

# Heartland WARRIOR

Volume 17, Issue 5

May 2012



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# Heartland WARRIOR

Vol. 17, No. 5  
May 2012

This Air Force Reserve online magazine is an authorized publication for members of the U.S. military services, family, and friends of Grissom Air Reserve Base.

Contents of the Heartland Warrior are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, or the Department of the Air Force.

The editorial content is edited, and prepared by the Public Affairs Office of the 434th Air Refueling Wing, Grissom ARB, IN, 46971-5000.

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## On the cover...

Sgt. Matthew Gregory, 2-238th General Support Aviation Battalion Medical Evacuation Unit aviation refueler, refuels a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter at Grissom April 25. The soldiers of the 2-238th MEDEVAC came to Grissom to train for an upcoming deployment to Southwest Asia. For more information on the unit and its mission, turn to pages 6-7. (U.S. Air Force photo/Tech. Sgt. Mark Orders-Woempner)



Dr. Michael Harris, Indiana University Kokomo chancellor and honorary 434th Air Refueling Wing commander, left, plants a tree with Col. Tim Cahoon, 434th ARW commander, as part of an Arbor Day celebration here April 27. Grissom's honorary commanders planted trees during as part of a 434th Mission Support Group tour. (U.S. Air Force photo/Lt. Col. Gary Lockard)

# Heartland Warrior Newspaper named best in AFRC

The Heartland Warrior, the official electronic publication of the 434th Air Refueling Wing and Grissom, was chosen as best in its category during the recent Air Force Reserve Command annual media contest.

The Warrior took first place in the web based publication category in AFRC and third overall in the Air Force-wide competition.

In rating the Heartland Warrior, the judges cited the e-publication for the value provided to its readers, variety of stories and photographs, use of AF and AFRC news service material, reader and commander involvement, recognition of unit personnel, reporting, front page impact, headlines and cutlines.

The skills of 434th ARW Public Affairs staff members were also noted by the contest judges, as there were a number of individual awards.

Tech. Sgt. Mark Orders-



Woempner was named as AFRC's best photojournalist while taking second place in news feature articles. Senior Airman Damon Kasber took top honors in the graphic layout and design category while Senior Airman Jami Lancette took second place in both sports article and sports photographs. Senior Airman Andrew McLaughlin took second place in human interest feature writing. (434th ARW Public Affairs staff)

Heartland Warrior

# Security Forces named best in AFRC

By Tech. Sgt.  
Mark Orders-Woempner  
Public Affairs staff

Facing the dangers of a cold war and nuclear holocaust President John F. Kennedy stated in his inaugural address, "in the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility -- I welcome it."

And, though they live and serve in a different time, the men and women of the 434th Security Forces Squadron here at Grissom have taken on that same mantle of responsibility in times that could be deemed equally as dangerous.

Such responsibility and willingness to face danger for the sake of freedom are keystones to the package that won the unit the title of Air Force Reserve Command Security Forces Outstanding Unit for 2011.

"Each year the Air Force selects a (national) guard unit of the year, a reserve unit of the year, and a small, medium and large (regular Air Force) unit of the year," explained Maj. Christopher Witter, 434th SFS commander. "This year we were the top reserve security forces unit in all of the Air Force."

Being responsible for the protection of over 1,500 personnel, 16 KC-135R Stratotanker aircraft worth over \$250 million and one of only five Air Force Reserve Command bases helped propel the 434th SFS to the top of the list.

"We didn't start out the year saying this year we're going to try to win this award," said Witter. "We just did the job, took on the challenges that came at us, executed and submitted the (award) package -- We just did what we always do."

Going beyond the Grissom fence line, 434th SFS Airmen were called upon to protect U.S. and allied servicemembers, aircraft, bases and military leaders around the world including President Barack Obama and the now retired Gen. David Pe-

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The 434th Security Forces Squadron at Grissom Air Reserve Base was recently named the Air Force Reserve Command Security Forces Outstanding Unit for 2011. (U.S. Air Force graphic/Tech. Sgt. Mark Orders-Woempner)

traeus during his tenure as NATO's International Security Assistance Force commander.

