

Commander's Connection



Photo by Staff Sgt. Lee Watts

Col. Sam Angelella (left), and Command Chief Master Sgt., Chief Master Sgt. Bryan Williams (center), learn about using a tractor mower from Jose Pabon Aug. 1.

"Commander's Connection" is a link between Col. Sam Angelella, 20th Fighter Wing commander, and the Shaw community. Questions or concerns that can't be resolved through normal channels can be called in and recorded at 895-4611 or e-mailed to commandersconnection@shaw.af.mil.

*Callers should leave a name and telephone number in case questions need clarification. Comments of general interest may be published in **The Shaw Spirit**.*

Kudos

Dear Sir,

I was on the base for my monthly visit to the pharmacy and shop. It was raining when I started to go home. As I was driving it began to pour, so I looked for a place to stop. I just couldn't see the road, so I pulled over. But, my car got stuck. All of a sudden a group of airmen came to help me. The airmen got my car out and pulled it to a safe area.

I am a retired E-5 and now 85 years old. I want to give my thanks to your wonderful personnel. You have a good base and the very best people. Thank all of you.

Are you missing body parts?

By Chief Master Sgt. Joe Lavigne
2nd Bomb Wing Command Chief

BARKSDALE AIR FORCE BASE, La. -- The other day I had an interesting conversation about drastically changing the Enlisted Performance Report system. Someone suggested we totally do away with the numeric-based program and writing all the flowery bullets to make sure the form is completely filled.

Instead, the form would simply be a drawing of a stick figure. Really simple. There would be room to draw two legs, a torso, two arms and a head. If, at the end of your rating period, your rater and the rater's rater felt you portrayed the "whole person" concept, they would draw a complete stick figure, and when you became eligible, you'd be able to take your promotion tests and compete for your next stripe.

If your picture wasn't complete, you simply wouldn't test. That would save you a lot of time studying, only to become frustrated when you weren't on the promotion list.

So exactly how would your rater decide what kind of person you are? Easy. As you know, the legs provide the basis for movement. One leg would represent your technical competence. If you completed your necessary upgrade training, were certified on all your core tasks and mastered your trade, that leg would be drawn.

The other leg would represent your mastery of overall Air Force knowledge. Have you completed the appropriate levels of Professional Military Education? Have you read any of the books on the Chief of Staff's or Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force's professional reading list? Have you attended any voluntary professional development seminars? If so, that leg would also be drawn.

Let's move up to the torso. Here you'd be evaluated on how well you maintain standards.

Do you look sharp in your uniform? Are you presenting a proper military image? Do you participate in a personal fitness program? Do you follow the instructions you need to safely and effectively accomplish the mission? Do you ensure your subordinates meet the standards as well?

To draw your left arm, your rater must be able

to honestly say you are actively supporting your unit and the base.

Are you out there helping your unit advisory council improve your squadron? Do you occasionally pitch in some off-duty time to help with your booster club's efforts? What about being an "active" member in one or more professional organizations or one of the benevolent organizations dedicated to improving the quality of life for our troops? Remember, being active doesn't simply mean paying your dues and hanging around waiting for your going-away gift when you move, separate or retire.

The right arm is simple. Are you taking part in any community activities? The possibilities here are endless: youth groups, helping the aging, church groups, schools, support for community events.

Finally, the head must be drawn to signify your pursuit of a well-rounded education. Are you taking advantage of the programs offered by the Community College of the Air Force? If you've already received that degree, are you working toward a bachelor's or perhaps a professional certification?

You need to understand and accept the fact that today's enlisted corps is becoming more and more educated than at any other time in the history of the Air Force. If you're not pursuing your education, you're behind your peers, plain and simple.

Will we ever adopt this form of evaluation system? You never know. If we do, will you be a complete person or will you have some missing body parts? The choice is yours.

By the way, this whole person concept isn't anything new. It's clearly outlined in Air Force Instruction 36-2618, *The Enlisted Force Structure*. We've been using the whole-person concept as a yardstick to measure people for years. Be it a "Stripes for Exceptional Performance" promotion, selecting annual award winners, or picking our next batch of senior and chief master sergeants, the picture needs to be complete.

Why not take a few minutes to draw a picture of yourself? Or, ask your boss to. If you find you're missing some body parts, take action now. You'll be glad you did!

The Shaw Spirit

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A note of thanks to those who serve

By Christy Ferer

(Editor's note: This commentary is printed with permission from Christy Ferer, a New York native whose husband, Neil Levin, was killed in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Ferer was part of a recent United Services Organizations tour to Iraq.)

NEW YORK -- When I told friends about my pilgrimage to Iraq to thank the U.S. troops, reaction was underwhelming at best.

