

CMSAF James Cody discusses ISR capabilities with a pilot from the 99th Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron in Southwest Asia.

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USAF photos by TSgt. Christina M. Styer

Asked if he ever imagined himself as the highest ranking enlisted airman, Cody confessed he'd had a fleeting image of himself as Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force when he was in basic training, but quickly dismissed the notion as "probably unlikely just for sheer numbers'" sake.

The most important lesson he's taken with him from the earliest years of his career is the importance of treating airmen properly. This has served him well with superiors and subordinates alike. "It has nothing to do with rank or position. ... This is a person who has decided to serve their nation and our Air Force; they have earned basic respect to be treated with dignity and that's how I treat everybody—regardless," said Cody. As a young airman he was most inspired by leaders who spoke respectfully, even to their subordinates. As the highest ranking enlisted person in the Air Force, Cody said the most "fundamental thing to leadership is dignity and respect."

The force seems to embrace this concept. Asked how airmen had adapted to the end of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" rules prohibiting homosexuals from openly serving in the US military, Cody said it has not been an issue. Airmen treat their peers with dignity and respect, he said at the Air Force Association's Air Warfare Symposium in Orlando, Fla., in February.

Barely a week into the job, Cody flew with the Chief of Staff to visit airmen at several bases in Southwest Asia. From his vantage point, what inspired him the most was seeing the "commitment, dedication, and focus" of the airmen deployed and serving abroad. "We had a glimpse of that" speaking with airmen at each base along the way from Afghanistan to the Middle East, he said afterward.

Hands-on Leadership

The Air Force is at a pivotal juncture—facing the end of combat operations in Afghanistan and bringing changes for airmen, necessitating decisive leadership, Welsh emphasized in explaining his choice of Cody. He said that selecting the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force was quite possibly the most important decision he will make as Chief of Staff.

Welsh said he picked Cody for his "hands-on leadership" style, among other qualities. "People describe him as smart, talented, articulate, poised, and it won't take you long to figure out why they feel that way," said Welsh.

"I bring a very holistic approach to what we're going to do. We're going to make some decisions," Cody said, underscoring



LEADING the Air Force's enlisted ranks as the 17th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force is "family business" for CMSAF James A. Cody, who assumed the weighty responsibility at a ceremony at JB Andrews, Md., in January. These are no idle words coming from Cody. He met his wife at Keesler AFB, Miss., in tech school. They were training to become air traffic controllers, and the two of them spent their entire careers together in uniform. He and Athena, who is now a retired chief master sergeant, were both sent to Ramstein AB, Germany, on their first assignment where they got married and had their first child, now an airman at JB Charleston, S.C.

"Our story is different, because we grew up together in our Air Force; we did the same career field together for 20 years," Cody said of himself and his wife, in an interview in February, three weeks into his new job at the Pentagon. "My family is knee-deep in this and has been our whole lives, so what we do and how we think about things is very much influenced and shaped by that life experience."

Cody began his uniformed career in 1984 and has served most of his 28 years as an air traffic controller, filling every slot from tower boss to ATC functional manager at Air Combat Command. Before replacing CMSAF James A. Roy in his current post, Cody was command chief master sergeant for Air Education and Training Command at JBSA-Randolph, Tex.

At every step along the way, "Cody's love of airmen is what leaps off the pages of his record," said Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III, in introducing Cody during his appointment ceremony at Andrews on Jan. 24.

The new Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force has his eye on preserving airmen's long-term strength.

IEF CODY

By Aaron M. U. Church, Associate Editor

his antipathy for endless study with no action. "Sometimes it's OK to make a decision and then realize later that it wasn't the best decision and you adjust, versus waiting forever," he said. He later elaborated that many issues need to be resolved within six months. If a subject takes longer than that to study, the Air Force may be going about it the wrong way.

The first big decisions—preparing for a drawdown in Afghanistan—are already at the doorstep. After 12 years of combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, many younger airmen have spent their entire career in the Air Force at war. "The challenge for our airmen is going to be [that] for the majority of them, they know nothing but this," Cody acknowledged.

Over the past decade-plus, the demands of deployments, Stateside training, professional development, and other requirements on airmen's time have grown continuously. The cumulative pressure on some within the force has gotten to the point where "it's just not feasible to maintain a family or have a healthy life," said Cody. In time of need, airmen have always risen to the challenge, but Cody is worried that the strain of such a high level of commitment "over an extended period of time" is proving "just too great."