In total, 434th SFS personnel were deployed around the globe for more than 3,400 days in support of operations such as Enduring Freedom. During these many deployments, the security forces Airmen responded to direct and indirect fire including rocket and ground attacks while insuring there were no U.S. or allied casualties.

"That's the way these guys operate; they operate at a higher level than a lot of the people in the Air Force," said Witter. "They look at things with a broader view point and they can process things faster."

The unit didn't just garner notoriety for its service abroad. 434th SFS Airmen were equally committed on the home front as they held a National Police Week educational fair for over 500 local students, provided training for local law enforcement agencies and volunteered over 1,000 hours in the local community.

While the many accomplishments mentioned above helped secure the prestigious award for the 434th SFS, Witter said one of the unit's greatest accomplishments is its

commitment to its people.

"You're not just part of the unit two days a month, you're part of the unit 365 days a year," elaborated the major, referring to the two days each month traditional reservists must serve as part of their commitment. "The senior (non-commissioned officers) and junior NCOs have a lot of impact and are very forward leaning in taking care of things."

That fact is something Witter said he relishes about his time as the 434th SFS commander.

"This unit's different...I give them a task and they run with it," he explained. "They know when to come back and ask for guidance, and they know how to prioritize, but a lot of time I'll get an e-mail on something and it's already been taken care of -- They're easy to lead, they're really easy to lead."

Despite their high levels of success, awards and achieving perfection have not been goals of the security forces unit.

"Excellence is not a destination, it's a state of mind, and that's the way we do things," said Witter. "Perfection is mind-numbing and pointless -- you don't arrive at excellence, you strive for it."

# SFS member named tops in the wing

By Tech. Sgt.  
Mark Orders-Woempner  
Public Affairs staff

Leadership is something many seek but a trait far fewer possess.

However, leadership is not something new to Senior Master Sgt. Bradley Klepinger, who was recently named the 434th Air Refueling Wing Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year for 2011.

As the 434th Security Forces Squadron operations superintendent, Klepinger served as a full-time leader to a unit that was recently named by Air Force leadership as the best Air Force Reserve Command security forces unit.

“As the operations superintendent, he’s the linchpin that keeps our base operating support side functioning and moving smoothly,” said Maj. Christopher Witter, 434th SFS commander. “He brings it all together and makes sure that operationally we get the job done.”

In his role, Klepinger is directly responsible for the protection of Grissom’s KC-135R Stratotanker aircraft valued at over \$250 million as well as the base’s more than 2,000 personnel.

On top of his daily duties, Klepinger helped plan a \$3.2 million redesign of Grissom’s

security forces facility and wrote the operations order for Operation TINMAN, which enhanced security during the 10th anniversary of 9/11.

With all of the accomplishments listed above, Klepinger was a prime selection for the prestigious award, but Witter said those weren’t his greatest achievements for the unit.



Master Sgt. Bradley Klepinger, 434th Security Forces Squadron operations superintendent, was recently named the 434th Air Refueling Wing Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year for 2011. (U.S. Air Force graphic/Tech. Sgt. Mark Orders-Woempner)

In fact, it was his leadership abilities when the unit was lacking both a commander and an operations officer that truly set the senior NCO apart from his peers.

“He functioned for the better part of a year as a commander and the operations officer, and he made sure that when I got here that there was a unit that was still functioning,” explained Witter. “He did a lot of great things in the last year, but that was without a doubt the best thing

he did for the unit.

“He knew he had to keep things going until the situation re-

solved itself,” the major added. “He functioned way beyond his level of responsibility.”

Klepinger didn’t just garner the prestigious award for his operational leadership. His commitment to self-improvement and his community were also taken into account.

The senior NCO recently com-

pleted all of his requirements for his Community College of the Air Force degree and was heavily involved in his local community.

He volunteered with the Veterans of Foreign Wars to support their traveling war memorial, hosted a National Police Week event that educated over 300 students on the law enforcement community, and he coached a Rookie League baseball team, taking the team to a 2nd place season.

Klepinger’s involvement and well-rounded leadership abilities are what Witter attributed to his success on and off duty.

“He’s the whole package and he’s good a team player,” the major elaborated. “He’s a dynamic, focused and motivated professional who’s got all those skills you’re looking for.

