	
9			5	8	6		
4	3				5		
1				6			7
	8		1				

To complete Sudoku, fill the board by entering numbers 1 to 9 such that each row, column and 3x3 box contains every number uniquely.

For many strategies, hints and tips, visit [www.sudokuwiki.org](http://www.sudokuwiki.org)

If you like Str8ts, Sudoku and other puzzles, check out our books, iPhone/iPad Apps and much more on our store at [www.str8ts.com](http://www.str8ts.com)

The solutions will be published here in the next issue.


## Voluntary Leave Transfer Program

The following Travis employees are approved as leave recipients through the Voluntary Leave Transfer Program: Rebecca Austria, 60th Maintenance Group; John Butler, Special Tactics Training Squadron; Jaqualynn Cabanlit, Travis AFB Commissary; Neftaly Clark, 1st Special Operations Force Support Squadron; David Duncan, 319th Reconnaissance Wing, Grand Forks AFB; Rabiye Hamilton, Travis AFB Commissary; Patrick Hodge, United States Transportation Command, Scott AFB; Mark Holmes, 10th Contracting Squadron; Dina Patterson-Steward, 60th Aerial Port Squadron; Jason Perkins, Grand Forks AFB; Gina Silva, Air Force Academy headquarters; Jean Sommer, Travis AFB Commissary; Maria Thammansen, 60th Force Support Squadron; and Dennis Weaver, Air Force Manpower Agency.

The VLTP allows an employee who has a medical emergency or is affected by a medical emergency of a family member and is without availability of paid leave to receive transferred annual leave directly from other employees. For more information, call 707-424-1720.

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U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Chris Drzazgowski

In-flight testing is conducted to certify a Negatively Pressurized Conex prototype April 30 at Joint Base Charleston, South Carolina. The NPC was rapidly developed and designed to fit inside both C-5M Super Galaxy and C-17 Globemaster III to enable safe transport of up to 28 patients, as well as teams of medical professionals to medical facilities around the globe.

# Conexes ready to save lives

**Air Mobility Command**

SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE, Ill. — On June 24, the first Negatively Pressurized Conex ready for operational use touched down at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, with 16 experts from Joint Base Charleston, South Carolina and three members of the program office team to stand on alert status and train additional Airmen on the NPC.

The NPC is configured for the C-17 Globemaster III and C-5 Super Galaxy aircraft to

**See CONEXES Page 18**

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# Scholarships beefed up to boost diversity efforts

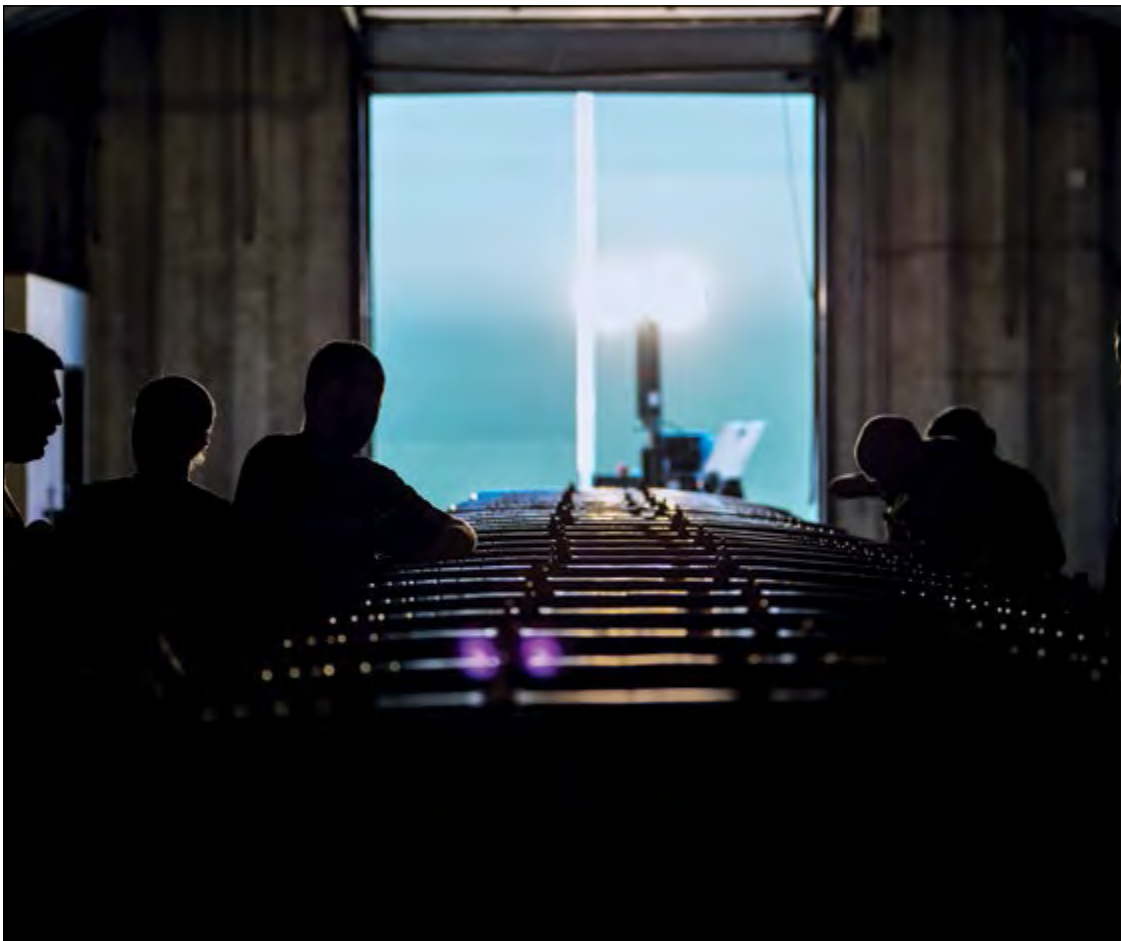
**Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs**

