



Retiring Lackland chief comes full circle

by Patrick Desmond
37th Training Wing Public Affairs

2/5/2009 - **LACKLAND AIR FORCE BASE, Texas** - After 31 years of service, Chief Master Sgt. Kevin Ludwig, superintendent of the Air Force's Basic Military Training, is hanging up his Airman Battle Uniform in the same place he first put on the old blue fatigues back in 1978.

"All I can do is smile when I think about it," Chief Ludwig, 737th Training Group, said. "To sit here and look onto those parade grounds and think about the times I stood out there as an Airman, as a trainee, as a younger instructor and now to watch these Airmen graduate on a Friday knowing they are going to step up and replace us."

The chief came through the Gateway to the Air Force a trainee in the 3709th Basic Military Training Squadron, but the boy in him from Lockport, Ill remembers wanting to join the service years prior.

"In 1966, my second grade teacher said, 'cut out a picture of what you want to be when you grow up and write a paragraph on it,'" the St. Joseph Catholic Grade School alum said. "I cut out a picture of a sailor because my dad had done a tour in the Navy, and I wrote a paragraph about wanting to be in the service. And I held on to that. You might say that dream is coming to a close, but it's coming to a close 40-something years later."

Living the dream, Chief Ludwig encompassed varying positions climbing the ranks, from his first position, fleet manager in the 92nd Transportation Squadron, to his last, Superintendent of Air Force's Basic Military Training, with stops in places such as Hawaii, Japan and the Pentagon along the way.

Many changes have occurred since Chief Ludwig donned blue cotton fatigues and chukka boots; having served during the Cold War, and participated in the Gulf and Iraq wars, he is impressed with the evolution of the modern Air Force.

"I started off in a Cold War Air Force; I started off in an Air Force that probably had almost a million people. Now we are below 250,000 enlisted members," Chief Ludwig said. "I think some of the best changes have been over the last 10 years."

Listed in the Chief's greatest improvements to date are the adoption of core values, social equality, performance tests, and the Air Expeditionary Force's warrior mentality. He added, "We did the right things because now we are working in an expeditionary environment."

But most of all, he lauds the recognition of servicemembers as Airmen.

The chief recalls a time when Air Force members would stand and voice their professional expertise, but now they call out "Airmen, with a capital 'A'."

"The unifying effect the title 'Airman' and our Airmen's creed has on our Air Force is just immeasurable," he explains. "It's our identity."

From trainee to instructor to superintendent, for the success he has enjoyed through the years Chief Ludwig points to the influence of his parents and fellow Airmen.



2/2/2009 - Chief Master Sgt. Kevin Ludwig, 737th Training Group superintendant, retires after more than 30 years of service Feb. 6. (USAF photo by Robbin Cresswell)

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"You achieve success with the support of great people, whether your peers, subordinates or superiors," he said. "Nobody does it with out them."

Having transferred from Robbins AFB, Ga, to take the reins of the BMT's two-week expansion, the 737th TRG superintendent is cautious and dismissive, if not humble, when considering his imprint on future generations of Airmen.

"I view legacy with great leaders like Chief Master Sgt. Rodney McKinley or Chief Master Sgt. Robert Gaylor," the bronze star medal winner said. "Awards on a wall, ribbons on a chest, that's nice, but that goes with you when you're done. What stays forever is how you influence those around you and the core values that you have instilled in those that you've served with."

With the first 8.5-week BMT class graduating earlier this year and satisfied in a job well done, Chief Ludwig jokes, "nobody is going to see me hanging out at the Valley High Gate looking back into base."

"I'm probably not going to shed a tear at my retirement ceremony, but if the Air Force said, 'hey chief, we need you for two, three, four, five more years,' I would have done it in a minute," he said. "It isn't the money, it isn't the security of the job; it's just a pleasure to serve."

Chief Ludwig's retirement ceremony is Feb. 6 at 11 a.m. in the Chief's Room at the Basic Military Training Reception Center.

At the request of Brig. Gen. Len Patrick, Chief Ludwig will continue as the 737th Training Group superintendent until May 1.

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