“He knows how to think strategy, knows how to think past the right now, and considers what the actions are going to be a day from now, a week from now, a month from now and a year from now,” he added. “He’s probably one of the best senior NCOs I know.”

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***“He functioned way beyond his level of responsibility.”***

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-- Maj. Christopher Witter

# OG captain recogized as best in wing

By Maj. Kelly Howard  
Public Affairs staff

Communication is often said to be the key to success and for one Grissom captain his skill in that area garnered him the 434th Air Refueling Wing Company Grade Officer of the Year award for 2011.

Capt. Kyle Knell, 434th Operations Group intelligence officer, was lauded throughout his award package for achievements including mobilizing for a deployment, completing his master of arts in religion, and leading fellow Airmen in Wingman Day training designed to bolster resiliency.

"He is a masterful communicator and leader," said Col. Christopher Amend, 434th OG commander. "He had an impressive performance at Global Thunder 2011, running the quarterly awards program and in leading Wingman Day training."

Knell acted as the senior intelligence officer during his most recent deployment and was key to the success of Global Thunder, a joint world-wide exercise. During that exercise, he also devised numerous communication alternatives for use during war-time scenarios in a bare-base environment.

"[My deployment] was an extremely rewarding experience working with some of the Air Force and (United Kingdom's) Royal Air Force's finest," said the multi-service veteran who has served in the Marine Corps and Indiana Army Guard as well as the regular Air Force. "It was a busy deployment, and I functioned as a force protection and anti-terrorism officer as well as my normal Intelligence duties."

His deployment not only kept him busy, but also provided an invaluable service to U.S. and allied troops heading down range.

"The majority of my work was briefing C-17 pilots, Americans and British, keeping them up to date on threats and the geopolitical situation in theater as they flew missions



Capt. Kyle Knell, 434th Operations Group intelligence officer, was named the 434th Air Refueling Wing Company Grade Officer of the Year for 2011. (U.S. Air Force graphic/Tech. Sgt. Mark Orders-Woempner)

supporting Operation Enduring Freedom," Knell recalled.

On top of his operational success, the captain was also recognized for his ability to mentor and teach.

Knell trained two new tanker survival and recovery team members to top-performance proficiency just one week before a wing-wide exercise.

Utilizing prior service experience, he also instructed his fellow intelligence shop members in navigation skills which improved critical intelligence proficiencies.

Knell was also lauded for broadening his own knowledge when he built and marshaled intelligence's cargo equipment in support of the base-wide exercise.

And though his job keeps him extremely busy, Knell said he keeps doing it because it's one of his passions.

"I love my job as an intel officer because it informs our people of threats to help keep them safe and make them aware of potential dangers wherever they may be serving," he explained. "One side benefit of my job is the opportunity to stay abreast of the world situation, but the part I enjoy most about

my job is briefing, the actual sharing of information with people who need it, when they need it."

Outside of his normal Air Force duties, Knell's communication skills were again employed as a guest lecturer for a Reserve Officer Training Corps detachment at Michigan Technological University, where he contacted 800 prospective cadets and organized four career days.

His community involvement extends far beyond just lecturing as Knell works with several ministry groups and a local Boy Scout troop, where he assists with leadership development and camping trips.

Despite his many accomplishments and accolades, Knell remains grounded in what he considers most important.

"I had two of my greatest achievements in 2011 -- I pastored Copper Country Bible Church in Hancock, Mich., where I live and secondly, I got to be a dad and husband," said the father of five. "I got to see my family grow, coach my kids' school soccer team, assist with Boy Scouts; this stuff is the opportunity that makes fatherhood so worth it."

# Army Guard unit trains for deployment

By Tech. Sgt.  
**Mark Orders-Woempner**  
*Public Affairs staff*



Capt. Aaron Fletcher, left, and Chief Warrant Officer 3 Ron Walker make sure their UH-60 Black Hawk is ready to fly at a moment's notice after repositioning the aircraft during a training exercise April 26. Both are 2-238th General Support Aviation Battalion pilots, Medical Evacuation Unit, which descended upon Grissom April 17 for two weeks of intense pre-deployment training.