WASHINGTON — The Department of the Air Force announced June 29 that all 161 Air Force ROTC scholarship recipients in good standing with the program and attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities or Hispanic-Serving Institutions will receive an upgrade offer from their current scholarship level, which will advance students to full tuition and fees paid, beginning the fall term of academic year 2020-21.

“The Air and Space Forces know that diverse Airmen operating in an inclusive culture increases innovation and operational effectiveness,” said Brig. Gen. Leslie A. Maher, commander of the Jeanne M. Holm Center for Officer Accessions and Citizen Development. “The Air and Space Forces are investing in students who have earned ROTC scholarships at minority serving institutions to ensure success as we strive for the diversity we need to improve Air Force mission performance.”

The Type 1 scholarship covers full tuition and fees with no monetary cap. The other scholarship opportunities include Type 2 scholarships which provide a student up to \$18,000 per year, and the Type 7 scholarships which offer full tuition and fees, capped at the in-state tuition rate.

“Diversity and Inclusion are priorities of the Department of the Air Force to build teams comprised of diverse backgrounds, experiences and demographics,” said Brig. Gen. Troy Dunn, Air Force director of military force management policy and leader of the Department of the Air Force’s Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion. “By fostering diversity and establishing an inclusive culture, we will increase our abilities to recruit from the broadest possible pool of talent, solve the toughest challenges, and engage the full power of an innovative force.”



U.S. Air Force photo/Airman 1st Class Aaron Larue Guerrisky  
**Airmen assigned to the 354th Maintenance Squadron munitions flight assemble the first bombs for the F-35A Lightning II June 16 at Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska. A bomb build is the intricate process conducted to ensure a bomb body is usable for operators.**

# Eielson Airmen build first bombs for PACAF F-35s

**Airman 1st Class Aaron Larue Guerrisky**  
354TH FIGHTER WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS

EIELSON AIR FORCE BASE, Alaska — Airmen from Eielson Air Force Base’s 354th Maintenance Squadron munitions flight built the first bombs intended for the 354th Fighter Wing’s F-35A Lightning IIs, June 15-19.

The last time a 354th FW unit dropped combat-specific bombs was about 10 years ago when the A-10 Thunderbolt II and F-16 Fighting Falcons flew in the Alaskan skies.

A bomb build is the intricate process munitions personnel go through to ensure a bomb body is usable for the operators.

“During this process, and depending on the bomb they are building, (munitions personnel) will add a guidance and control unit, tail kit and fuse to a basic bomb body,” said Capt. Christina Merritt, a 354th MXS operations officer. “Each of these components work together to make up the type and purpose of the bomb.”

Before a single bomb can be built, the munitions flight must coordinate and plan accordingly. The munitions are initially ‘barged’ which is a process of receiving, transporting and storing the explosives. Eielson AFB conducted its largest barge in years back in April.

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# Spark Tank accepting submissions

**AFWERX Public Affairs**

ARLINGTON, Va. — Spark Tank, a collaboration between AFWERX and Deputy Under Secretary of the Air Force, Management, is accepting submissions for the 2021 campaign from July 1 to Oct. 16.

The annual campaign is designed to spur and empower innovative ideas from Airmen to further strengthen Air Force culture and capabilities.

