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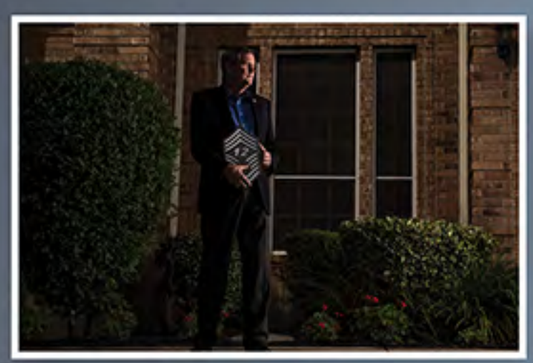

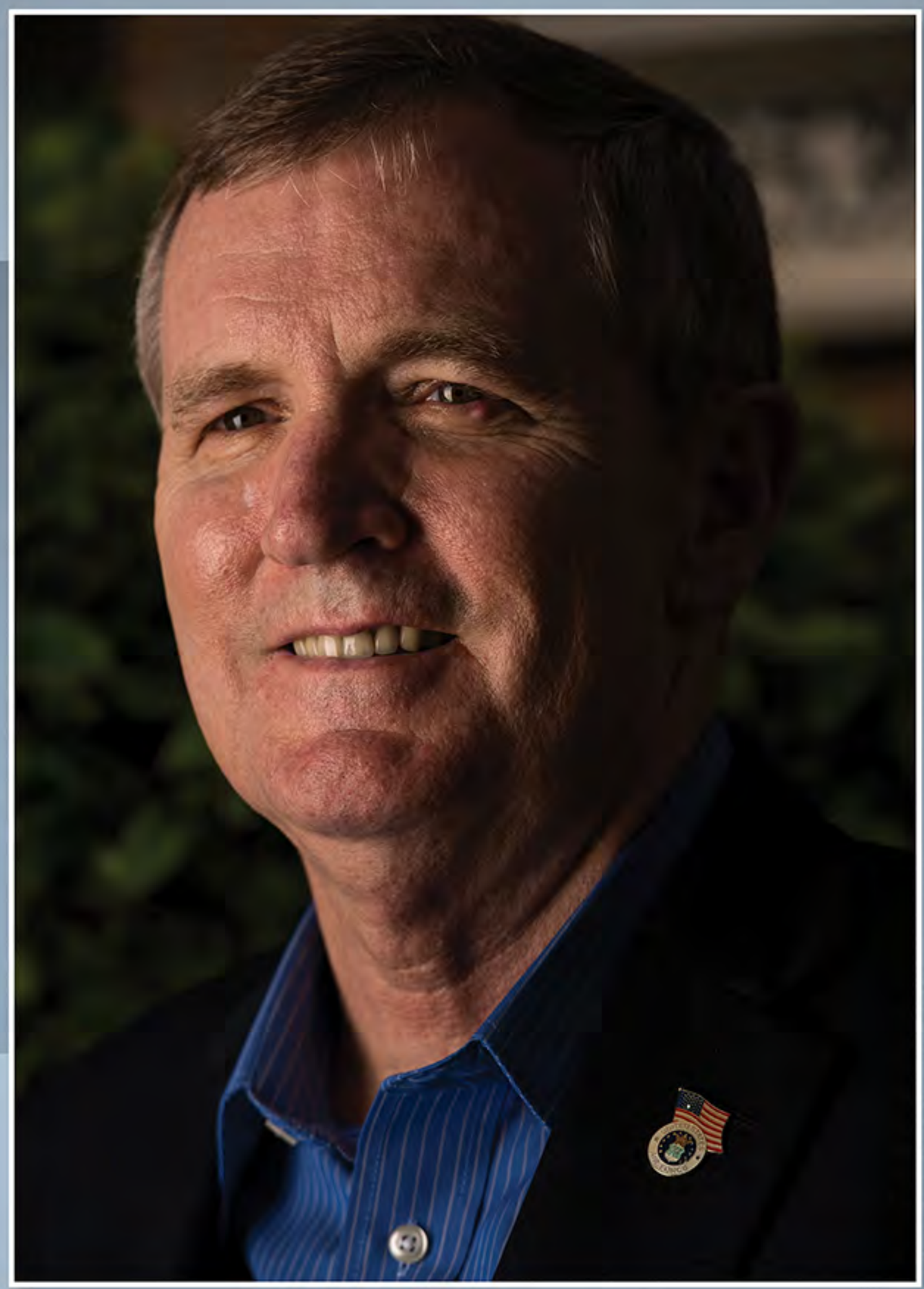

Photos by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Snyder

ERIC BENKEN

BIOGRAPHY

Chief Master Sergeant of The Air Force(Ret.) Eric W. Benken had no intention of serving more than his first term of four years. With his plane ticket and separation paperwork in hand, he was ready to go back to his hometown of Cincinnati, Ohio, until a chief master sergeant pulled him into his office for one last reminder of why it's important to wear the uniform. The next day, Benken asked his commanding officer to reenlist him. He went on to become the 12th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, the highest enlisted position in the branch. After joining in 1970 as an information management Airman, Benken served in various maintenance, operational and support units in the United States and in overseas locations such as Taiwan, Vietnam, Korea, Belgium and Germany. Before his tenure as CMSAF in 1996, he served as the senior enlisted advisor of U.S. Forces in Europe. During his USAFE tour, the command was involved in operations such as PROVIDE PROMISE, PROVIDE COMFORT, DELIBERATE FORCE and JOINT ENDEAVOR. Benken retired in 1999 after 29 years of service, and continues to be actively involved in the Air Force community by engaging young Airmen on the importance of leadership and followership.

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Photos by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Snyder

BILLY BOLES

BIOGRAPHY

General (Ret.) Billy Boles joined the Air Force during a tumultuous time in United States history. The year was 1962, and many young Americans were being drafted into the Army. Boles was faced with a critical decision: do nothing and risk being drafted, or voluntarily join the military and have more control over his career. He