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SUBJECT: ACADEMIES AND PRIMARY LEVEL PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION

STATEMENT OF: COLONEL STEPHEN M. TANOUS
COMMANDANT OF SQUADRON OFFICER COLLEGE
AIR UNIVERSITY, MAXWELL AFB, ALABAMA

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The Squadron Officer College (SOC) is an educational institution committed to the development of the Air Force's Company Grade Officers. Founded in 2000 to centralize management of Air Force Basic Developmental Education – professional military education for lieutenants and captains, it is comprised of two schools, the Air and Space Basic Course (ASBC) for second lieutenants, and the Squadron Officer School (SOS) for captains at the five-to-seven-year point in their careers. As part of a single college dedicated to the development of the Air Force's junior officers, SOS, and ASBC are able to share curriculum development resources, as well as a single mission support staff. This enhances efficiency and eliminates curriculum overlap between these two important, developmental programs.

SOC's curriculum is based on educational requirements established by higher headquarters. Pre-eminent in this list is the Joint Staff's Officer Professional Military Education Policy (OPMEP), prescribed in CJCSI 1800.01C. The Air Staff also levies requirements through the Institutional Competency List, as well as through the Air Force Learning Committee. Air University expands on these requirements with its Continuum of Education Strategic Guidance. Combined, SOC responds to over 140 separate learning requirements and does so with a keen eye toward achieving its vision for the future.

SOC's vision is to become the USAF's premier leadership-development institution. SOC's mission statement operationalizes its vision. SOC's mission is to develop Company Grade Officers as leaders of integrity ready to fly, fight, and win in air, space, and cyberspace. SOC achieves mission success through its two schools and the numerous educational initiatives underway. The two schools comprising SOC and the additional educational opportunities SOC offers are detailed in the following descriptions.

The Air and Space Basic Course was created to address very specific needs within the Air Force. In 1996, then CSAF Gen Ron Fogleman determined the need to develop a common bonding experience for all its newly commissioned Air Force officers and to inculcate “air-mindedness” with a clear understanding of the Air Force “family business” versus a strictly functional perspective. He envisioned an Air Force in which every officer knows and understands the important roles that air, space, and cyberspace power can play in the operational environment and is equipped to articulate and advocate those roles in order to aid joint force commanders in achieving mission success. Gen Fogleman conceived of the Air and Space Basic Course as a first, critical step in developing this level of understanding.

ASBC is a six-week, resident program consisting of two weeks of hands-on instruction in expeditionary skills specifically related to the complex requirements of warfare in an expeditionary environment, a week dedicated to building a working knowledge of officer-enlisted relationships through direct interaction between ASBC students and Senior Non-Commissioned Officer Academy students, and three weeks of classroom instruction in the Profession of Arms and Air Force doctrine. The Air Force has established a goal of 100% attendance for its line of the Air Force (LAF) officers to attend ASBC. Supporting Air Force active duty, Reserves, and National Guard officers, ASBC educates 270 to 365 students in each of the ten classes it hosts annually.

In 2007, sensitive to the dramatically changed roles Airman are fulfilling in today’s complex operational environment, then CSAF Gen Moseley directed ASBC to expand its curricular offerings to impart expeditionary skills and emphasize a warrior ethos. Branded the “ASBC Retool” effort, over 65% of the course was revised. It was improved to impart skills and knowledge relevant to the irregular warfare environment our Airmen face every day in their

deployed locations, while at the same time inculcate a culture that comprehends and embraces the sacrifices necessary to support and execute operations from bare-bones locations around the world in potentially hostile environments.

In addition to traditional academics, ASBC imparts expeditionary skills that are key to the officers' effectiveness and survival in today's operational environment. These include training in: Self-Aid and Buddy Care; Weapons Handling and Employment; Integrated Base Defense; Small-Unit Tactics, Improvised Explosive Device Detection and Procedures; Tactical Communications; Land Navigation; Survive, Evade, Resist, and Extract Procedures; the Proper Use of Protective Equipment; Troop Leading; Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and High-Yield Explosives Procedures; and Combatives (hand-to-hand combat).

ASBC students develop these skills under the tutelage of specially qualified enlisted and officer trainers, and execute what they have learned at two simulated deployment locations. The first of these, Blue Thunder, is a small, "tent city" that has been established on Maxwell Air Force Base. ASBC students spend much of their first week there, being indoctrinated into the skills they will need to succeed both in the course and in an expeditionary Air Force. During the second week, students participate in their combined operations activities with students from the Senior NCO Academy. Here they work together to solve complex, operational problems and interact to identify and eliminate barriers to their mutual success. In addition, students are active participants in three weeks of intense academics, emphasizing Air Force doctrine, capabilities and limitations, and the fundamentals of officership.

ASBC concludes with a second simulated deployment to a location called Vigilant Warrior, a 200+ acre remote site located some 30 miles northeast of Maxwell. There ASBC

students demonstrate what they have learned through a series of operational exercises they must complete successfully in order to graduate.

The “Retool” effort is in its final stages and has already produced graduates that are arriving to their first assignments significantly more deployment-ready, motivated, and empowered with the skills and knowledge to support their commanders both at home and abroad.

ASBC celebrated its tenth anniversary just last year, and graduated its 30,000th student last month. The school represents the Air Force’s commitment to the development of its most valuable resources, its people – an investment in the junior officers of today who will become the air, space, and cyberspace power leaders of tomorrow. It is a critical first step in the professional military education of the Air Force’s officer corps.