“Empowerment breeds success,” said Lauren Knausenberger, Spark Tank director. “We know that if our Air Force leaders demonstrate their support, our Airmen’s desire to share their ideas and innovations would spread like wildfire across the Air Force.”

To kick off the campaign, Total Force Airmen are encouraged to submit their ideas on the Airmen Powered by Innovation crowdsourcing platform where teams from their major command will review them and select two semi-finalists, each to advance to a board run by Air Force Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Stephen W. Wilson. Two wildcard submissions will also be selected to progress to the board.

The selection process will look at the needs for specific capabilities as well as concerns of safety, policy, Air Force-wide implementation, technical feasibility and scalability.

Non-finalist submissions will be transferred to the API open-call campaign and partnered with collaboration coaches to further develop their projects.

Following the board, six finalists will be selected to visit AFWERX Vegas for pitch coaching and innovation training before presenting on-stage at the Air Force Association Air Warfare Symposium in 2021.

“While we only select six finalists to progress to the Spark Tank final stage, we aim for all Airmen who participate in the campaign to gain something from the experience,” said Maj. Alisha Temples, Spark Tank deputy. “Whether it’s discovering a pathway to share their ideas, learning creative ways to solve problems at their unit, or hearing the secretary of the Air Force encourage them not to accept the status quo--this is an event meant for all Airmen.”

Building on last year’s event, which drew more than 200 idea submissions and named two winners, Spark Tank is also looking to expand and improve its program to include more educational opportunities and pathways for leaders to empower Airmen at all levels of the organization.

As part of this effort, the wing and major command with the most number of ideas submitted by the end of the campaign will be recognized for mobilizing their organization to contribute to the Air Force’s innovation mission.

By empowering Airmen to submit as many ideas as possible, the Air Force can begin to understand trends, identify pain points and challenge areas, and start connecting teams that may have similar interests and could benefit from combining efforts.

“Shifting a decades-in-the-making bureaucratic culture toward an agile and responsive problem-solving, improvement and innovation-focused culture will not happen overnight,” said William “Brout” Gautier, Air Force Continuous Process Improvement & Innovation

**See SPARK TANK Page 12**

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# Airmen adapt to COVID-19 working conditions



U.S. Air Force photos/Heide Couch



1) U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Robinson Sanon, 821st Contingency Response Squadron air traffic control journeyman, watches a KC-10 Extender depart May 5 in the control tower, at Travis Air Force Base, California. The coronavirus pandemic has had a minimal impact on the Travis Control Tower team's 24/7 mission. 2) Air traffic controllers assigned to the 60th Operations Support Squadron Radar Approach Control monitor the Travis airspace May 5 at Travis. The coronavirus pandemic has affected RAPCON daily operations due to the significant decrease in civilian and military air traffic. 3) U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Francis Raymundo, 60th Dental Squadron dental technician, wears a reusable face shield while conducting an examination June 5 at Travis. 4) U.S. Airmen assigned to the 60th Aerial Port Squadron stand in formation during an early morning roll call June 4 at Travis. 5) U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Kiarra Vendrell, left, 60th DS dental technician, takes the temperature of Lt. Col. Thomas Weber, right, 60th DS dentist, June 6 at Travis. 6) U.S. Air Force air traffic controllers watch the airfield while wearing cloth face coverings May 5 at Travis.





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Courtesy photo

**Spark Tank, a collaboration between AFWERX and Deputy Under Secretary of the Air Force, Management, is now accepting submissions for the 2021 campaign from July 1 to Oct. 16.**

## Spark Tank

From Page 9

Division chief. “While we’ve made great strides over the last few years with Spark Tank and Airmen Powered by Innovation efforts, we still have a long way to go. It will take active participation from our top leadership and every Airmen and Space professional to get us there.”

As part of this year’s campaign, AFWERX and SAF/MG will also be sharing educational

material on how organizations can move beyond potential roadblocks and innovate, pulled from resources like the Innovation Handbook and the Four Phases of Innovation, as well as highlighting the experiences of previous Spark Tank participants.

To get started, head over to the API crowdsourcing platform to submit and share ideas, provide thoughts and feedback on submissions, and vote on the most promising solutions: <https://usaf.ideascale.gov.com/a/ideas/recent/campaigns/156>.



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## Eielson

From Page 8

Once the barge is complete, the munitions Airmen then move onto bomb assembly.

"We're going to be building a total of 70 bombs over the course of the week," said Master Sgt. Jason P. Brackins, the

354th MXS conventional maintenance noncommissioned officer in charge.

The munitions flight typically builds bombs in mass fashion, especially when they are dealing with the largest shipment Eielson AFB has received in quite some time.