chose to press ahead with his Reserve Officer Training Corps commitment and started a long and accomplished career. Boles, a native of King, N.C., started his career as assistant officer in charge of the student records section at Keesler Air Force Base, Miss. He served in many personnel officer billets, including a deployment and follow-up assignment to Tan Son Nhut Air Base, South Vietnam. He was then assigned to the Air Force Military Personnel Center at Randolph AFB, Texas, an assignment he credits as having the most impact on him and his career. After multiple assignments between AFMPC and Headquarters U.S. Air Force in Washington, D.C., Boles earned the rank of four-star general and assumed command of Air Education and Training Command from June, 1995, until his retirement April 1, 1997.

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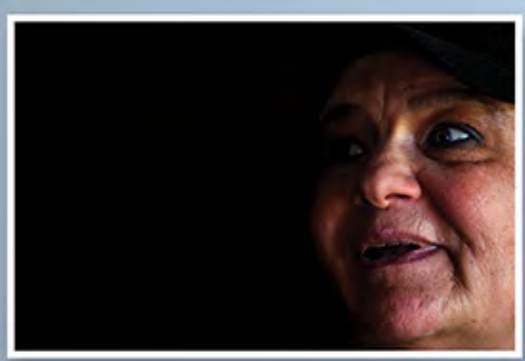
Photos by Staff Sgt. Dave Salinitri

LINDA CARD



BIOGRAPHY

Master Sergeant (Ret.) Linda Card is a public affairs officer, equestrian, medical technician and role model for women currently serving in the armed forces. Card's 24-year career began when she joined the Women in the Air Force in the early 1970s. WAF was a program that served to bring women into limited roles in the Air Force. The program ended in 1976 when women were accepted in the service on an equal basis with men. Card worked at McChord Air Force Base, Wash., driving forklifts for the aerial support squadron. She was the first woman operator on base, completing tasks alongside men. Card's career helped lead women into having roles on the flight line, allowing strong and willing women a chance to prove themselves.

"I would tell women today to ensure that they want to go into a nontraditional role; not to do it just to prove a point," she said. "You have to believe in what you're doing, take the technology, training, and do the best you can do."

