

Lackland honors nine enlisted heroes

by Tech. Sgt. Ryan Mattox
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6/16/2006 - **SAN ANTONIO (AFPN)** -- **Nine enlisted heroes** earned honors for their service and sacrifice to the Air Force and the nation during the Basic Military Training Memorialization Ceremony at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

At the June 14 ceremony, the base renamed and dedicated basic military training facilities to **nine Airmen** who served in the Air Force from its beginnings in 1947 to its current operations in Southwest Asia.

The event was the highlight of a three-year project to recognize the achievements of the Air Force enlisted corps and serve as a reminder of those who helped build and shape the Air Force.

"We have been working on this for quite some time - it is an effort to recognize our enlisted heritage," said Col. Gina Grosso, 737th Training Group commander. The group is the Air Force's sole basic military training group. It consists of nine squadrons and more than 700 Airmen who handle a daily student load of more than 6,000.

"We don't do enough to celebrate our enlisted heroes who have left a tremendous legacy for us to be proud of," the colonel said. "It's really humans that make the Air Force great, not weapon systems."

Each Airman memorialized went through Air Force basic training and they were not much different than the Airmen who go through training today, the colonel said.

"They serve as tremendous inspiration to all of us," she said. "We want to be able to tell trainees these people were ordinary people who volunteer to serve their country, who really did extraordinary things."

One facility is now the Barnes Training Complex, named after fourth Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Thomas Barnes. He was the first African-American to hold the top enlisted position in the U.S. Air Force.

"It's an honor and a privilege for the Air Force to honor our father this way," said his daughter Thyra Barnes. "Of all the choices (and) other great leaders -- here my father is.

"If you knew a little about my father, he wasn't anybody of great stature when he entered the Air Force," she said. "It was all in his heart. It was his determination, his loyalty, his character and his stamina -- it was all that he put in to the Air Force."

Ms. Barnes said the Air Force was also the chief's family.

"He cuddled it, he trained and he nurtured it and that's what he did for young Airmen," she said. "I hope these young Airmen see that, too, and that is what (training instructors) are doing. They're nurturing, building a strong structure -- leadership."



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Airmen render a salute during the National Anthem at the Basic Military Training Memorialization Ceremony on Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, on Wednesday, June 14. The ceremony included the dedication of nine training facilities in honor of nine enlisted heroes who have served from World War II to present-day operations in the war on terrorism. (U.S. Air Force photo/Master Sgt. D. Scott Wagers)

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One of the base's main facilities is now the Airey Processing Center, named after Paul Airey, the first chief master sergeant of the Air Force.

"I think with this ceremony and naming this processing center after him every Airman who enters our Air Force will be able to relate to this Air Force icon," said Sam Parish, the eighth chief master sergeant of the Air Force. "If he can (affect) a few of these Airmen -- so they become as dedicated and as disciplined as he has been -- his life and this effort will have been worthwhile.

Chief Parrish said, "I am proud to be a part of this very special honor, which has been bestowed on the best friend I have in my entire life -- Paul Wesley Airey."

At the dedication Chief Airey quoted Sir Isaac Newton, who said, "If I have been able to see further, it was only because I stood on the shoulders of giants."

Chief Airey said he was proud and humbled by the honor.

"I would not be here today if I did not stand on the shoulders of giants," he said. "I am talking about the Parishes, the Murrays, the McCoy's and many of those I have known. And if I could pass onto you one thing, it's that you, too, are going to stand on the shoulders of giants as you progress in your careers."

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