The next step in that professional development of a company grade officer is the second of SOC’s educational programs, Squadron Officer School. SOS is unquestionably a leadership school. The resident program is five weeks long and employs a wide variety of academic and experiential offerings to develop caring, confident leaders of integrity for the Air Force. A typical SOS class consists of some 420 Air Force active duty, Guard and Reserve officers, as well as a handful of rank-equivalent Air Force civilians. In addition, three of the seven classes executed each year host some forty international officers from partner nations who enroll their O-3 equivalents in the SOS resident course. Although SOS offers an outstanding educational opportunity, the additional benefits its students derive through interaction with others outside of their specialties and with different sets of experiences and perspectives are absolutely phenomenal; the relationships that result is one of the major strengths of the program.

The Air Force established goal is for 80% of LAF officers to attend SOS; however, a distance learning version of SOS is available for those LAF, reserve component and/or civilian

equivalents who are unable to attend in residence. A revised version of the SOS distance learning was launched in early March 2009. Already boasting some 2,500 students, the old version – with over 6,000 students still enrolled – is being phased out now.

Although much has changed since Col Russell Ritchey founded the school almost 60 years ago, today's SOS is achieving successes that would have made him proud. SOS recently completed and enacted a 100% curriculum review designed to make the program more relevant to the needs of today's Air Force officers. Designed around Avolio and Bass' Full-Range Leadership (Transformational-Transactional) model, SOS is encouraging its students to reach their full leadership potential through a four-phased approach to personal development. Beginning with introspection, SOS forces its students to consider their strengths and weaknesses as leaders and to design a program of personal growth for execution throughout the curriculum and beyond. Building on this, its students are next introduced to the first tier of leadership, leading within teams. Here, the students study the keys to effective teambuilding, coaching, and mentoring, and begin learning about the tools they will use to recognize and motivate their charges throughout their Air Force careers.

In the next phase of instruction, students study the role of the company grade officer leader within the US Air Force. They study the interaction of the leader and society – ways in which officers are affected by and, in turn, can influence society. SOS looks, in particular, at the influences wielded through social networking tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, etc.

In the third phase of instruction, the school takes a broader stance, looking at the officer leader within the US military. Here students study the complexities of modern warfighting within the joint and coalition environment. The course concludes with a look toward the

strategic face of modern operations, addressing cross cultural competency, regional security issues, and debating issues of relevance to the Air Force's operational future.

These academic pursuits, combined with robust physical training and a number of experiential activities held at field locations and within the classrooms, mark SOS as an innovator in professional military education, well on its way to achieving the vision of being a leadership center of excellence for the US Air Force. Already, since embarking upon this journey to enhance its educational offerings, SOS has sparked interest in its academic counterparts across the country, including the University of Texas, Michigan State, and Kansas State Universities.

In the Air Force, an officer will remain at the company grade level for a period of roughly nine years: four years as a lieutenant and five years as a captain. Between ASBC and SOS, SOC provides eleven weeks of instruction to our junior officers during this period. In recognition of the growing complexity of today's national security environment, the Air Force has made a commitment to provide additional development opportunities over this period of an officer's career to match the increasing responsibilities and challenges they will face over that extended time span. SOC will fulfill these requirements with a series of specially targeted, voluntary developmental offerings it calls the Company Grade Officer Leadership Program (CGOLP).

The CGOLP is a collection of five courses designed to provide focused content to meet specific developmental needs as CGOs progress through their careers. They address everything from the basics of officership ("*CGO Development: Foundations of Officership*"), to the unique responsibilities of being a flight commander ("*Flight Commander: Team Building Leadership*"), to the special requirements of deployments ("*Expeditionary Leadership: Military Operations in Intercultural Contexts*"), to the specific resource-management skills crucial to CGOs' success

(“*Organizational Leadership*”). The distance learning SOS course is the fifth and final course in the CGOLP line-up.

The revised SOS distance learning course was launched in early March 2009. The remainder will launch this summer. The courses were developed in both a self-paced version that students can complete via an online learning management system, and a facilitated version. The facilitated version will permit qualified faculty members or contract instructors to guide interactive sessions, supervise student projects, and grade exam papers in order to reinforce student learning and maximize critical thinking. These facilitated versions are also being offered up as SOC’s contributions to a proposed expansion of the Air Command and Staff College’s Online Master’s Degree Program (OLMP). Combined, the courses of the CGOLP offer targeted developmental opportunities commensurate with specific milestones in a young officer’s career.

Other specifically targeted developmental opportunities have been created within SOC itself, aimed at the creation and preservation of one of the finest military faculties in the US military education system. These courses and activities comprise SOC’s faculty development program.

With an annual turnover of roughly one-third of this faculty, SOC understands it must make a robust investment in its faculty education and training in order to achieve the high standards it has set for instruction. This spring, a working group met to devise a complete faculty development program, intended to recruit, orient, train, educate, and evaluate SOC’s faculty in order to ensure the best possible learning experience for the college’s students. The results are impressive. In addition to new recruitment guidelines, a thorough orientation prior to the new faculty member’s arrival, and three in-house, hands-on courses to prepare faculty for teaching and curriculum development duties, SOC now boasts a robust faculty forum series of

noon time, faculty development sessions. These sessions are specifically devoted to curriculum related topics, teaching techniques, and topics of specific interest to our faculty. Combined, these initiatives have significantly “raised the game” of our teachers, resulting in heightened morale and glowing praise from our students.

SOC has a critical mission. It is solely responsible for the professional development of the entire Air Force officer corps for the first nine years of its service. SOC is meeting the requirements of this mission through an innovative array of programs and initiatives that combine to create a coherent and rewarding developmental experience for these young officers. SOC is justifiably proud of its talented faculty and staff members. Their innovative approaches to maximizing their limited resources – most notably the limited amount of time they have with these students – coupled with their perseverance to achieve success in each of their endeavors has underscored their commitment to their students. The students’ comments capture it all: SOC is on the right trajectory to reach its goal of becoming the Air Force’s premiere leadership development institution.