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Photos by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Snyder

PAUL CARLTON

BIOGRAPHY

Lieutenant General (Ret.) Paul K. Carlton Jr. was the 17th Surgeon General of the Air Force. As chief of surgery in 1983 at Wiesbaden, Germany, he and his group of surgeons proposed a different method of caring for wounded service members, resulting in the best survival rates in the history of war. During the 1991 Gulf War, Carlton was assigned as the commander of the medical center at Scott Air Force Base, Ill. Upon his return, he had the chance to perform actions to improve the casualty care of military members. While Carlton was Surgeon General of the Air Force, medical responders conducted a scenario in May and August 2001 that included an aircraft crashing into the Pentagon; when the Sept. 11, 2001, attack occurred, many people thought it was part of the exercise, which resulted in lives being saved. "I was part of the greatest family in the world – the United States military, and I'm still part of that family," Carlton said. "Being an Air Force veteran is wonderful, but being a military veteran is better. It encompasses a broader feeling, and you have to remember, it is family. I've never left the family…I've just taken off my uniform."

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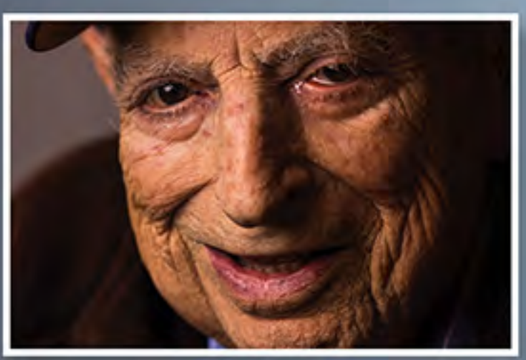

Photos by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Snyder

DAVID CORAZ

BIOGRAPHY

Technical Sergeant (Sep.) David Coraz served in the U.S. Army Air Corps from June 1941 to November 1945. During his military service in World War II, he was a radio operator using Morse code on aircraft such as the B-17 Flying Fortress, B-24 Liberator, B-25 Mitchell, B-26 Marauder, A-20 Havoc, Douglas DC-3, Douglas DC-4, Douglas C-54 Skymaster and Curtiss C-46 Commando. Coraz helped deliver B-17s from Maine as they flew to Newfoundland to Iceland and then finally to Scotland. After the aircraft was dropped at its destination, crews would fly back to Maine on the same route on a C-54. Once he returned, Coraz would get ready to deliver another aircraft. "My favorite missions during my time as a radio operator were the secret missions," he said. "We flew a bunch of scientists around the United States testing out the Loran navigation system." During one of his missions off the coast of Brisbin, Saskatchewan, he found out over Morse code that the war was over. He turned and told the captain, "Free at last!"

After the war, Coraz separated from the service and returned to Indianapolis to help with his parent's restaurant supply business.

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Photos by Pat Nugent

HARRY DALTON

BIOGRAPHY

Brigadier General (Ret.) Harry Dalton is a 30-year combat-decorated Air Force veteran and pioneer in military public relations. He was the first career public affairs officer to earn a star and advance to the rank of brigadier general. When the Korean War began, he volunteered for active duty and was assigned in August 1950 as a public information officer at March Air Force Base, Calif. Dalton transferred to Vietnam in July 1968 where he served as executive to the chief of information at the U.S. Military Assistance Command. During this assignment he flew 32 combat missions as an aerial combat photographer. Later, as a plans officer in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), he was the principal planner for matters pertaining to prisoners of war and those missing in action. Dalton spent his last five years in uniform as the director of public affairs, reporting to the Air Force chief of staff and secretary. His decorations include the Air Medal, Bronze Star, Legion of Merit and Distinguished Service Medal. In 2007, Dalton was awarded the Public Relations Society of America Golden Anvil award, which commemorates a lifetime of service by an individual whose work significantly advanced the profession and set high standards for others engaged in the practice of public relations.

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Photos by Staff Sgt. Vernon Young

JIM FINCH

BIOGRAPHY

Chief Master Sergeant of The Air Force (Ret.) Jim Finch was the 13th person appointed to the highest noncommissioned officer position in the United States Air Force. He entered the service in July 1974. His background includes missile maintenance and professional military education. He served in a number of operational, maintenance and support units at every level of command from squadron through major command. Finch's assignments included bases in Colorado, Florida, Alabama, Texas, Virginia and Washington, D.C. He served overseas in the United Kingdom and Alaska. Finch served as the Command Chief Master Sergeant for 11th Air Force and Air Combat Command. While at ACC, the command was involved in operations such as PROVIDE PROMISE, NORTHERN WATCH, SOUTHERN WATCH, JOINT ENDEAVOR and ALLIED FORCE.

