

Air Force Basic Military Training at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, celebrated its 60th anniversary this year. As part of the June 14 celebration, nine basic training facilities were dedicated to nine enlisted heroes.

Chief Master Sergeant Paul W. Airey -- *Building 5725 at the 319th Training Squadron*

Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force Thomas N. Barnes -- *Building 9110 at the 322nd Training Squadron*

Tech. Sgt. John A. Chapman -- *Building 9210 at the 326th Training Squadron*

Senior Airman Jason Cunningham -- *Building 5570 at the 324th Training Squadron*

Master Sgt. Henry “Red” Erwin -- *Building 10416 at the 320th Training Squadron*

Chief Master Sgt. Richard L. Etchberger -- *Building 6275 at the 323rd Training Squadron*

Chief Master Sgt. Duane D. Hackney -- *Building 9410 at the 321st Training Squadron*

Airman 1st Class Elizabeth Nicole Jacobson -- *Building 9310 at the 319th Training Squadron*

Chief Master Sgt. Grace A. Peterson -- *Building 9085 at the 331st Training Squadron*

*1. Building 5725 at the 319th Training Squadron was dedicated to the first chief master sergeant of the Air Force -- **Chief Master Sergeant Paul W. Airey***

Chief Airey was born in New Bedford, Mass., and entered military service in 1942. He planned on joining the Navy, but an encounter with an abrasive chief petty officer sent him down the street where he enlisted in the Army Air Forces. Though he wanted to become an aerial gunner, he was trained as a B-24 radio operator with additional duty as waist gunner.

After training Chief Airey was assigned to a B-24 crew which eventually was assigned to Italy to fly missions against targets in Hungary, Germany and Austria.

In 1944, at 20, he was on a mission near Vienna, Austria. His plane was being hit with heavy flak when the pilot said “Get out.” There was no hesitation on Chief Airey’s part, he jumped. During the slow descent to the earth he took the radio code out of his pocket and tore it up, scattering it to the wind. He then calmly smoked a cigarette.

As he hit the ground, a group of farmers grabbed him and as Chief Airey recalled “beat the hell out of him.” German soldiers and police arrived and took him away. He eventually ended up at Stalag Luft IV, as a guest of the Luftwaffe for the next year. He survived a 90-day forced march from the Baltic Sea to Berlin before being liberated by the British Army in 1945.

During the Korean Conflict, he was awarded the Legion of Merit, an uncommon decoration for enlisted airmen during this era. Chief Airey became a first sergeant in 1953 and continued to be a first sergeant until he was selected to be the first Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force in 1967.

Chief Airey said, “It is pride and dedication that keep enlisted men at their posts, not the lure of an easy life and a secure future. For the dedicated airman, it is not only money or the job to be done, it is the desire to serve our country that motivates today’s Air Force.”

Some of his most important contributions were the creation of the Weighted Airman Promotion System, known as WAPS, and the establishment of the Senior NCO Academy.

Chief Airey term as CMSAF ended July 31, 1969, although he did not retire until one year later. In a sense, however, he has never left the Air Force. He served as regional director of the Air Force Sergeant Association and continues to support their programs.

He makes numerous speaking engagements, usually at leadership schools, NCO Academies, dedications, and anniversaries. He is a member of the Board of Trustees for the Airmen Memorial Museum and a member of the Air Force Memorial Foundation and the Air University Foundation.

*2. Building 9110 at the 322nd Training Squadron was dedicated to the first and only black chief master sergeant of the Air Force -- **Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force Thomas N. Barnes***

Chief Barnes was the fourth CMSAF and the first black CMSAF. He was also the first black appointed to the top enlisted position in any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces. His accomplishments during his tenure as CMSAF are of extreme importance to the enlisted force. Several of the policies he helped mold are still in place today, more than 30 years after their creation.

Chief Barnes was the first CMSAF invited to attend and participate in the chief of staff’s weekly meeting with all division chiefs. This allowed Chief Barnes to spread the chief of staff’s perspective to the enlisted men and women he visited during his travels worldwide. He also was able to bring information back rapidly from the enlisted force to the division chiefs and chief of staff directly.

Chief Barnes once said, “I was not void of information. I knew what was going on. I just think that was a crowning point for the enlisted man.”

Chief Barnes brought two major changes to the way Airmen are trained and retained: Enlisted Professional Military Education and Total Objective Plan for Career Airman Progression.

EPME was set up on a five-tier approach: NCO Leadership School, Command NCO Academy in residence and correspondence, and the Air Force SNCO Academy in residence and correspondence. The basic structure still applies in today’s EPME.