He later said at the symposium that the force has been at war for so long, for some airmen there is no "normal" but wartime operations. The Air Force will have to stay on top of its airmen to ensure they keep their "work/life balance" in sync. Many airmen are so motivated they can drive themselves to the breaking point mentally or with their families.

The focus of his tenure will come down to one key question, said Cody. That is: "How do we create this community within our Air Force where our airmen will step up and continue to step up and serve ... but not do it in a way that is destructive to their ability to have a family and a life?"

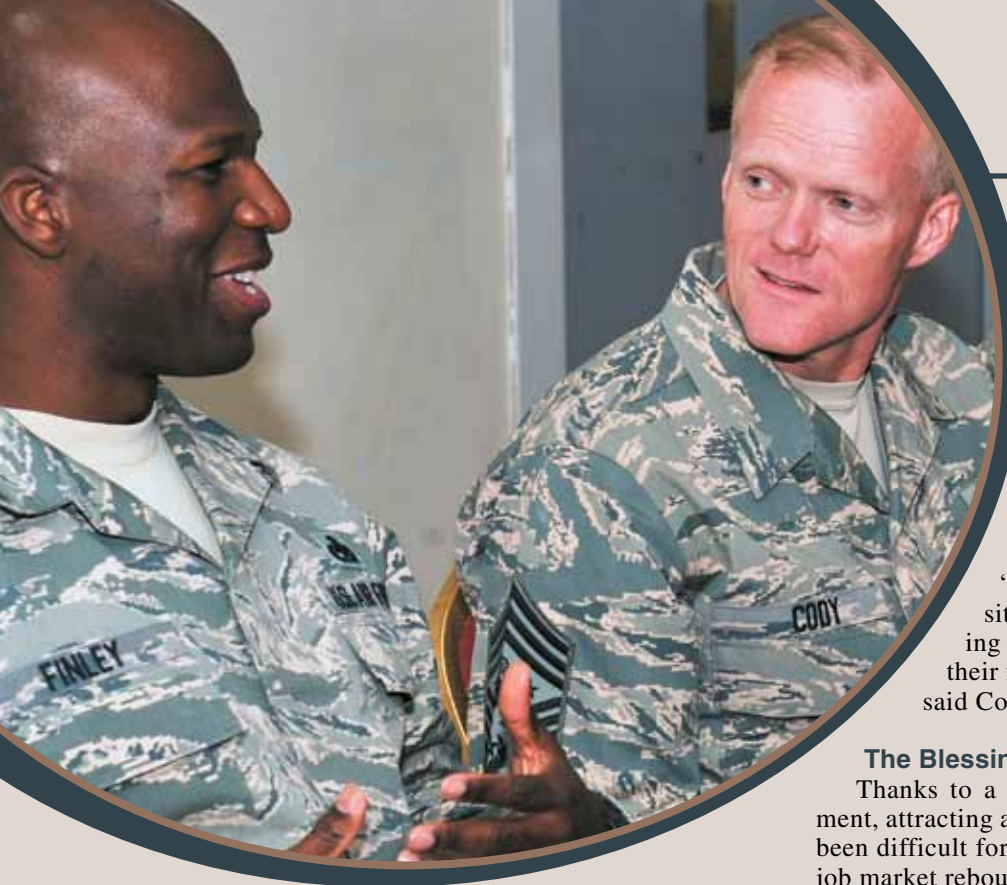
More-senior airmen "have been around a little bit longer; we know what the Cold War was like," he continued. "We know a military posture that was primarily just training," he said. As the US redefines its strategic goals and force posture post Afghanistan, "it's going to be different and it's going to be shifting of missions, shifting of focus," Cody said.

The drawdown will initially be good for airmen, providing some—"and I say some," he stressed—the chance for a well-needed rest.

In specialties such as pararescue or explosive ordnance disposal, demand for airmen's skills is "still so great we can't meet the requirements," he said. As these airmen leave Afghanistan they'll probably redeploy "to some other region," admitted Cody. The Air Force must take care not to "burn out" certain career fields.



Cody greets A1C Geston Gordon and his military working dog, Djule. The new Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force says treating all airmen with respect is key.



Cody chats with SMSgt. Jeffery Finley during a dinner with airmen.

USAF photos by TSgt. Christina M. Styer

States Air Force to help airmen and their families as they come back from war,” said Cody, adding that USAF is already doing “great things” in this regard.

With as many programs as the service already has, Cody said the near-term concern is making certain airmen and their families “know what those resources are and take advantage of them.” This hasn’t always proved easy. “I think what is encouraging from where I sit is that there is really pretty much nothing that we won’t do to help our airmen and their families, if we’re aware of the problem,” said Cody.

