

Hectic pace keeps Team Charleston busy

By Brig. Gen. Robert D. Bishop, Jr.
437 AW commander

Let me begin this week's column by thanking all the people of Team Charleston who have worked so hard over the last several weeks e.g. the Protocol office, Air Expo team, civil engineers, Wing Plans and Programs, and the project officers for the many different events. This is supposed to be a period of rest and reconstitution, but given the recent schedule, there doesn't appear to be too much resting going on!

It goes without saying everything associated with the Air Expo was great. The weather even cooperated enough so all of our hard work was not for naught. I've heard nothing but glowing comments from the community for the superb show. We should all feel much pride!

Our new Undersecretary of the Air Force, Carol A. DiBattiste, visited us this past Friday and we left her with a tremendous impression of Team Charleston and our capabilities. She had nothing but praise for the dedication, enthusiasm, and candor of the true professionals that make up Charleston AFB.

Just prior to writing this column, I received a call from U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Dick Cody, who was the commander of the Apaches during the Albania deploy-

ment. He echoed the above comments and closed our conversation by saying never in his career had he run across a more professional group of men and women, especially given the terrible safety and airfield conditions of Tirane. He called us "real mission hackers."

This week is already shaping up to be another busy one with a team of ten in from our headquarters at Air Mobility Command and the Air Staff to administer a vulnerability assessment. These folks are really here to help us and share the many good ideas that they have collected from visiting other bases across the Department of Defense, especially when it comes to force protection. There can be no higher goal during peacetime than the protection of our people and our assets.

On a closely related topic—the safety down day we held this past Wednesday. My hope is that your unit really made the day productive. It was meant to be like an annual physical — a little bit of preventive maintenance.

With an extra day off this coming weekend, it will hopefully be a good opportunity to get some much needed rest and relaxation. I hope you can spend this time with family and friends pursuing your favorite pastime, but please be safe, as I would like to see all of you back on Tuesday!

by Chief Master Sgt. Jim Finch
Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force

All of the attention pay table reform has received recently has opened the door for considerable confusion on just what pay table reform is and is not intended to accomplish. I want to share some thoughts in hopes of providing a better understanding of the proposed pay and compensation package.

The fiscal 2000 National Defense Authorization Act, recently signed by President Clinton, has a number of positive pay and compensation initiatives for the military. These include a 4.8 percent pay raise — the highest we've received in 18 years — repeal of the "Redux" retirement system to one that provides 50 percent retirement at 20 years service; future annual pay raises at 0.5 percent above the economic cost indicator for the next six years; and authorization for a first-duty station temporary lodging expense, something we have sought for some time.

Also included is an adjustment to the military pay table — a pay table reform initiative the Department of Defense recommended to correct long-standing problems within the table itself.

It is this single aspect of current pay and compensation initiatives that has been a topic of discussion among many Air

Talk about pay table reform

Force members — discussion fueled by the misperception of what pay table reform is and is not intended to accomplish.

After meeting with Air Force and DOD compensation experts, this is what I have learned about pay table reform: The purpose of this pay reform is to make a one-time correction in certain cells of the pay table that have gotten "out of sync" over the years, with the intent to emphasize and reward performance (promotion) over longevity throughout the table.

This is why some pay cells with larger anomalies will require larger corrections to fix the overall table. However, the bottom line is everyone benefits from this reform when viewed from a whole-career perspective rather than by looking at only one pay table cell. You must look beyond today and focus on the increased earnings you will obtain throughout your career and into retirement.

Let me cover some of the areas that I think have caused some concern.

Since staff sergeants at seven years service (about the average pin-on time in the Air Force) received one of the smallest adjustments to the table, one

might question the assertion that pay table reform focused on mid-level noncommissioned officers. I found part of the answer to this rests with the definition of "mid-level." We in the Air Force lag behind our sister services in average promotion pin-on time to the mid-level NCO grades (e.g., the average promotion to E-5 in the Army is just over four years service). Keep in mind that pay table reform is a DOD initiative applying equally to all the services. Therefore, it's a fact that Air Force members won't benefit from pay table reform quite as much as our sister service counterparts. However, this is more of an Air Force promotion problem than a DOD pay table reform concern, and we are working to improve this situation.

In fact, we've just received authorization to increase the percentage of the Air Force enlisted force allowed to serve in the top five grades from about 48 percent today to 56 percent by 2003. This should ultimately allow us to shorten the time it takes to promote our mid-level NCOs and, therefore, increase the benefit of pay table reform.

Another misperception I've heard recently is that pay table reform was

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intended to significantly increase basic pay levels of our NCOs, especially at the senior NCO level. Although I'm told this was not the intention of this reform, I agree there is still much more work to be done in this area considering the education levels, expectations and responsibilities of an all-volunteer, professional NCO corps. You are the best and brightest people our country has to offer, and you're the envy of virtually all the world's militaries. I assure you I will continue to push for increased compensation to better recognize the many contributions you as dedicated professionals give to our nation.

We have much to look forward to in the coming months. We're slated to receive the largest pay raise since 1982, an improvement to our retirement system, projected pay raises for the next six years that will outpace inflation and begin to close the pay gap, and a reform of our pay table that will further increase lifetime earnings.

With these initiatives, and others I haven't mentioned, the president, Congress and the American people are sending us a strong message of thanks and support. Let me also take this opportunity to thank you for what you do every day for our Air Force — I'm proud to serve along side you.

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