AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AGENCY PRESENTS

VETERANS IN BLUE

VOLUME V

Photo by Airman 1st Class David Cooper

HARLAN MOHLER

BIOGRAPHY

Chief Master Sergeant (Ret.) Harlan Mohler joined the Air Force as a medical technician in January 1958 at the age of 17. Mohler served from 1958 to 1987 in the medical career field and served in multiple locations to include Germany, Korea and Vietnam. While in Vietnam, Mohler worked at the 22nd Casualty Staging Facility. Mohler said, "The job in Vietnam was a little more tedious than other jobs and it was difficult to serve in a war that's not supported by home at home. It's really difficult to see the youth of America lying out in front of you with horrendous wounds - arms and legs missing. Those are never pleasant things but it's something you have to do." Mohler finished up his career at Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, Texas, where he became the medical service manager. One of his greatest accomplishments was being selected to be a command nurse on the headquarters staff. Growing up in the Air Force, Mohler was able to raise a family and be there to pin the rank of lieutenant onto his daughter. He said the Air Force exposed him to different cultures and shaped his world view, "I feel like I became more of a world citizen and learned that peace is better than war, love is better than hate, and that it would be nice if we could be like a box of crayons; a lot of different colors living in the same box, getting along."

AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AGENCY PRESENTS

VETERANS IN BLUE

VOLUME V

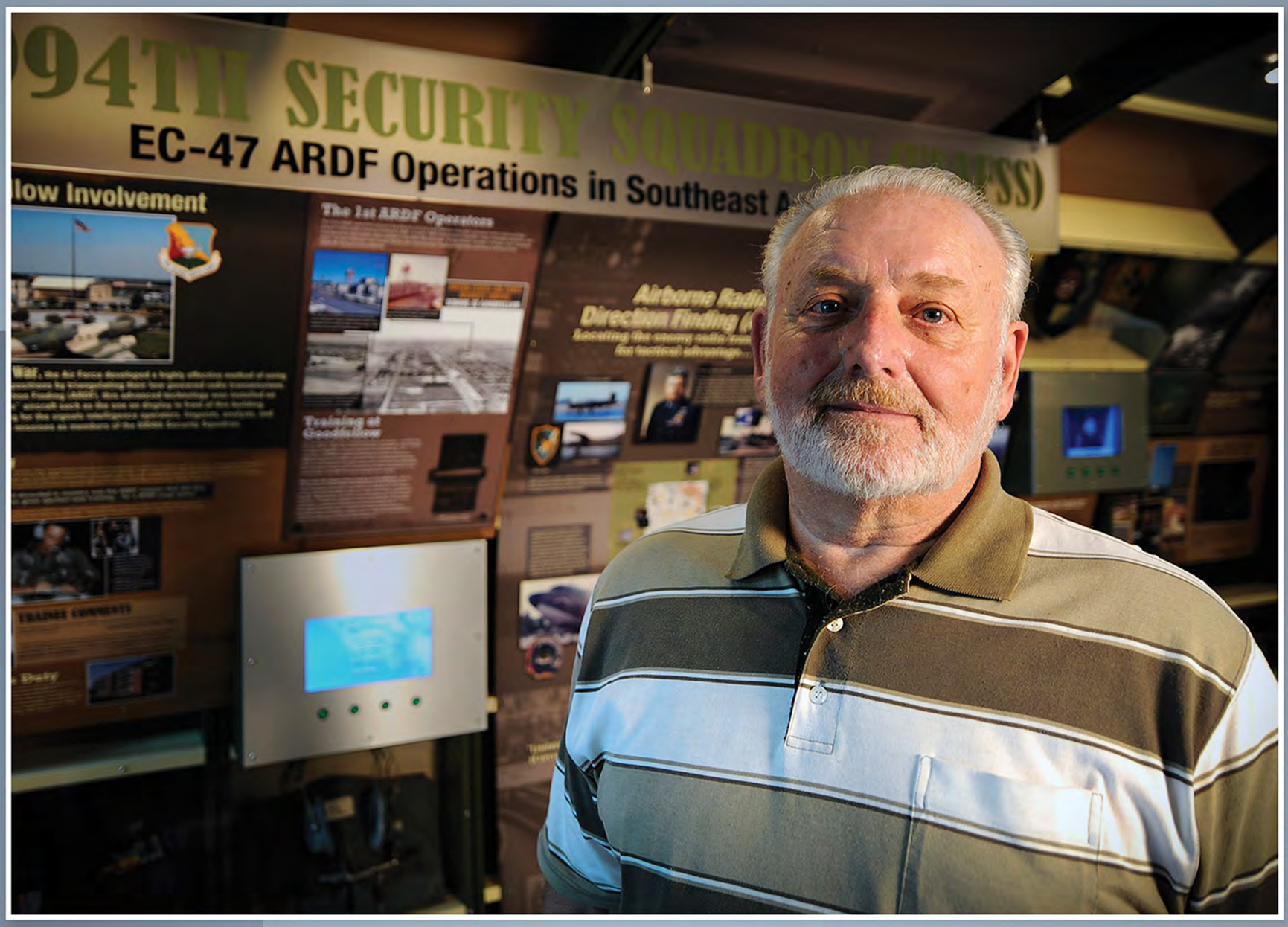

Photo by Airman 1st Class Devin N. Boyer

TOM NURRE

BIOGRAPHY

Chief Master Sergeant (Ret.) Tom Nurre began his Air Force career May 22, 1961, enlisting as a Morse Code Intercept Operator. Immediately after, two of his brothers were drafted into the Army. To keep his brothers out of the war zone, Nurre volunteered to go to Thailand during the Vietnam War at an air base near Nakhon Phanom. This was possible due to a regulation that stated only one son from a family could serve in a war zone at a time. During his time in Thailand, Nurre gathered intelligence while airborne and created reports sent to commanders in Southeast Asia. "The war I saw was from 8,000 feet," he said. Later he served as a commandant for the Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) Academy at Goodfellow Air Force Base, Texas, and as the Chief of Air Force Enlisted Professional Military Education while at the Pentagon. His decorations include the Legion of Merit, the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with three oak leaf clusters. After 33 years of service, Nurre retired from the Air Force June 1, 1994. He lives with his wife Carletta in San Angelo, Texas, and has three children; Betsy, Tom and Ginny. Nurre was recently involved in funding and collecting memorabilia for an Airborne Radio Direction Finding History Exhibit at Goodfellow Air Force Base, commemorating the 6994th Security Squadron and the mission supported during the Vietnam War.

AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AGENCY PRESENTS

VETERANS IN BLUE

VOLUME V

Photo by Carol Anne Hartman

JOHN PARKER

BIOGRAPHY

Colonel (Ret.) John B. Parker began his career in February 1942. Two years later he was navigating B-17s in Europe. He flew 30 combat missions over the next eight months, taking battle damage on every one. Parker described a mission on Christmas Eve in 1944 as his most memorable. It was the first day 8th Air Force was able to fly after the Battle of the Bulge began. His aircraft was one of more than 2,000 B-17s/24 that made up the largest bomber formation in history. Parker recalled both awe and fear on the mission, explaining that the sight of all of those bombers was the most impressive thing he had ever seen. While Parker was flying over Europe, his father was an Army chaplain in Italy and his three brothers were in the Army and Army Air Corps. His entire family and crew returned safely from the war. Parker served more than 32 years, earning the Legion of Merit, the French Legion of Honor and the Distinguished Flying Cross among other decorations. He flew 30 missions in the Berlin Airlift, multiple C-47 missions in Vietnam, and was a Basic Military Training Squadron commander. At 91, he still lives on his own and walks to the Hickory, North Carolina, YMCA every day to stay in shape.

AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AGENCY PRESENTS

VETERANS IN BLUE

VOLUME V

Photo by Rob Bussard

LARRY PETERSON

BIOGRAPHY

Staff Sergeant (Sep.) Larry Peterson was an active duty Airman from 1970 to 1974. Although it has been 40 years since the Hewlett Packard Data Center manager disembarked an AC-130H Spectre gunship for the final time, the Colorado native is never more than five feet away from the room he has filled with relics, or five minutes away from a larger-than-life retelling. During his tenure, Peterson deployed to Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base as part of the 16th Special Operations Squadron. It was there that he completed his 10th combat mission and was awarded permanent aircrew wings. By the end of the Vietnam Conflict in 1973, Peterson had amassed more than 600 combat hours spanning more than 123 missions and lived through the deadliest year in Spectre gunship history. Ironically, in the midst of the mayhem, Peterson said he experienced "the most serene and beautiful moment he has ever known," when he was permitted to pilot the gunship between take off and the commencement of combat flight operations. Peterson went on to aid firebases and troops-in-contact in South Vietnam, and relieve ground troops in Kontum and An Loc with precision airborne artillery delivery. For his actions, Peterson was awarded the Air Medal with nine oak leaf clusters and the Distinguished Flying Cross. Peterson credits the discipline and "one team, one fight" mentality he has towards the time he spent in the world's greatest Air Force.

AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AGENCY PRESENTS

VETERANS IN BLUE

VOLUME V

Photo by Jerry Lara / San Antonio Express-News

GREGG POPOVICH

BIOGRAPHY

Captain (Sep.) Gregg Popovich is currently the head coach of the National Basketball Association's (NBA) San Antonio Spurs, leading the team to five World Championships ('99, '03, '05, '07, '14), making them one of the most successful organizations in American professional sports today. Popovich attributes his competitive spirit, determination and drive back to his humble beginnings at the United States Air Force Academy. " I give the Academy a lot of credit for instilling certain qualities and beliefs that still remain to this day," he said. "Being dedicated and having a work ethic where you work to be persistent in trying to achieve a goal and not faltering in that regard." In 1966 he was recruited to play basketball for the Academy and started all four years. Following graduation he served his five years on active duty, during which he toured eastern Europe and the Soviet Union with the U.S. Armed Forces Basketball Team. Popovich returned to the Air Force Academy as an assistant coach in 1973 and remained there for six years. He was hired by the Spurs as an assistant coach in 1988. Popovich became the head coach in 1996, making him the longest-tenured active head coach (18 years) in all four major American sports leagues.

AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AGENCY PRESENTS

VETERANS IN BLUE

VOLUME V

Photo by Airman First Class Jordan Castelan

JULIAN RICE

BIOGRAPHY

Second Lieutenant (Sep.) Julian Rice flew airdrop missions during the invasion of Normandy at a very young age, joining the Army Air Forces in 1942. In the fall of 1943, Rice was sent to Cottesmore, England, for six months to prepare for the Normandy invasion. The veteran spoke to a packed crowd of service members, dependents and retirees at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, the week before the 70th Anniversary of the invasion. Rice focused on the unforgettable moments that led up to the invasion, including when he flew in tight formation during a training mission two weeks prior to D-Day; training that ended in tragedy. He said the night was shrouded with confusion, which led to mid-air collisions and the first of their casualties prior to the invasion even beginning. Despite prior casualties, they were able to drop soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division behind Utah Beach, Normandy, France, between St. Mere-Eglise and Carentan on June 6, 1944. Within a day, the invasion was complete, but the mission did not end there. The next day they brought in ammunition and medical supplies to the men who were dropped, and evacuated the wounded. "It seems like only yesterday we were there on D-Day," said Rice. "It's something you would never forget. At the time, I was happy to be able do what I had to."

AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AGENCY PRESENTS

VETERANS IN BLUE

VOLUME V

Photo by Airman 1st Class Jeffrey Parkinson

KENNETH RODRIGUEZ

BIOGRAPHY

Colonel (Ret.) Kenneth Rodriguez received his commission from the Air Force Academy in 1980 and began his career as an aircraft maintenance officer. Rodriguez served in the F-117 stealth fighter development program while it was still a "black project," and later as a military advisor in El Salvador. In 1989, Rodriguez cross trained into combat control after learning about the Air Force's own "special forces." For the next 20 years he served as a special tactics officer, and was included in the first waves of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. He was also vice commander of the 23rd Air Force which stood up at Hurlburt Field, Florida, in 2008. He finished his career as the U.S. Military Group commander in Honduras. Following his retirement, Rodriguez spent two years as a Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) instructor at Pensacola High School, eventually transitioning into a volunteer instructor position so he could stay at home with his children. With his experience as a special tactics officer, Rodriguez is able to coordinate and plan a five-day summer leadership school for JROTC cadets at Hurlburt Field. Rodriguez's Air Force pride stems from his many opportunities to serve with, "great Americans for a great cause."

AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AGENCY PRESENTS

VETERANS IN BLUE

VOLUME V

Photo by Staff Sergeant Corey Hook

JERRY ROSS

BIOGRAPHY

Colonel (Ret.) Jerry Ross is a 28-year Air Force veteran and former NASA astronaut. He began his career as a cadet at Purdue University and received his commission in 1970. He earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees in mechanical engineering before entering the Air Force in 1972. In 1979, Ross was assigned to the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center as a payload officer and flight controller. A year later, Ross's service took him out of this world when he was selected as an astronaut. He went on to fly seven U.S. space shuttle missions and shares an individual world record for the most spaceflights flown. Both his number of space walks and time on space walks are some of the highest among NASA astronauts. He is one of only three NASA astronauts to support the U.S. Space Shuttle Program from it's first launch through its final landing. Before retiring in 2001, Ross flew in 21 different types of aircraft. During Ross's service he earned two Defense Superior Service Medals, the Air Force Legion of Merit, four Defense Meritorious Service Medals, the National Intelligence Medal of Achievement, and 15 NASA Medals. After the Air Force he earned a private pilot's license and logged more than 4,100 flying hours. Today, Ross's work mostly keeps him on terra firma. He travels with his wife and speaks to school children – inspiring them to believe that "the sky is the limit."

AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AGENCY PRESENTS

VETERANS IN BLUE

VOLUME V

Photo by Airman First Class Krystal Ardrey

ROBERT RUPP

BIOGRAPHY

Master Sergeant (Ret.) Robert Rupp joined the Air Force in 1984, spending his first 12 years as a medical service specialist. Rupp then retrained into radiology, ultimately becoming a first sergeant for the last three years of his enlistment. While in the Air Force he was stationed at bases in Florida, North Carolina and Texas. He also deployed to Panama for Operation Just Cause and to Saudi Arabia for Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Rupp said his favorite assignment was at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, because of how much he was able to travel with his family. One of his fondest memories is when his father, who served in the Air Force for 28 years, was able to re-enlist him in the back of a C-130. The main highlight of Rupp's career was the three years he spent as a first sergeant. "It was a goal of mine as a young Airman … I just knew that was the thing for me," Rupp said. After retiring from the Air Force he went on to become the CEO of Harris Hospital in Newport, Arkansas. He attributes his success to the skills and training he learned while in the Air Force and highly recommends that all Airmen take advantage of all opportunities they can to pursue higher education.

AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AGENCY PRESENTS

VETERANS IN BLUE

VOLUME V

Photo by Staff Sergeant Kevin Linuma

DANIEL SCHAELER

BIOGRAPHY

Master Sergeant (Ret.) Daniel Schaeler is a 24-year Air Force veteran who served from 1987 - 2011. He learned to speak fluent Japanese while stationed in Japan for more than 13 years at air bases in Yokota, Kadena and Misawa. While at Misawa in 2011, he volunteered to use his language skills to help the Red Cross with their recovery efforts, providing aid to casualties during the aftermath of the worst earthquake in Japan's history. The devastating tremor measured 9.0 on the Richter scale and killed more than 15,000 people. "It was very sad to witness the destruction of one of the worst natural disasters in history. But I was glad I could show the Japanese people, who were affected by this tragic event, that we as American Airmen could help them in the small way we could." Schaeler praised the Air Force by stating, "It taught me to respect and appreciate freedom and the United States of America because freedom is not free. I was proud to help fight for freedom around the world as a member of the United States Air Force." Schaeler currently works as a nuclear quality assurance inspector for the British Aerospace Subsidiary in New Braunfels, Texas.

AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AGENCY PRESENTS

VETERANS IN BLUE

VOLUME V

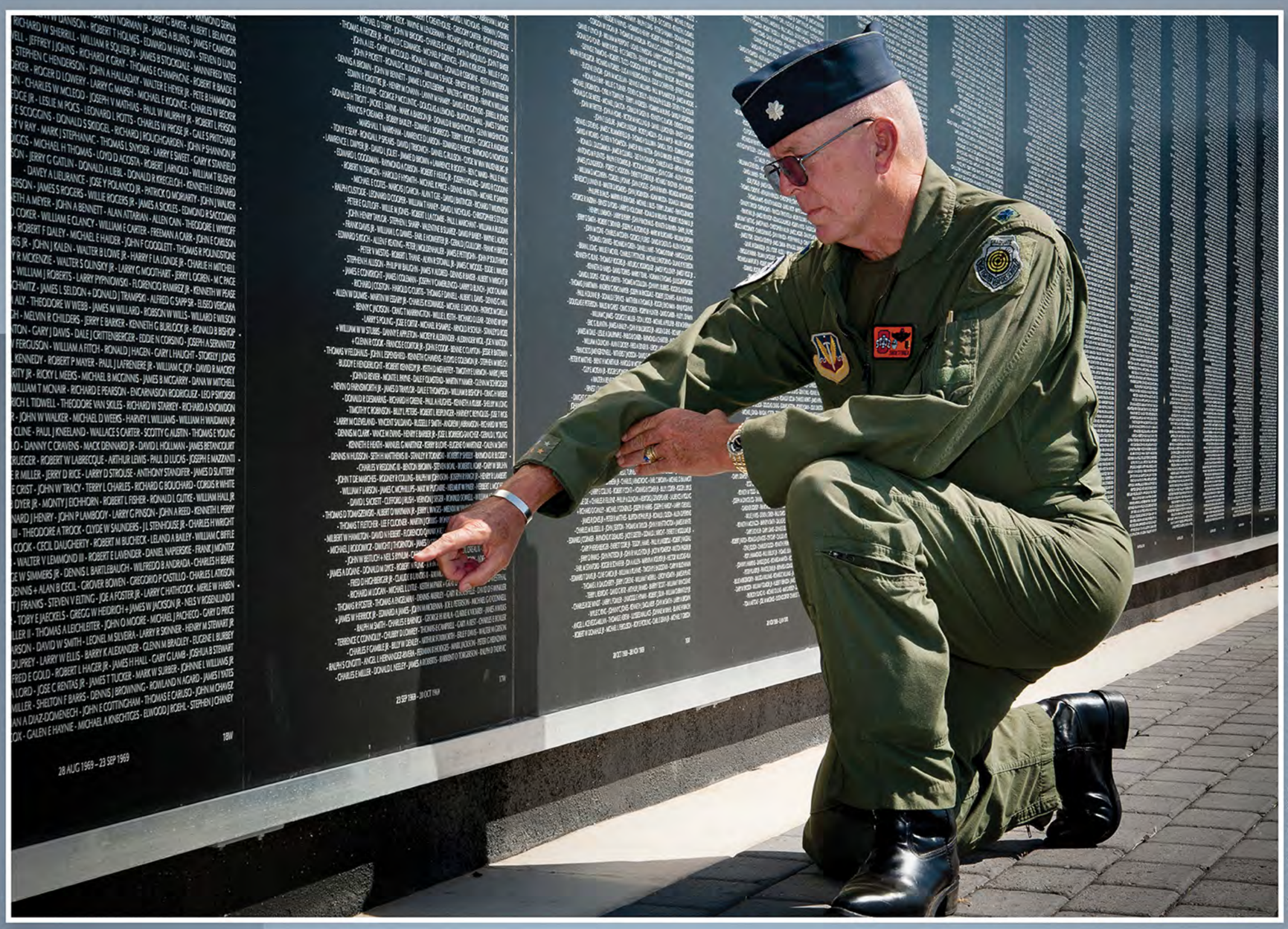

Photo by Staff Sergeant James Bolinger

BILL SCHWERTFEGER

BIOGRAPHY

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Bill Schwertfeger was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Air Force through the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) in 1967. After completing undergraduate pilot training at Vance Air Force Base, Oklahoma, Schwertfeger became an F-4 Phantom II pilot systems operator at Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand. Schwertfeger located targets in North Vietnam and directed other fighters to the targets. He was shot down on 16 February, 1972, by a Russian SA2 missile. He and his weapons systems officer were captured and sent to the Hanoi Hilton. He was a Prisoner of War (POW) for 407 days. He continuously resisted torture and worked with new POWs, teaching them to communicate, resist and survive. He returned to the United States in 1973. Prior to his retirement in 1988, he served in a variety of fighter pilot positions, ultimately upgrading to the F-15 Strike Eagle. Schwertfeger's time as a POW gave him a desire to give back by speaking to military and civilian audiences about his faith, patriotism, sense of service and determination to succeed. He has taught leadership classes at several universities and regularly visits with student pilots. His message is, "Freedom is not Free" with an emphasis on duty, honor, faith and leadership.