The Blessing of the Bad Economy

Thanks to a sluggish economy and high unemployment, attracting and retaining good quality recruits hasn’t been difficult for the Air Force in recent years. When the job market rebounds, things will get more difficult, Cody said. With jobs scarce, the Air Force has offered people the opportunity to make money doing something meaningful that also benefits their country. “When that changes—and that will change—we have to be very cognizant of the fact that people may decide to go do something else because the demands and sacrifices we’ve asked from them for such a long period of time are not reasonable,” he commented.

To confront this, he plans to comprehensively review what USAF is requiring of airmen, to make certain the demands

For the rest, the probable transition to peacetime training will require leaders to re-evaluate what they’re asking of airmen, to keep them engaged and motivated.

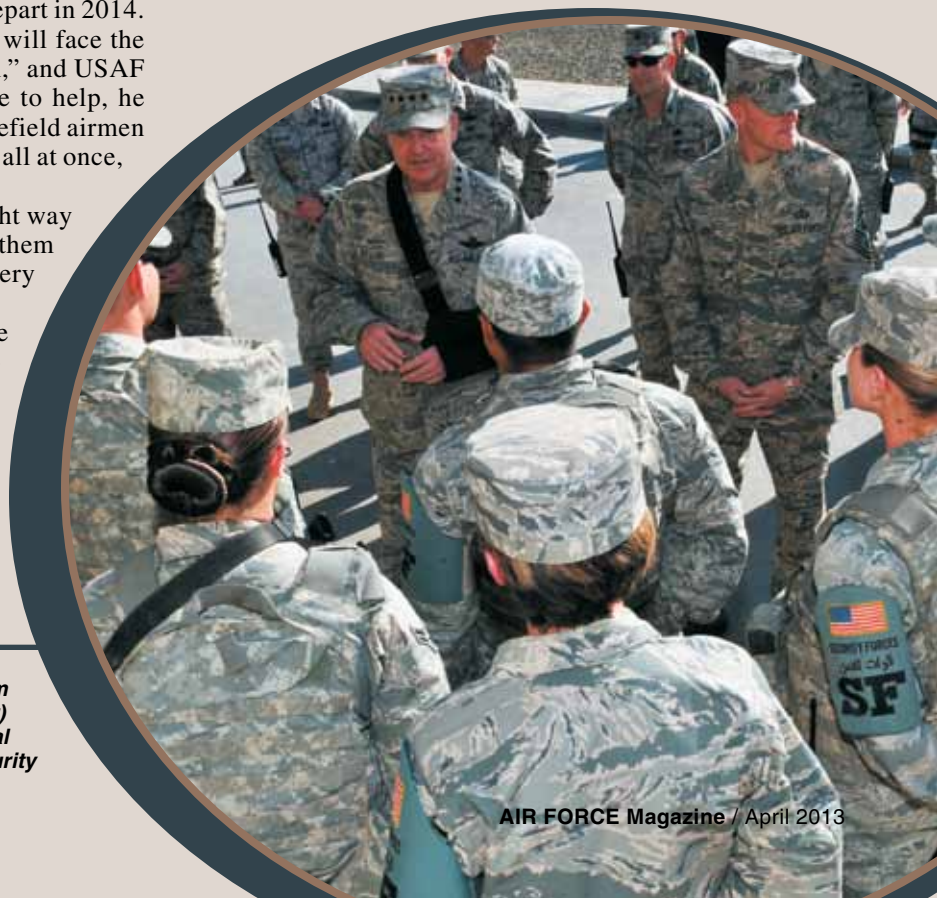
Though combat is drawing to a close, Afghanistan will continue to be a significant part of many airmen’s experience. From airlift and logistics to tactical air control on the ground, “we provide a capability that stays in place to almost the very end,” said Cody. In his opinion, this means USAF advisors, logistics, and support will linger on in Afghanistan even after combat forces depart in 2014.

When airmen finally do come home, they will face the fresh challenge of adapting to a “new normal,” and USAF will commit whatever resources it can spare to help, he stated. As the war winds down and more battlefield airmen with injuries and post-traumatic stress return all at once, this will become an even bigger issue.

“We are trying to figure out what is the right way to reintegrate families—how do we give them time to decompress from what is arguably a very compressed environment,” he said.

Adding to this is the fact that many of the psychological effects of combat won’t manifest themselves until much later. This means when the long-term effects become clearer, the Air Force will need to be vigilant to adapt its support.