The second major change he brought forth was TOPCAP, which limited the time an enlisted member could stay in the Air Force. This helped alleviate grade stagnation brought along partially by the mass influx of personnel during the Korean War, also known as the “Korean Hump.”

Chief Barnes was a leader among his leaders and a great influence on the Air Force’s future. Shortly after his passing, current CMSAF Gerald R. Murray said, “His experience in racial relations, technical expertise and experience in both the Korean War and Vietnam clearly made him the right person to become the fourth chief master sergeant of the Air Force. His leadership paved the way for the enlisted force of the mid-’70s to begin its rise above many challenges – post-Vietnam issues, racial tensions, low standards, and drug and alcohol abuse.

"Following his retirement, he continued to lead and mentor, through many speaking engagements and visits with our Airmen. The Air Force is better today because of Chief Barnes’ dedicated service. His passion, leadership and friendship will be greatly missed.”

*3. Building 9210 at the 326th Training Squadron was dedicated to one of four Air Force Cross recipients since Vietnam War -- **Tech. Sgt. John A. Chapman***

Sergeant Chapman, a native of Springfield, Mass., was 20 when he enlisted in the Air Force on Sept. 27, 1985. From basic training, Sergeant Chapman’s first assignment as an information systems operator was to the 1987th Information Systems Squadron at Lowry AFB, Colo.

In 1989, he entered the combat controller pipeline training at Lackland. Immediately following a successful graduation from the CCT courses, his first assignment in the special tactics community was at the 1721st Combat Control Squadron, Pope AFB, N.C. Next, Sergeant Chapman spent three years at the 320th Special Tactics Squadron in Okinawa, Japan. Since Japan, he was assigned to several positions at the 24th Special Tactics Squadron.

Sergeant Chapman was a special tactics combat controller, 24th Special Tactics Squadron, Operational Team-Red, at Pope AFB. He was specially trained and equipped for immediate deployment into combat operations.

Sergeant Chapman deployed into non-permissive environments by parachute, scuba or covert infiltration to select, survey, establish and control air/land and airdrop zones. He established en route and terminal navigation equipment, ground-to-air, and point-to-point radio communications, and weather information in the target area. Sergeant Chapman was a qualified Special Operations Terminal Attack controller in the use of all close-air support aircraft delivering destructive ordnance on enemy targets.

Sergeant Chapman was posthumously awarded the Air Force Cross in 2003 for extraordinary heroism in military operations in Afghanistan on March 4, 2002, during the war on terrorism and against massed al-Qaida and Taliban forces.

On this date, Sergeant Chapman's aircraft came under heavy fire and received a direct hit from a rocket propelled grenade which caused a U.S. Navy SEAL team member to fall from the aircraft. Heavily damaged, the aircraft egressed for an emergency landing. Once on the ground, Sergeant Chapman established rescue communications while providing close air support coverage for the entire team. He then directed the gunship to begin the search for the missing team member.

Without regard for his own life, Sergeant Chapman volunteered to rescue his missing team member from an enemy stronghold. Shortly after insertion, the team made contact with the enemy. Sergeant Chapman engaged and killed two enemy personnel. He continued to advance, reaching a second enemy position, a dug-in machine gun nest. At this time the rescue team came under enemy fire from three directions.

From close range he exchanged fire with the enemy from minimum personal cover until he succumbed to multiple wounds. His advancement on the second position enabled his team to move and break enemy contact. The Navy SEAL team leader unequivocally credits Sergeant Chapman with saving the lives of the entire rescue team.

Sergeant Chapman is recognized as the highest decorated combat controller in U.S. Air Force history.

*4. Building 5570 at the 324th Training Squadron was dedicated to one of four Air Force Cross recipients since the Vietnam War -- **Senior Airman Jason Cunningham***

Sergeant Cunningham is one of 23 enlisted members ever awarded the Air Force Cross, and only the second since the Vietnam War. Of the 23 recipients 12 have been pararescuemen, whose motto is, "That Others May Live." This dedicated and heartfelt Airman was also a Sailor.

Prior to completing his four-year commitment to the Navy, he passed the physical to be a Navy SEAL. He separated from the Navy only to turn around a short time later and enlist in the Air Force to be a pararescueman because he “wanted to save people.”

He successfully graduated from a school that has a higher attrition rate higher than the SEALs and Green Berets. On March 4, 2002, 26-yearold Airman Cunningham was fatally wounded during military operations near the village of Marzak in the Paktia Province of Afghanistan.