Finch continues to interact with and have an impact on today's Airmen. "I'm always delighted to spend time with them," he said. "It makes you feel better about our Air Force."

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Photo by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Snyder

PAT FINCH

BIOGRAPHY

Master Sergeant (Ret.) Pat Finch joined the Air Force in 1972 with hopes of being a security forces Airman, but realized near the end of basic training that she would become a Basic Military Training Instructor. After being an instructor for eight years, she became an administrator, which took her to assignments in Iceland, Alabama, Texas and Alaska, covering all aspects of the career field. She has two primary mentors: Chief Master Sgt. Jimmy Lavender, who ran the professional military education school at Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala., and her husband Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (Ret.) Jim Finch. She says the two have had the biggest influences on her life.

Although Finch retired in 1993 after 21 years of service, her legacy continues through the Airmen that she pushed to be their best during basic training. "I am Air Force. I may be retired, but I am still Air Force," she said.

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Photos by Airman 1st Class Nicholas Byers

KEITH FINNEY

BIOGRAPHY

Chief Master Sergeant (Ret.) Keith Finney enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in November 1981, serving as a heavy equipment operator in the civil engineering career field. He deployed twice; first to Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia, where he served as the noncommissioned officer in charge of the heavy equipment operator shop in 2000. The second was to Balad Air Base, Iraq, in 2007 as the chief enlisted manager of the 337th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron. The highlight of his career was in 2003 when he was selected as one of the Air Force's 12 Outstanding Airmen of the Year. However, he said his fondest memory came in 2002 when he was selected as the Pacific Air Forces Senior NCO (noncommisioned officer) of the Year while stationed at Osan. His selection brought him to Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii, to receive his award and certificate. "Staying in the dorms that were still full of bullet holes from the attack on Pearl Harbor and then having a private viewing of the USS Arizona really allowed me the time to reflect on the sacrifices made in the past for freedom," he said. Finney rose to the rank of chief master sergeant in 2003 and retired in 2010 at Kadena AB, Japan, after 29 years of service. He now serves as a military testing proctor at Joint Base Charleston in South Carolina.

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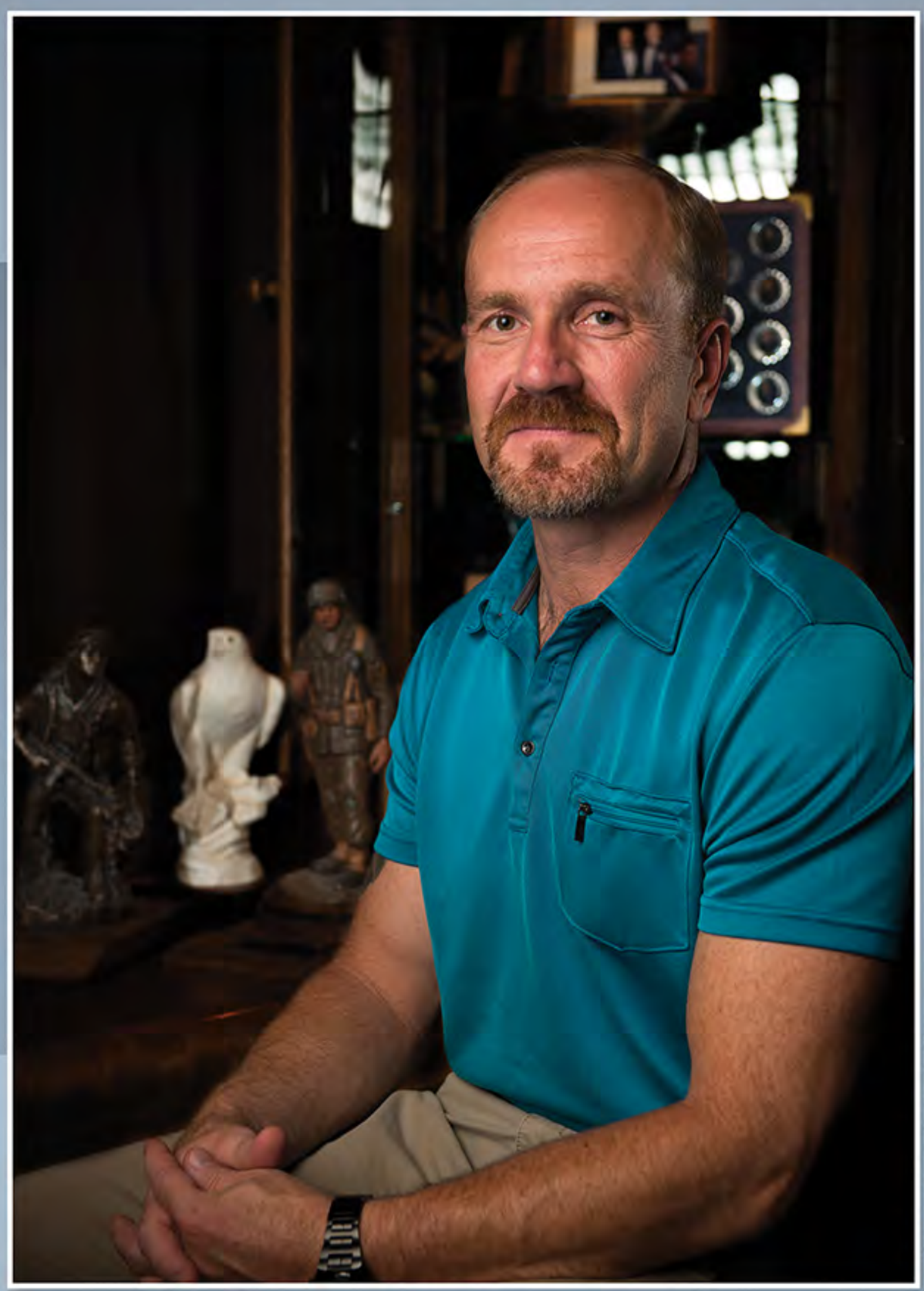