"We typically work to build bombs in a mass fashion," Merritt said. "Mass builds are done

using an assembly line process, where each Airman has a particular job and we can produce multiple bombs at once."

Munitions are a key component to ensuring Eielson AFB's F-35s meet all goals for initial combat capabilities and exercise Red Flag-Alaska participants have ammunition to train. The Airmen who build them are the ones ensuring

Eielson AFB's warfighters are prepared for the future fight.

"We're the ones that bring the fight to the aircraft and give them that offensive posture," Brackins said. "Without (munitions personnel) it's just another aircraft flying in the sky."

The junior Airmen in the munitions flight know how impactful the first bomb build is

for the F-35s at the at the Eielson AFB-based fighter wing and for Pacific Air Forces.

"It is very rewarding to be a part of making history," said Airman 1st Class Daelyn Mayer, a 354th MXS conventional maintenance inspector. "I think it's awesome to get to say we built the first bombs for the F-35s that are here at Eielson (AFB)."

## TRICARE

From Page 4

Air Force Reserve at the Pentagon. "By law, TRICARE is required to suspend coverage after 30 days past the payment due date. The guidance the Office of the Secretary of Defense put out erroneously stated that TRICARE would delay suspending coverage until 90 days after COVID operations ceased."

Bastian said to remedy this disconnect, OSD will allow members up to five months, instead of the original three-month period, to pay overdue premiums to have coverage reinstated and will honor any medical services and bills incurred during that time, once premiums are paid.

Reservists may have to resubmit any previously denied TRICARE claims from the period of delinquency for

processing.

The colonel said Reserve leadership at both the Pentagon and Air Force Reserve Command, headquartered on Robins Air Force Base, are providing information through functional communities to unit leadership to make sure Reservists are aware of the correct information.

Any member who acted upon the April 6 guidance should contact TRICARE immediately to ensure premiums are paid in order to avoid a loss of health care coverage.

Any Reserve members needing financial assistance should contact their unit leadership and local Airmen and Family Readiness Center. Bastian also said as normal operations resume, members should work with their units to accomplish missed Unit Training Assembly periods, which may provide income to cover overdue TRICARE premiums.

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**Conexes**  
From Page 7

safely transport up to 28 passengers or 23 patients, including ambulatory and litter, around the globe, while the Negatively Pressurized Conex-Lite is a smaller variation configured to be used aboard the C-130 Hercules.

The NPC-L system was certified to be fully operational June 25.

Air Mobility Command and Air Force Materiel Command leaders joined forces early April to invite creative materiel and non-materiel solutions to address a joint urgent operational need to move large numbers of COVID-19 patients should the need for that capability arise.

“In less than 30 days, the NPC went from an idea on a napkin to a proven concept ... and only 88 days from that idea to the delivery of an operational system,” said Lt. Col. Paul Hendrickson, Air Force Life Cycle Management Center Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defense material leader. “This was made possible by a team comprised of



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the Air Force CBRN Defense Systems Branch working with the Joint Program Executive Office for CBRN Defense and partnering with teams across the Air Force and Department of Defense.”

After putting the proof of concept NPC system through rigorous testing that ran from April 21-30; the first NPC-L was delivered June 1, at JB Charleston, followed by the first NPC on June 7, to begin testing and operational utility evaluation.

“Teams from across the country led by the Program Executive Office for Agile Combat Support, gathered at Joint Base Charleston to assess the NPC and ensure it met four main requirements,” Hendrickson said. “The NPC must one, be able to contain the virus from aircrew and the aircraft; two, be usable for aeromedical teams; three, have the potential to be certified airworthy; and four, have the potential to be safe to fly. The NPC has proven capable of satisfying all of those requirements.”

When the coronavirus outbreak began, the Air Force increased training on the Transport Isolation System, an isolation chamber developed during the 2014 Ebola outbreak, but never used in operations until April 10, when it transported COVID-positive patients from U.S. Central Command to Ramstein AB for medical treatment.

To date, the TIS has successfully transported more than 80 patients. However, it offers AMC and the Air Force limited capability, as each TIS can transport only two to four patients. The NPC will increase AMC’s capacity for patient transport, both now and in support of future requirements.

“The NPC is crucial to readiness as it not only protects our aircrews, aircraft and aeromedical evacuation teams as they transport patients, but it also protects the readiness of the locations we will move patients from,” said Lt. Col. Timothy Mach, AMC Requirements Division chief. “We need to take care of the individual infected by the virus and mitigate the chance of it spreading. The NPC allows us to perform those life-saving movements in only hours.”