Chief Warrant Officer 3 Ron Walker, left, and Capt. Aaron Fletcher fly their Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk over North-Central Indiana during a training exercise April 26. (U.S. Air Force photos/Tech. Sgt. Mark Orders-Woempner)

Only a cool breeze could be heard gently rustling through the trees as it swept over the farms and fields of North-Central Indiana, until a noise in the distance cut through the silence of the spring air.

Whop, whop, whop, whop, whop...

The noise grew louder and closer as tiny black dots on the Hoosier horizon rapidly transformed into 12 Army National Guard helicopters cutting through the sky like a scene pulled straight from a Hollywood blockbuster, but this was no movie.

The UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters from the 2-238th General Support Aviation Battalion, Medical Evacuation Unit made their way from Shelbyville, Ind., and Frankfort, Ky., on their way to Grissom April 17 for two weeks of intensive pre-deployment training.

"We'll be heading to Southwest Asia in the fall," said Maj. Bryon Blohm, 2-238th commander, during a press conference here April 18. "We're really excited to be at Grissom and use the wonderful facilities here."

As their unit name suggests, the primary mission of the 2-238th MEDEVAC is aeromedical evacuation; however, they can perform other medical-related missions such as search and rescue and the transport of medical personnel and supplies.

The Black Hawk entered service with the Army in 1979 and has since replaced the UH-1 Huey.

With a max speed of 220 mph and a range of over 320 miles, the aircraft are well-suited for aeromedical evacuation, a mission where speed is life, said Capt. Aaron Fletcher, 2-238th Black Hawk pilot.

"Once we get a call, we are supposed to be in the air in less than 15 minutes," explained Fletcher. "But, our goal is 10, and we almost always hit that."

"Ideally, a crew is on first-up for 24 hours then moves to second-up, (or standby) for 24 hours before getting a day of rest," explained Fletcher. "First up takes all of the most serious calls and second up takes the more routine calls as well as fills in for first up while they're out on their mission."

On a typical medevac mission, the helicopter takes off with a crew of four and a set of unique tools including a medical carousel that can carry up to four patients and a hoist used to lift stranded patients from locations where a Black Hawk can't land. The crew includes two pilots, a crew chief and a flight medic.

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# MEDEVAC, *from page 6*

“I’ve been both a ground medic and a flight medic, and being a flight medic is a lot more challenging because you’re often the only medical person on the aircraft,” said Staff Sgt. Dana Owen, 2-238th MEDEVAC, who also is a paramedic and clinical instructor in her civilian job.

This unique situation has led to crew chiefs often being trained on more than just standard first aid techniques.

Often, when there are multiple patients onboard, the crew chief has to jump in to save a life, said Owen, who added that teamwork is essential to mission success.

And, it’s those unique challenges as well as the importance of their mission that keeps the crews going back day-after-day.

“I do this for the challenge, because I like helping people... and we’re all adrenaline junkies,” said Owen.

Despite the excitement and joy she gets from helping people in her job, Owen said it’s not easy.

“There are times when it’s very hard; it’s always harder when it’s somebody in uniform, no matter what uniform that is,” explained the flight medic who previously deployed to Talil, Iraq. “We see the worst that happens to people in life, and sometimes there are things that get to you, sometimes you cry and

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Staff Sgt. Dana Owen, 2-238th General Support Aviation Battalion, Medical Evacuation Unit flight medic, starts an IV on an Airman volunteer during a simulated aeromedical mission April 26.



Staff Sgt. Dana Owen, 2-238th General Support Aviation Battalion, Medical Evacuation Unit flight medic, starts an IV on an Airman volunteer during a simulated aeromedical evacuation mission April 26.

sometimes you just need to talk about it.”

Despite the pressure that comes with flying into hostile territory and the responsibility of trying to save a wounded servicemember’s life, Owen said she and her fellow Soldiers push through and rely heavily on their training.

“When something bad does happen and there’s a trauma call, you go into autopilot, do what you’ve been trained to do, and later look

back and say ‘I can’t believe I just did this!’” she explained. “We have to remain calm, if we freak out that makes everyone else freak out.”

During their time at Grissom, the 2-238th mixed new Soldiers with those more experienced to get the best training possible, said Blohm. The crews trained with their unique equipment day and night for situations just like they will see during their deployment,

including a mass-casualty exercise with over 40 patients.