Some were blunt. "Why are you going there?" They could not understand why it was important for me, a 9/11 widow, to express my support for the men and women stationed today in the Gulf.

But the reason seemed clear to me: 200,000 troops were sent halfway around the world to stabilize the kind of culture that breeds terrorists like those who I believe began World War III on Sept. 11, 2001. Reaction was so politely negative that I began to doubt my role on the first USO/Tribeca Institute tour into newly occupied Iraq where, on average, a soldier a day is killed.

Besides, with Robert De Niro, Kid Rock, Rebecca and John Stamos, Wayne Newton, Gary Sinise, and Lee Ann Womack, who needed me?

Did they really want to hear about my husband, Neil Levin, who went to work as director of the New York Port Authority on Sept. 11 and never came home? How would they relate to the two others traveling with me: Ginny Bauer, a New Jersey homemaker and the mother of three who lost her husband, David; and former Marine Jon Vigiano, who lost his only sons, Jon, a firefighter and Joe, a policeman.

As we were choppered over deserts that looked like bleached bread crumbs, I wondered if I'd feel like a street hawker, passing out Port Authority pins and baseball caps as I said "thank you" to the troops. Would a hug from me mean anything at all in the presence of the Dallas Cowboy cheerleaders and a Victoria's Secret model?

The first "meet and greet" made me weep. Why? Soldiers, armed with M16s and saddlebags of water in 120-degree heat, swarmed over the stars for photos and autographs. When it

was announced that a trio of Sept. 11 family members was also in the tent it was as if a psychic cork on an emotional dam was popped.

Soldiers from all over our great country rushed toward us to express their condolences. Some wanted to touch us, as if they needed a physical connection to our sorrow and for some living proof for why they were there.

One mother of two from Montana told me she enlisted because of Sept. 11. Dozens of others told us the same thing. One young soldier showed me his metal bracelet engraved with the name of a victim he never knew and that awful date none of us will ever forget.

In fact at every encounter with the troops there would be a surge of Reservists -- firefighters and cops, including many who had worked the rubble of Ground Zero -- wanting to

exchange a hometown hug.

Their glassy eyes still do not allow anyone to penetrate too far inside to the place where their trauma is lodged; the trauma of a devastation far greater than anyone who hadn't been there could even imagine. It's there in me, too. I had forced my way downtown on that awful morning, convinced that I could find Neil beneath the rubble.

What I was not prepared for was to have soldiers show us the World Trade Center memorabilia they'd carried with them into the streets of

Baghdad. Others had clearly been holding in stories of personal 9/11 tragedies which had

made them enlist.

USO handlers moved us from one corner to the next so everyone could meet us. One fire brigade plucked the three of us from the crowd, transporting us to their firehouse to call on those who had to stand guard during the Baghdad concert. It was all about touching us and feeling the reason they were in this hell. Back at Baghdad International Airport, Kid Rock turned a "meet and greet" into an impromptu concert in a steamy airport hangar before 5000 troops.

One particular soldier, Capt. Vargas from the Bronx, told me he enlisted in the Army after some of his wife's best friends were lost at the World Trade Center.

When he glimpsed the piece of recovered metal from the Towers that I had been showing to a group of sol-

diers he grasped for it as if it were the Holy Grail. Then he handed it to Kid Rock who passed the precious metal through the 5000 troops in the audience. They lunged at the opportunity to touch the steel that symbolized what so many of them felt was the purpose of their mission -- which puts them at risk every day in the 116 degree heat, not knowing if a sniper was going to strike at anytime.

Looking into that sea of khaki gave me chills even in that blistering heat. To me, those troops were there to avenge the murder of my husband and 3,000 others.

When I got to the microphone I told them we had not made this journey for condolences but to thank them and to tell them that the families of 9/11 think of them every day. They lift our hearts. The crowd interrupted me with chants of "USA, USA, USA." Many wept.

What happened next left no doubt that the troops drew inspiration from our tragedies. When I was first asked to speak to thousands of troops in Qatar, after Iraq, I wondered if it would feel like a "grief for sale" spectacle.

But this time I was shaking because I was to present the recovered WTC steel to Gen. Tommy Franks (U.S. Central Command commander). I quivered as I handed him the icy gray block of steel. His great craggy eyes welled up with tears. The sea of khaki fell silent. Then the proud four-star general was unable to hold back the tears which streamed down his face on center stage before 4,000 troops. As this mighty man turned from the spotlight to regain his composure I comforted him with a hug.

Now, when do I return?

“
Terrorism is a direct threat to freedom around the world.
”
*Gen. Richard B. Myers
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*