During the Air Force Cross presentation on Sept. 13, 2002, Airman Cunningham was cited for his valor and heroic efforts while under enemy fire. According to the citation, on March 4, 2002, Airman Cunningham was the primary Air Force Combat Search and Rescue medic assigned to a Quick Reaction Force tasked to recover two American servicemen evading capture in austere terrain occupied by massed al-Qaida and Taliban forces.

Shortly before landing, his MH-47E helicopter received rocket-propelled grenade and small arms fire, severely disabling the aircraft and causing it to crash-land. The assault force formed a hasty defense and immediately suffered three fatalities and five critical casualties. Despite effective enemy fire, and at great risk to his own life, Airman Cunningham remained in the burning fuselage of the aircraft in order to treat the wounded. As he moved his patients to a more secure location, mortar rounds began to impact within 50 feet of his position.

Disregarding this extreme danger, he continued the movement and exposed himself to enemy fire on seven separate occasions. When the second casualty collection point was also compromised, in a display of uncommon valor and gallantry, Airman Cunningham braved an intense small arms and rocket-propelled grenade attack while repositioning the critically wounded to a third collection point.

Even after he was mortally wounded and quickly deteriorating, he continued to direct patient movement and transferred care to another medic. In the end, his distinct efforts led to the successful delivery of 10 gravely wounded Americans to lifesaving medical treatment.

5. Building 10416 at the 320th Training Squadron was dedicated to a Medal of Honor recipient.-- Master Sgt. Henry “Red” Erwin

Sergeant Erwin wasn't there to hear the sound of breaking glass shattering the predawn stillness at U.S. Army Headquarters in Honolulu. He didn't see his brother-in-arms nervously glancing about for military police or other officials, or the shaky hands grasping the golden star and its attached blue ribbon from the display case. It was the Medal of Honor, the only one available in the Pacific Theater of Operations. Instead, back at Guam, then-Staff Sgt. Erwin lay fighting death.

In the history of our nation's highest award, the actions were unprecedented. But so too, was the heroism of a young B-29 radioman.

On April 12, 1945, the "City of Los Angeles" was the lead B-29 in the 52nd Bombardment Squadron's attack on Koriyama, Japan. The handsome 24-year-old radioman from Alabama knew his job. This was his 10th combat mission.

"Now, Sergeant," he heard the captain speak into his headphones.

Quickly Sergeant Erwin positioned the 20-pound white phosphorus canister in its narrow chute, pulled the pin, and let it drop into the skies over Japan. Only, it didn't. In a blinding explosion of heat and light Sergeant Erwin felt his nose literally melt from his face. No one knows why, but the flare failed to clear the chute.

Within six seconds it exploded into flames, propelling itself directly into Erwin's face and falling back into the belly of the aircraft, just feet from three tons of incendiary bombs.

The billowing white smoke that made the white phosphorus such an ideal marker, now filled the entire aircraft. In the cockpit, choking on smoke and unable to see, the captain could no longer control his aircraft. The bomber lurched over and began a rapid dive toward the ground. The only question was whether the crew would die in a fiery crash or spectacular explosion.

Unable to see after catching the full force of the white phosphorus in the face, Sergeant Erwin found the burning canister by touch – at thousands of degrees Fahrenheit, it was not hard to locate. Clutching the white hot canister to his body and holding it in place with his arm, Sergeant Erwin struggled to ignore the pain while he crawled toward the cockpit.

His entire upper body was in flames. His hair completely burned away, his clothing vaporized and his face burned beyond recognition. For the crew it was no ray of hope. No man could endure the trek required to eject the lethal canister from the only available opening, a cockpit window. Added to that, the path was blocked by the navigator's table.

Somehow Sergeant Erwin managed to struggle on, clutching the flaming incendiary to his body. With unbelievable strength he tucked the canister under his arm, unlocked the obstructing table, and moved it aside. Almost 10 seconds of indescribable agony had already passed and Sergeant Erwin was only halfway to his goal.

"Open the window, open the window," Sergeant Erwin shouted to Lt. Roy Stables. Somehow the co-pilot overcame his shock at seeing the flaming Airman doing what no human being should be capable of accomplishing, and managed to open the window.

"Excuse me, sir," Sergeant Erwin said through his pain, and then launched the flaming canister to the wind before collapsing to the floor in flames.

Only 300 feet from the ground, Captain Simeral pulled the *City of Los Angeles* out of its dive to head for Iwo Jima, the nearest landing site affording medical aid. The crew turned fire extinguishers on the prostrate, burning body of Sergeant Erwin.