Offering more than just nice facilities and a runway, several Grissom Airmen volunteered their time and bodies as simulated injured personnel, often being poked and prodded as they were treated.

“This has been really amazing,” said Fletcher. “Everyone here at Grissom has really stepped up, welcomed us and made this training a success.”

# Runners participate in 5k fun run



Above: Bruce Cannady, far right, a recreation specialist with the 434th Services Flight, goes over the course map with race participants. (U.S Air Force photos/Tech. Sgt. Doug Hays)

Right: Aaron Wilson, 434th Maintenance Squadron, heads into the final stretch of a 5k fun run, which called for members to predict their times. Wilson finished second. First place went to Eric Saddlemeier, 434th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, who was 16 seconds off his predicted time, and third place went to Ashley Sammelman, 434th MXS.



## In the limelight

### Promotions

**To senior master sergeant** -- Darin Schenher, 434th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron

**To technical sergeant** -- Gabriel Girard, 434th AMXS

**To staff sergeant** -- Dana Bondurant, 434th AMXS

**To senior airman** -- Brittany Bell, 434th Force Support Squadron; Zachary Gibson, 434th AMXS; Brian Humphrey, 434th Civil Engineer Squadron; David O'Donnell, 434th Maintenance Squadron; David Sparks, 434th Operations Group; and Jessica Weatherman, 434th Air Refueling Wing.

**To airman 1st class** -- Kara Chapman, 434th Logistics Readiness Squadron; Christopher Ferris, 434th AMXS; Kevin Horseman, 434th LRS; Caroline Taylor, 434th LRS; Bianca Upshaw, 434th MXS; Amanda Valentine, 434th AMXS; and Justin Williams, 434th FSS.

**To airman** -- Edward Black, 434th CES; Tara Lees, 434th FSS; Thomas Moorman, 434th MXS; Michael Mundy, and 434th Security Forces Squadron.

### Medals

**Meritorious Service Medal** -- Maj. Richard Day, 74th Air Refueling Squadron; Chaplain (Maj.) Obadiah Smith Jr., 434th ARW; Senior Master Sgt. Ray Boylan, 434th OG; Senior Master Sgt. Robert Hoffman, 434th FSS; Senior Master Sgt. Rafael Leyva Jr., 434th OG; Master Sgt. Trudy Burnett, 434th ARW; Master Sgt. Keith McAndrews, 434th Maintenance Group; Master Sgt. Kym Orange, 72nd Air Refueling Squadron; Master Sgt. Christy Shives, 434th Operations Support Squadron; and Master Sgt. Gregory Spradlin, 434th Maintenance Operations Flight.

**Aerial Achievement Medal** -- Maj. Chadd Kobielush, 74th ARS.

**Air Force Commendation Medal** -- Capt. Jeffrey Benware, 434th OSS; 1st Lt. Jacob Creel, 72nd ARS; and Tech. Sgt. Kevin McCarty, 434th Communications Squadron.

**Air Force Achievement Medal** -- Maj. Chadd Kobielush, 74th ARS; Capt. Brandon German, 74th ARS; Capt. Ladd Leimer Jr., 72nd ARS; Capt. Chadwick Tice, 72nd ARS; Capt. Joel Webley, 72nd ARS; Staff Sgt. Clayton Duncan, 72nd ARS; and Staff Sgt. Zuriel Lund, 72nd ARS.





# Atkins survives hot Boston Marathon

By Tech. Sgt. Doug Hays  
Public Affairs staff

It was the kind of hot that makes long-distance runners and event organizers of such long-distance runs sweat days before the run begins. The kind of hot that makes one re-think things hot.

But when it's the Boston Marathon, and there's a year's worth of planning and preparation, it's not easy to quit and sprint to the air conditioner.

Robert Atkins, the 434<sup>th</sup> Communications Squadron commander, joined 26,655 other runners starting the 26.2 mile run, and when he crossed the finish line at 3:48:05 he was among the 21,554 people who finished the 116<sup>th</sup> running of the world's oldest annual marathon.

The Oklahoma native said he completed an intensive 18-week program to prepare for the Boston Marathon after qualifying for the event in the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon in 2011.

The training had him running 6 days a week with a focus on high-intensity runs instead of long runs.

