

FEATURE

Welcome back

Air Force members return to duty after trying civilian life

By Senior Airman Jason Smith
437 AW Public Affairs

Getting out of the Air Force after finishing an enlistment term doesn't necessarily mean staying out anymore.

Recent Air Force manning shortages have created new openings for prior service airmen to return to active duty after "calling it a day" with the Air Force, according to an Air Force News release.

"I got out, and then realized I should have stayed in," said Senior Airman Matthew Luetkemeyer, 437th Civil Engineer Squadron, fire department driver/crew chief. "I was out for about five months and didn't like the idea of being stuck in one place for the rest of my life."

Luetkemeyer is one of many Charleston AFB members who served their first enlistment and then opted to try civilian life. He said returning to service was an easy process, and it only took him six weeks to get back in.

According to an Air Force news release, a pay gap exists between military members and workers in the civilian sector. Civilian workers with the same duties earn between 8.5 and 13.5 percent higher wages than military mem-

bers. While it may discourage airmen from reenlisting, Senior Airman David Vanhorn, 437 CE utilities system apprentice, warns that benefits can often outweigh salary.

"I had a job making \$13 per hour as a plumber," said VanHorn. "It sounded like a lot, but it didn't cover housing expenses or my little girl's medical bills. Having the peace of mind that my family was covered was important to me. So, I came back in."

VanHorn, like Luetkemeyer, had no problem reenlisting. He said he was on his way to CAFB within a week of contacting his recruiter.

No matter what the exact reason for an airman to return, benefits seem to play an overwhelming role. There are, however, smaller aspects of the Air Force that can't be overlooked, like teamwork.

"The housing and the health care were very important," Luetkemeyer said. "There aren't many jobs that can compare. I also missed the teamwork aspect. I was working with the Missouri State Highway Patrol, and while it seemed like a team, it wasn't as tight as the Air Force."

"The Air Force has a great supervisory system," said VanHorn. "With my company (civilian) we had supervisors, but they didn't help you the way they do here. You were given time limits to finish jobs. If a job wasn't done in time, you get fired."

"It seems like Air Force supervisors have a better understanding of how long things take to get fixed," continued VanHorn. "They tend to give you enough time to do something right the first time."

It's not just enlisted members who decide to return. Capt. Brad Oliver, 15th Airlift Squadron aircraft commander/wing mission director, also said "I do" again to the Air Force.

"In 1993, there was an overage of pilots, and the Air Force was letting us out of our commitments," said Oliver. "My wife had

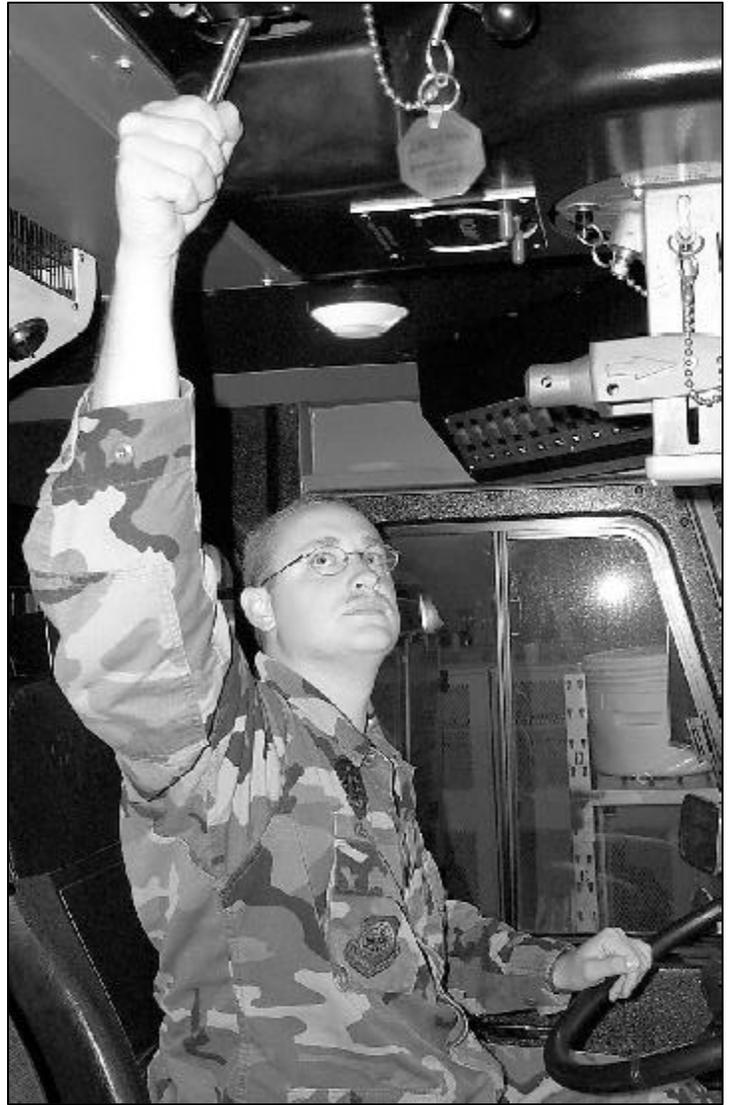


photo by Staff Sgt. Michael Duhe

Senior Airman Matthew Luetkemeyer, 437th Civil Engineer Squadron, fire department, said people should think about all the benefits the Air Force offers before they decide to leave.

surgery on both eyes and had limited vision, and we had two young children. I volunteered to get out to take care of my family."

Oliver started his own special event rental company that covered central Texas and Oklahoma. While Oliver said he enjoyed his freedom, he realized he missed flying when his wife's medical condition improved and his kids started school.

"There was a shortage of pilots and I missed military aviation. I found out about a pilot recall program on the Internet through an

active duty friend. Here I am."

Luetkemeyer, VanHorn and Oliver all agree that before anyone leaves the Air Force, they should weigh all their options.

"If you're happy in the Air Force, stay in and make it a career," said Oliver. "Don't let other people's complaining about their job rub off on you. The Air Force and the civilian workplace both offer great careers. Ask yourself where you want to be in five or ten years. If you're on the right path, continue. If not, make the necessary change."



photo by Senior Airman Jason Smith

Capt. Brad Oliver, 15th Airlift Squadron aircraft commander and wing mission director, said he missed military aviation while he was a civilian.