Through it all – the trip back and days of surgery following – Sergeant Erwin remained conscious. The doctors gave whole blood transfusions, performed internal surgery, and administered antibiotics to fight infection. For hours they labored to remove embedded white phosphorus from his eyes. The chemical spontaneously combusts when exposed to oxygen, and as each fleck of incendiary was removed it would burst into flames, torturing the Airman once again. Through it all Sergeant Erwin said there was an angel by his side saying, “Go, go, go. You can make it.”

Sergeant Erwin was flown from Guam so he could receive more complete medical attention. It was there, one week after his moment of heroism and sacrifice, that Gen. Curtis LeMay told him, “Your effort to save the lives of your fellow Airmen is the most extraordinary kind of heroism I know.” Through his bandages, Sergeant Erwin simply replied, “Thank you, sir.” Sergeant Erwin died in January 2002.

6. Building 6275 at the 323rd Training Squadron was dedicated to the first and only senior NCO to receive the Air Force Cross -- Chief Master Sgt. Richard L. Etchberger

Chief Etchberger was a ground radar superintendent team chief at Lima Site 85, a mountaintop radar site in Phou Pha Thi, Laos, when it came under attack by North Vietnamese troops in March 1968.

On March 11 that year, Chief Etchberger and four American technicians huddled on the side of a cliff, exchanging gunfire with North Vietnamese Special Forces troops. Two Americans were quickly killed, while two others were wounded.

Chief Etchberger continued to return the enemy’s fire, thus denying access to his position. He continued to direct air strikes and call for air rescue on his emergency radio, enabling the air evacuation force to locate the surrounded friendly element.

More than five hours later, an Air America (CIA-owned airline) UH-1 Huey came to a hover over the cliff. When the helicopter arrived, Chief Etchberger deliberately exposed himself to enemy fire to place his two surviving wounded comrades in the rescue sling.

When it was his turn to ride up the hoist, another surviving American (who had been hiding elsewhere on the mountain) came running toward him. Chief Etchberger grabbed the man and, bear-hugging each other, the two rode up the hoist together.

During this rescue, the Huey was strafed by enemy ground fire. As Etchberger climbed inside the helicopter, armor-piercing bullets tore through the floor of the UH-1 Huey.

Chief Etchberger was struck from below and bled to death before he reached the hospital in Thailand.

His fierce defense, which culminated in the supreme sacrifice of his life, saved not only the lives of his three comrades but provided for the successful evacuation of the remaining survivors of the base. In December 1968, Chief Etchberger's family received his posthumous Air Force Cross at a top secret ceremony held in the Pentagon. His Air Force Cross was top secret because his action in Laos, which by international treaty, was a neutral country during the Vietnam conflict, stayed top secret until declassified in 1982. Chief Etchberger's Air Force Cross became a matter of public record in 1998, 30 years after his heroic action.

7. Building 9410 at the 321st Training Squadron was dedicated to the first living recipient of the Air Force Cross and one of the Air Force's most decorated enlisted heroes -- Chief Master Sgt. Duane D. Hackney

Chief Hackney was originally from Flint, Mich. He entered Air Force basic training in June 1965 and trained as a pararescue specialist. He served three tours of duty in Vietnam and flew more than 200 combat rescue missions. It was on one of those missions, on Feb. 6, 1967, near the Mu Gia Pass in North Vietnam, where his actions resulted in him being recognized as the first enlisted recipient of the Air Force Cross.

According to the citation, Airman Second Class Hackney was involved in military operations against an opposing armed force as a paramedic on an unarmed HH-3E rescue helicopter near Mu Gia Pass, North Vietnam. He flew two sorties in a rescue effort of an American pilot downed in a heavily defended hostile area.

On the first sortie, despite the presence of armed forces known to be hostile and entrenched in the vicinity, Airman Hackney volunteered to be lowered into the jungle to search for the survivor. He searched until the controlling search and rescue agency ordered an evacuation of the rescue forces.

On the second sortie, Airman Hackney located the downed pilot, who was hoisted into the helicopter. As the rescue crew departed the area, intense 37 mm flak tore into the helicopter amidship, causing extensive damage and a raging fire aboard the craft. Airman Hackney fitted his parachute to the rescued man, choosing to place his responsibility to the survivor above his own life.

The paramedic located another parachute for himself and had just slipped his arms through the harness when a second 37 mm round struck the crippled aircraft, sending it out of control. The force of the explosion blew Airman Hackney through the open cargo door and, though stunned, he managed to deploy the unbuckled parachute and make a successful landing. He was later recovered by a companion helicopter.