"I only did two 16-mile runs leading up to the marathon," Atkins said.

As the race neared, the focus on the weather became more important.

"Ten days out, the weather looked pretty good," he said, "but as it got closer and closer you could see that it was changing.

"The race organizers went from asking people to use caution to urging people not to compete in the point-to-point race," he continued. "We had planned a family vacation around this and we were there, so I wasn't going to back out."

What did change was his strategy for the race itself.

Organizers warned runners not to expect to set personal records for the event because of the searing temperatures for a marathon – 79 degrees at the start and nearly

85 at the finish line.

"At first I thought I'd just take it easy and enjoy the moment," he said, adding that he even planned on carrying a cell phone to take pictures along the way.

That plan gave way when he realized he'd be sweating too much to even carry a phone.

"The event really became about strategy," he said. "Instead of doing 7-minute pace, my goal was to do anything under 7:30 and to keep the heart rate low and minimize sweat and exertion as much as possible."

He had the 6,304<sup>th</sup> fastest qualifying time, (the the bib number he wore), which put him in the first wave of runners, but way back in a big pack.

"It took nearly 5 minutes and 20 seconds just to cross the start line," he exclaimed. "By the second mile, I was sweating pretty heavy just from the heat and I knew it would be hard not to run out of fluids."

The first mile Atkins ran in 7:38, and then held a 7:22 pace until mile 10.

"It was hard holding back and not to run like normal in order to minimize effort and sweat, but I was becoming more concerned because my sweat rate was faster



Atkins stretches out his calves after a run on base recently. (U.S. Air Force photo/Tech. Sgt. Doug Hays)

Please see 'Marathon,' page 10



# Marathon, from page 9

than my body was absorbing what I was drinking.”

At about mile 14, he began walking through water stations and cooling down while taking in plenty of fluids. For the next three miles he walked 30 seconds to a minute at each station.

Then near the 15-16 mile stage, he started feeling the first signs of dehydration, a slight pull to his side.

“I made it to Heart Break Hill and made a deal with myself to run 30 seconds and walk 10 seconds all the way to the top in an effort to keep my heart rate down to limit sweating,” he added.

Not long after the top of the hill Atkins said he got a confidence boost as his wife Jen ran up beside him and cheered him on, running with him for nearly a half mile.

“We talked and she told me about the other runners suffering from the heat, and I began to feel better after getting to talk to her,” he admitted.

After the adrenaline of running



Daughters Bryce, left, and Taylor were on hand to cheer on their father.

with his wife ended, Atkins said he began to cramp so bad his legs started to lock up.

“At mile 23 my thighs started contracting and twitching, so I immediately started walking to keep from falling over,” he recalled. “It went away after about 20 seconds, so I decided to walk/run it all the way in because I had to finish.”

After about three intervals of a very slow jog/walk, Atkins said his legs were cramping on the walk and he thought he might be going down.

“I was able to find a walking position that seemed to not cause cramping, and I kept loading up on water, ice, popsicles, anything the crowd were handing out just to get to the finish line,” he said.

Then the calculations started, and he said he figured that even if he walked the rest of the way, he’d still finish in

less than 4 hours.

As he walked he talked with a Sailor who had just returned from Afghanistan, and began to feel better.

With his legs feeling decent again, Atkins ran about a half mile doing little ‘shuffle steps.’

“It looked like I was waddling,” he joked, “but I was moving faster than others attempting to run at that point.”

He soon spotted a friend and as they turned onto Boylston Street., they decided to run in together and find a good spot to get a finisher’s picture.

“We crossed side by side to finish the slowest, most demanding run I’ve ever completed,” he said.

The race, as it turns out, was more of a test of on-the-course race and hydration management, he said.

“I also learned that in that type of heat, its not a matter of mental toughness, you just can’t block the pain, you can’t just try harder, all you can do is hope the muscles don’t lock up, hope the mind doesn’t black out and hope the time and miles just keep passing by – all 26.2 of them,” he concluded.



Robert Atkins, with wife, Jen, and daughters Bryce and Taylor. (Courtesy Photos)

# Unit supports 50 years of space discovery

By Capt. Cathleen Snow  
920th Rescue Wing  
Public Affairs

PATRICK AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. -- Flying in the prone position atop a modified jumbo jet, NASA's Space Shuttle Discovery paraded down Space Coast beaches recently, making a u-turn over Patrick Air Force Base, before heading north to its new home as a static display at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C.