“Part of this is, we don’t know everything that we need to know,” he pointed out. Going forward, though, “there is commitment from every level of leadership in the United



USAF Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh III (l)—whom the new Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (r) accompanied on a visit to bases in the US Central Command area of responsibility—speaks to security forces airmen there.

Outgoing CMSAF James Roy tacks the chevrons on the sleeve of Cody at a transition and retirement ceremony at JB Andrews, Md., in January.

USAF photo by Jim Varhegyi



it places on them are both reasonable and mission essential; he suspects many currently are not. It may mean reducing how often airmen are required to attend training away from home, or even whether certain qualifications are required for a given job, but “that’s what you’ll see me focus on,” said Cody.

In today’s climate of budgetary uncertainty, the one sure thing is that the Air Force will have fewer training dollars and resources to go around. This makes prioritizing training and cutting unnecessary requirements just as important from a resource stewardship standpoint as it is for airmen and families, Cody explained. Since airmen are probably already aware of what requirements are a needless burden, Cody said USAF plans to solicit their feedback as part of its “holistic” approach to balancing resources and requirements.

“We need to understand what is it that they are being asked to do that clearly doesn’t need to be done.” The service needs to stop spending airmen’s time and USAF money on it, emphasized Cody. “We’re looking for them to tell us what we shouldn’t be doing anymore. ... They have the best vantage point.”

Setting more reasonable demands also means taking a more personal look at what is asked of an individual airman. There isn’t enough manpower to cut deployments—especially in high-demand careers—but there are other measures the Air Force can take to prevent burnout, Cody acknowledged. “I don’t want to step out there and say we’re going to change dwell rates, because we’re probably not. ... There’s just no capability to do that.”

Instead, the Air Force may contemplate extenuating family and personal circumstances in conjunction with the usual deployment metrics. The extent to which airmen are stretched depends not only on their particular career field but also on events in their lives—possibly combat wounds on a previous deployment or the loss of a family member back home.

“Every airman has a story. We need to understand their story,” said Cody. “At any given moment, Airman X could not be the airman to go, even though they would be next to go” in the rotational deployment cycle. To keep good people in the force, Cody said the Air Force needs to be thinking more individually about airmen, above and beyond the tactical and strategic needs of the force. “That airman has a story that would say that this is the right or wrong time,” he explained.

Though the details have yet to be hammered out, Cody said that both Welsh and Air Force Secretary Michael B. Donley encourage this approach and fully back the effort to exercise more personalized judgment in the tasking of airmen. “We’re not necessarily appreciating what we’re asking the individual airman to do” day in and day out over the course of years, he said.

On the other hand, Cody admitted the Air Force has also had trouble communicating expectations to airmen. And when airmen have faltered or had

moral failings, USAF didn’t always hold them properly accountable. The service intends to change this.

The problem was highlighted by the well-publicized sexual abuse of trainees by instructors at basic training, he said. Cody went to lengths to dispel notions that the Air Force has suffered a moral slump, stressing instead that airmen need better education and clearer expectations beyond simple task-level directives.

“I think they’re the kind of airmen I’m looking for already; I think we just have to develop them,” said Cody. He believes the average airman has “very high moral character” and that the “reprehensible” actions of a few hardly characterize today’s force.

He was also quick to add that recent scandals and the rise in sexual assault within the ranks underline that “we have to put some more focus” on moral development. “We will do everything we can to establish the right environment, ensure our airmen and their families understand what the expectation is, and that’s what we’re doing,” he summed up.

Cody conceded this is easier said than done. He called the varied societal cross-section within the force a “huge strength” but said it poses an immense challenge to forging common identity and values.

“The problem in the future” is establishing a “culture that’s built on our Air Force core values,” to both achieve the mission and uphold the honor of the service, he said. It “comes down to dignity and respect—how we treat each other and how airmen view each other.”

Speaking during the transfer of leadership ceremony at Andrews, Cody said there are few areas in life where you “get something for nothing.” He summed up his commitment by saying that the Air Force will “continue investing in the development of our airmen in the most deliberate way possible,” calling airmen the service’s most important asset.

“We need to protect them by making sure they know how to deal with the stress that comes in the military life. ... We will focus on strengthening relationships, taking care of one another, and holding each other more accountable for measuring up to the high standard demanded of every airman,” he concluded.

Giving his advice to airmen today, he recommended the same path he followed in becoming Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force: “Do the best job you can.” This doesn’t mean doing a perfect job, but “if you keep working hard, ... our Air Force will recognize that,” he promised. ■

