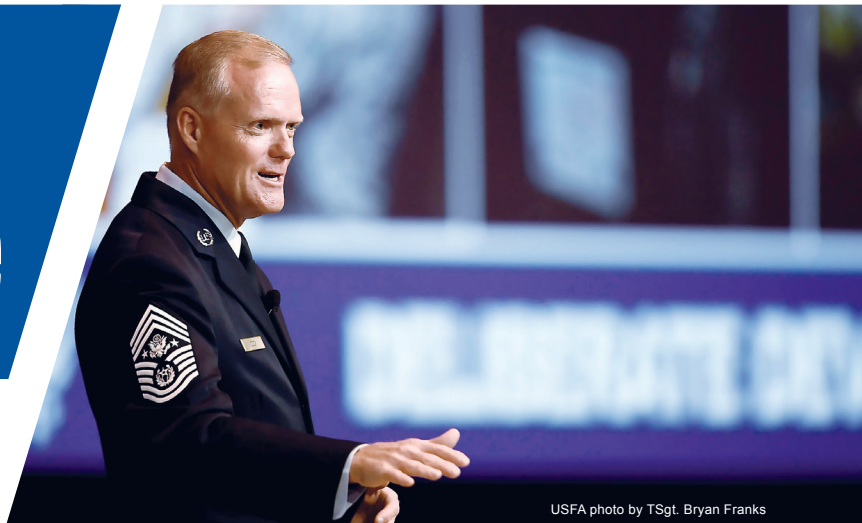


The Hard Knock Life

By June L. Kim, Associate Editor



USFA photo by TSgt. Bryan Franks



USAF photo by SRA. Justyn M. Freeman



USAF photo by TSgt. Miguel Lara III

CMSAF James Cody cautioned that airmen must be resilient because they will never have it easy.

Uncertainty will always be a part of serving in the Air Force, so airmen must stay flexible and adaptable, USAF's top enlisted airman said during AFA's 2016 Air, Space & Cyber Conference at National Harbor, Md., in September. CMSAF James A. Cody, making his last AFA address before retirement, pressed airmen to remain resilient.

Asked when USAF will ever get a break from having to do "more with less," Cody said airmen have to put their workload in perspective. The service is the smallest it has ever been, and the work-life balance, he said, "is not about an even scale. It'll fluctuate."

While Air Force leaders at every level must acknowledge the hardships airmen are facing, Cody chided the unknown questioner, saying, "It's a

little bit unfair to just sit there and [ask], 'When does it stop?' ... It stops when the nation tells us they need us to stop doing the business for the nation."

Senior leaders "don't just sit up in the Air Staff and think about new things to have people do," he said. "Quite the contrary. We try to balance that workload based on the requirements."

THE RIGHT BALANCE

He added his regret that "do more with less" has become a modern epithet in the military, "because it really just puts the wrong connotation" on the expectations of airmen, he said.

"We have to look [at] how reasonable and sustainable that is over time and then figure out the right balance," he said. "Heck, yeah, we do a lot more today," Cody observed, "but we have a lot more assets at our fingertips to

Clockwise from left: TSgt. Rene Garcia puts a panel back on an F-16 during phase maintenance at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. CMSAF James Cody speaks at AFA's Air, Space & Cyber Conference in September. His presentation focused on taking care of airmen at all levels. SSgt. Kory Stanton goes over forms during a preflight check for a B-2 at Andersen AFB, Guam.

be able to do a lot more." Airmen 30 years ago put in the same number of hours that airmen do today, he noted.

Cody said USAF leaders have moved to reduce additional duties, to give back to airmen what Chief of Staff Gen. David L. Goldfein called "white space on their calendars."

Goldfein and Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James said they eliminated or reduced 29 of 61 additional duties that have accumulated for airmen during the past several years. Though



USAF photo by A1C Christopher Dyer



USAF photo by SSgt. Shawn Nickel

the additional duties were introduced to reduce administrative burdens, “we have heard your concern and frustration,” wrote James and Goldfein in an August memo. The added tasks “affect our ability to focus on core missions, which in turn impacts our readiness,” they wrote, saying that this move was just the “first step in this initiative” to reduce the workload of airmen.

Two specific areas of additional duties getting focus are ancillary training and computer-based training, Cody told reporters at the conference. These two areas affect every airman and “I’m optimistic that the review of the ancillary training and CBT will

produce a greater net effect on the majority of airmen,” he said.

To reduce people shortages in critical specialties, the Air Force announced changes in April to allow airmen to cross-train from less-critical career fields into those in high demand. Cody told reporters at the conference that though retraining is targeted by grade, “the rank isn’t the job.”

While he would ideally want midlevel airmen for these specialty switches, they must have some experience in the field they want to cross-train into. In the maintenance field, Cody said, “I need them to be a staff sergeant or tech sergeant, ... experienced in maintenance.”

Cross-training from a support-type field might be more difficult. For example, if a staff sergeant or tech sergeant specializing as a medical technician wants to cross-train to maintenance, “well, that’s great,” Cody said, “but they can’t perform as a seven-level or even a five-level.” They would have to start as “a three-level, get the five-level upgrade, [and] get the experience.”

ESSENTIAL EDUCATION

The important thing is that airmen are able to do the job, he said.

Cody wants to steer clear of potential situations where NCOs in their new specialty find themselves in “a leadership role based on their rank, but they don’t have the experience or credibility in that career field.”

Education, Cody insisted, is “absolutely essential to the future of our Air

Left: SrA. Jason Watson, a crew chief, cleans the landing gear and wheels of an F-16 before a sortie during Red Flag-Alaska at Eielson AFB. Above: SrA. Kristine Thomas, a loadmaster, prepares to marshal a C-17 during a Patriot Warrior exercise at Volk Field ANGB, Wis., in August.

Force,” and “we have elevated leaps and bounds [from] where it was.”

“We have redesigned basic military training,” restructured professional military education into sequenced courses in airmanship, and now, there are “credentialing opportunities online ... [for] every one of our primary career fields,” he said. Next year, the Community College of the Air Force will have graduated more than a half-million airmen since 1972.

Enlisted airmen are “educated in their technical career fields, and that validates what they need to be a professional airman and the things [that] we do for our nation,” he said. “We should be proud of that.”

Cody reported that USAF is working to do better in supporting those with exceptional family members—those who require special housing, medical attention, education, and financial support—but it will take time to reshape the bureaucracy in this regard.

“There’s been a significant amount of effort to try to get this right,” but it must be done as a defensewide effort, he said. If it’s not done together with other military service leaders, one or more will get out of step with the others. He promised that USAF would not let go of this initiative. ✪