The paired air and spacecraft historic flight drew more beachgoers than a good surf and sun day at the beach.

Among them was Air Force Reservist Lt. Col. Phillip Kennedy, HH-60G Pave Hawk pilot and 301st Rescue Squadron director of operations, 920th Rescue Wing here.

Wearing a green Air Force flight suit, his squadron's shoulder patch tells a story of a long history supporting manned spaceflight--a medical pack attached to a parachute floats toward a space capsule on a globe cradled by the words "Guardian Wings."

"I'm proud to have been part of a rescue community that supported manned spaceflight and the shuttle program since its inception," said Kennedy, who caught a glimpse of the flight over Patrick.

Manned spaceflight is something the 920th RQW has been doing since the early 60s. In 1961, the unit which began as the 301st Air Rescue Squadron in Miami provided rescue-contingency operations for the first Mercury launch, beginning its longstanding relationship with NASA.

Now situated at Patrick AFB and expanded into a wing, Rescue

Wing Airmen are celebrating 50 years of manned spaceflight support as they were the primary rescue unit charged as guardians of the astronauts during NASA space shuttle missions into near Earth orbit until the space transportation system ended in July 2011.

Air Force Reserve history unfolds successful search-and-rescue support, notably on the first recorded real-life astronaut rescue.

When NASA launched the Aurora 7 capsule on May 24, 1962, as part of the Project Mercury program, the capsule missed its intended landing area by approximately 250 miles and landed in the Atlantic Ocean, just east of Puerto Rico. Staff Sgt. Ray E. McClure and Airman 1st Class John F. Heitsch, pararescuemen from the 41st Air Rescue Squadron--then located at Hamilton Air Force Base, Calif.--jumped from an Air Sea Rescue SC-54 aircraft and attached an auxiliary flotation collar to the Aurora 7 to keep it from sinking. They stayed with the craft and its only passenger, astronaut Scott Carpenter, until a U.S. Navy helicopter picked them

up and transported them to safety. For every manned space mission thereafter, Air Force rescue personnel have been present to clear the range and stand by in the event of a mishap.

Rescue Wing Airmen pilot HC-130 King refueling aircraft and HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters to transport their highly-trained and effective rescue teams, called Guardian Angels. Their unique combat search-and-rescue skills and equipment make them the most qualified in the world to respond to any emergency scenario, the worst being one that would cause the astronauts to bail out over the Atlantic Ocean during liftoff. To best prepare for this scenario, 920th RQW regularly performed what they called Mode VIII exercises with NASA astronauts.

Located 11 miles south of NASA's Kennedy Space Center, the 920th RQW has been conducting search-and-rescue and range-clearing missions for the shuttle program since the first launch, STS-1 on Space Shuttle Columbia in 1981.

Although the space shuttle program has ended, Rescue Wing Airmen continue to work closely with the 45th Space Wing, NASA, the Naval Ordnance Test Unit and civilian space agencies providing safety and security on the Eastern Range during all Space Coast rocket launches.

Rescue Wing Airmen will be on hand to clear the Eastern Launch Range for the upcoming historic SpaceX launch April 30.

The first civilian rocket to carry supplies to the International Space Station. (AFRCNS)



Space Shuttle Discovery took off from Kennedy Space Center on Florida's Space Coast for the last time April 17 parading down the beaches for public spectacle before making a u-turn at Patrick Air Force Base, Fla., to head north to its new home at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C. Airmen from the 920th Rescue Wing, PAFB, were on hand for the past 50 years serving as guardians of the astronauts during all space shuttle launches and landings. (U.S. Air Force photo/Master Sgt. Rob Grande)

EXCLUSIVE OFFER FOR RESERVISTS

# TIM MCGRAW

*Brothers of the Sun Tour*

REFER A FRIEND  
AND GET TWO VIP TICKETS\*  
TO SEE TIM MCGRAW  
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A VIP PRE-SHOW PARTY  
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## JULY 28, 2012

LUCAS OIL STADIUM  
INDIANAPOLIS, IN – 4:30PM



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