Chief Hackney, a recipient of 28 decorations for valor in combat, retired after 22 years of distinguished service to the nation. His awards include the Air Force Cross, Silver Star, Airman's Medal, Purple Heart, four Distinguished Flying Crosses and 18 Air Medals.

8. Building 9310 at the 319th Training Squadron was dedicated to the first female Airman killed in Operation Iraqi Freedom -- Airman 1st Class Elizabeth Nicole Jacobson

Airman Jacobson was on a dusty road just north of the Kuwait-Iraq border on Sept. 28, 2005. The 21-year-old was providing security for a supply convoy as a gun truck crew weapons operator. The convoy was on a routine supply mission and traveling to Camp Bucca, Iraq. Somewhere along that road, terrorists set off an improvised explosive device as the vehicle Airman Jacobson was riding in passed. A tremendous explosion erupted. Airman Jacobson and the Army driver in the vehicle were killed instantly.

Airman Jacobson's sacrifice for her country made her the first security forces member to die in combat since May 20, 1975.

For her selfless actions and endless devotion to duty, Airman Jacobson was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Air Force Achievement Medal and the Iraqi Campaign Medal.

The Orlando, Fla., native entered the Air Force in 2003 and was assigned to the 17th Security Forces Squadron at Goodfellow AFB on Dec. 9, 2003.

It would become known that her favorite quote was, "I also believe in love and here is my quote. 'We're on this Earth for a little while, so live life to the fullest and carry a smile.'" In February 2005, the Air and Space Expeditionary Force Center sent a tasking order asking for a 13-person squad for duty at Camp Bucca. Goodfellow provided this team and the senior leadership of the unit met to determine the best possible candidates in that AEF bucket to fulfill this mission.

Airman Jacobson was one of the first to volunteer. She was always ready for any challenge and eager to support Operation Iraqi Freedom. In Iraq, Airman Jacobson lived life to the fullest and never shunned away from any task. She asked to be placed on convoy missions. A few hours before the incident that would take her life, she drove from Camp Bucca to Ali Al Saleem, Kuwait, to see another four-person team from Goodfellow.

Among those warriors was her supervisor, Staff Sgt. Katrina Hunt. Sergeant Hunt had no idea Airman Jacobson was coming, and was very shocked when she was awakened to see her subordinate standing before her. The two talked for hours about their respective missions. They talked about celebrating Airman Jacobson's 22nd birthday when both of

them returned home. They ended the conversation and hugged each other goodbye. Sergeant Hunt would not know this was the last time she would see her troop alive.

On Oct. 6, Goodfellow said goodbye to Airman Jacobson with a very special memorial service. It featured the first 21-gun salute conducted in a memorial service in almost 20 years. On Oct. 9, in a beautiful cemetery just outside Fort Lauderdale, Fla., under a semicircle of flags, our warrior was laid to rest. After the formal ceremony, the 11 members from the 17th SFS in attendance removed their shields and placed them at the foot of the coffin. The badges were then presented to members of Elizabeth's family.

*9. Building 9085 at the 331st Training Squadron was dedicated to the first female chief master sergeant in the Air Force -- **Chief Master Sgt. Grace A. Peterson***

Chief Peterson paved the path for all women in today's Air Force. She entered the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps in 1942 when Public Law 554 was passed. She achieved many firsts while she served her country.

Chief Peterson's first assignment took her to Fort Oglethorpe, Ga., where she was promoted to first sergeant within one year, an accomplishment previously unheard of. Her last assignment was in 1958 at McGuire Air Force Base, N.J., where then-Master Sgt. Peterson met and married Master Sgt. David F. Peterson. Together, they attended the Military Air Transport Service NCO Academy at Orlando AFB, Fla., where they became one of the first husband/wife couples to graduate.

When she sewed on senior master sergeant rank on March 1, 1959, Sergeant Peterson and her husband became the first husband/wife E-8 team in the Air Force. On June 1, 1960, she became the first and only woman chief master sergeant in the Air Force. Her 20-year career ended on July 31, 1963, when she achieved her final military first as the highest ranking female NCO to retire from the Air Force.

In summarizing her career, Chief Peterson said, "I doubt if any woman could have a more interesting, enriching career than that afforded me by the Air Force. I think all women in the Air Force take pride in sharing with the men the duties and responsibilities inherent in military service."

For more information on Air Force heritage, visit Air Force Link's heritage page at www.af.mil/history.