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Career

From Page 2

he said. “The biggest impact of that is you can’t really be genuine because it’s a huge part of your life that you can’t share with your friends.”

Ultimately, Hickey chose to stay in the Air Force.

“I wanted to live a fully genuine life,” he said. “And then, once (DADT) was repealed, I did a lot of soul searching and decided that I wanted to see how it all panned out after the ban was lifted. And I’m really glad that I did.”

After his first stint at Travis AFB, Hickey’s career took him to Hurlburt Field, Florida, where he met firefighter Brett Buckland. The two became a couple and married in 2017.

Hickey said the 2015 Supreme Court decision that legalized same-sex marriage was a bigger deal for him than the repeal of DADT. The decision allowed Buckland, a civilian captain firefighter, permanently to change stations with him as his spouse.

Buckland, who also serves as a key spouse mentor for the 60th AMXS, said their relationship dynamic is just like any other couple.

“It’s only going to be as successful as the work you want to put into it,” he said. “We have the same type of arguments, same petty stuff. It doesn’t make any difference in those regards. It’s about respecting each other, about keeping it lively.”

After Hurlburt, Hickey commanded a maintenance squadron at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, before returning to Travis AFB for his current position. Since their reassignment here, Buckland also joined Team Travis through the base’s fire department June 22.

As an O-5 and a squadron commander, Hickey said he realizes for some Airmen he may be their sole connection to the queer community, a responsibility he has grown to accept.

“It was difficult for me, because I never considered myself to be an activist,” he said. “But then, as my troops approach me and tell me how grateful they were to have a gay officer in the squadron, over time, I realized the importance for people who



**Brett Buckland, 60th Civil Engineer Squadron firefighting captain, left, and his husband, U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Justin Hickey, 60th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron commander, cut their wedding cake April 15, 2017, at Fort Walton Beach, Florida. The U.S. Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in 2015, allowing Buckland and Hickey to wed.**

are gay in the military to have somebody that looks like or represents them in the same way as other minority groups. I think it’s important that they’re represented at all levels of the Air Force.”

Ballinger said she is appreciative of the open, authentic lives they can both live now.

“It’s wonderful,” she said. “This is the first time we’ve been stationed (in the same area where) people understand the relationship between us. Obviously, we’ve always been close, probably because of DADT. We didn’t have a lot of people we could trust. ... Now everyone is able to see a complete picture. He has his husband. I have my wife. We don’t have to pretend that it’s something that it’s not and get to lean into everything that it is. It’s a really awesome friendship.”

Hickey looks back a decade ago and sees a young captain questioning his path in the Air Force due to the strains created by DADT. He is appreciative of the life he has now, he said.

“I knew that if I was going to stay in the Air Force that the cost of keeping my private life a secret would be too much to bear,” he said. “I couldn’t see myself as a squadron commander unless (‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ repeal) were to happen. Fast forward eight years later, me and Brett hang out with Lyndsey and her wife, Sharon. ... To think about how things were in 2011, living in secret, and now we can be who we are and have families that we want. (It) has been a dream come true.”

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Equality

From Page 3

was by people speaking up that helped enact that change, just like it’ll take speaking up to enact the changes we still need.”

Another of the committee’s advisers, Tech. Sgt. Christopher Covin, 60th Security Forces Squadron noncommissioned officer in charge of systems and technology, noted that the disparity between speaking up and staying silent could also be a result of the Air Force’s culture.

“Coming into the Air Force, you hear a lot of people say, ‘Don’t talk about religion or race,’ but that’s not really a conducive environment to confront some of the challenges we need to address,” he said. “By leadership, supervisors and even other Airmen fostering an environment of family, we embolden people to feel safe in speaking their truth, and that’s where that positive change is going to come from.”

Covin, a supervisor himself, went on to underscore the importance of ground-level conversations with co-workers, no matter their rank.

“Amid everything that’s going on, it’s a powerful gesture to simply ask, ‘Are you doing okay,’ to each other,” he said. “Getting to know your Airmen – who they are, what life they had before the Air Force, what their first name is – that’s a good first step to not only nurture a relationship of trust, but potentially dispel the bias and preconceptions we might have, whether they be conscious or unconscious.”

Travis’ Cultural Consciousness Committee, which promised to continue similar meetings in the future, punctuated the town hall with an offer to join the group.

Covin and Cook, likewise, encouraged those in attendance to perpetuate equality in their own lives and units.

“Never feel silent – never feel as if you can never speak your truth or the reality you face,” Covin said. “And just as it’s one’s responsibility to speak up, it’s others’ responsibility to listen – not to respond, but to understand, empathize and learn.”