Photo by Christopher DeWitt

LOUIS FISCHER

BIOGRAPHY

Chief Master Sergeant (Ret.) Louis Fischer entered the Air Force in 1984 as a security forces Airman. He deployed in support of Operations DESERT SHIELD, DESERT STORM, ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM. He still remembers his experience as one of the first enlisted Airmen to become a Military Training Leader at the U.S. Air Force Academy, a position now known as the Academy Military Training Noncommissioned Officer. "There was no description as to what the job entailed," he said. "You were, in most cases, the cadets' first exposure to an enlisted person, which would set the stage for future exchanges in their careers. You mentored the cadets, showed them what an NCO does and how NCOs take care of their people," Fischer said. "You also assisted them in their development." Fischer served more than seven years as an MTL, and still has former cadets, many of whom became squadron commanders, approach him with the respect afforded to a leader. Although Fisher completed his 25-year active-duty career when he retired in 2009, he continues to serve the Air Force as the base antiterrorism officer at Schriever Air Force Base, Colorado. "The Air Force is pretty much my family and I want to stay in the family," he said.

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Photos by Staff Sgt. Russ Scalf

PARNELL FISHER

BIOGRAPHY

Master Sergeant (Ret.) Parnell Fisher is a decorated war veteran, serving 22 years as an Air Force loadmaster. He first served from 1950 to 1954 and, after earning a bachelor's degree in the ensuing years, served again from 1959 to 1977. He was awarded a Silver Star for gallant actions on Dec. 18, 1966, while aboard an AC-47 Spooky, over Vung Tau, Vietnam. During the routine mission, Fisher saved the life of the crew by tossing out a prematurely exploded flare from the aircraft. Fisher and the flight engineer were handling 22-pound flares, set to go off on a timer. As the engineer picked up a flare, it unexpectedly ignited. The chute went out and knocked him unconscious. "I get to the flare, go to the doorway and throw the dang thing out," Fisher said. Thinking he had averted disaster, Fisher was distressed to see the flare's chute hanging onto the edge of the plane's cargo door. He feverishly cut at the attached cords, fighting to snip the tightly wound strings clutching to the cargo door and threatening the lives of the crew. Fisher was able to cut the flare's chute loose just in time, severing the lines and looking on as the flare exploded outside seconds later.