

Why stay in the Air Force?

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I experienced my first aircraft flight in the fall of 1970. My brother was a first year cadet or "Doolie" at the U.S. Air Force Academy and I visited him with my parents for Parents Day activities. It was certainly a very memorable flight from Montgomery, Alabama to Colorado Springs, Color., via Atlanta and Dallas.

The Atlanta to Dallas leg was aboard a Boeing 747 where we were served steak and lobster in coach class — those were the good old days, today we're lucky to get a sack lunch. An incoming high school sophomore at the time, I had always wanted to be an architect but after that flight I was hooked on flying and decided I wanted to be pilot. My father retired as a senior master sergeant and Vietnam veteran. My brother graduated from the Academy and I was on my way to making it a family trifecta in the Air Force, choosing to attend Auburn University on an Air Force ROTC scholarship. That was the genesis of my Air Force career but what is more important is the reason I have stayed in.

My career has faced many of the same challenges facing our younger personnel today. A Strategic Air Command warrior fighting the Cold War during the early years of my career, I spent in excess of 180 days away from home each year: 120 days sitting alert at the end of the runway, 45

days overseas at one of our tanker task forces and another couple of weeks or more worth of short trips. During the early 80s, I served through a pilot exodus as many of my peers sought greener pastures on the other side of the fence. Many found that green pasture, many did not. My brother separated from the service in 1984 and has been laid off several times since then in the fickle high tech world of computer chips and circuit boards. I've seen good economic times and bad, and I too sat on the fence post ready to change careers until one eventful day.

In June 1985, I was assigned to a detail as an officer in charge of cadet ushers for the U.S. Air Force Academy graduation ceremony. I had been seriously considering putting my papers in to separate from the service and for months had been debating the options. At the graduation ceremony I witnessed the beauty and pageantry of the ceremony for at least the third time previously attending my brother's graduation and one other ceremony since my assignment to the Academy began in 1982. It was during this ceremony in 1985 that I was emotionally moved. I can still remember the lump in my throat as I watched cadets I had taught how to fly march onto the field, be awarded their diplomas and graduate, caps flying in the air to the roar of the Thunderbirds flying overhead. I realized at that ceremony that I had not joined the Air Force to fly but to serve my coun-

try and that day, I rededicated my career to the Air Force.

My family and I have faced many challenges during my 22 years of service to our country. We have moved eight times, bought and sold three homes in varying market conditions, and my sons have each attended several different high schools.

On the positive side, my family has lived in many different areas of the country and has seen and learned more about this great country than a short vacation each year could ever offer. My kids have seen more of the United States than my wife or I ever dreamed of as a kid.

A sign is prominently displayed in our home saying, "We can handle anything...we're an Air Force family." The military lifestyle has certainly challenged our family, but it has also enriched our lives, made us each more self sufficient, and enhanced friendships around the globe.

Why did I stay in the Air Force? It wasn't for the pay, it wasn't for the benefits, it's really rather simple...it was patriotism. The military service is one of the last noble professions, the call to arms to serve and protect this great country of ours. I think that if each of us looks deeply into our souls we'll find another common bond between us.

Not the love of flying, not the adventure of travel, not the thrill of a challenge but rather a love for our country and the ideals it stands for. There is no one better to protect our country than you and I.

Would I do it again? I'm not done yet, but you bet I would!

Thanks

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Once again, the AMC tanker team stepped up to the plate recovering 15 AMC KC-135s stranded off-station in minimal time and finding new and creative ways to meet the high demand for air refueling assets with a drastically reduced number of available aircraft.

And that doesn't even address all the other innovative ways you came up with to work around our normal day-to-day challenges such as parts shortages, personnel shortages, and C-5 tail cracks.

Even as we planned for the predictable events of March, we all knew that no matter how much we prepared, the demands would still stress our system.

But, as unforeseen contingencies unfolded, I was continually amazed at the smart ideas which you, AMC's professionals, came up with to meet both the predictable and unpredictable demands we faced.

And though the numbers speak volumes about your mission success, there is even more to the story, because for every mission, there are literally hundreds of people, deployers and non-deployers, behind the scenes, who are integral to its success.

Our global reach lay down folks provide the foundation for our global capability ... literally the ability to go anywhere in the world ... and, as always, performed magnificently. (AMCNS)