



Omaha-area Tuskegee chapter losing altitude

By Eugene Curtin

Bellevue Leader Associate Editor

On July 30, 1945, World War II aviator Alfonza W. Davis went missing while flying over the Gulf of Trieste at the juncture of Italy, Slovenia and Croatia.

It was a bad day for Omaha, for Davis was the first African-American aviator from Omaha to earn his wings after training at Moton Field, the Tuskegee Army Air Field near Tuskegee, Ala.

He was one of approximately 20,000 persons who would carry the designation "Tuskegee Airmen" into subsequent decades, a designation that has earned particular honor for describing a corps which, during that racially segregated era, consisted wholly of black Americans.

Although formally declared dead on Oct. 30, 1945, Davis's legacy, like the legacy of all the Tuskegee Airmen — only a small percentage of whom were pilots — would prosper. In 1988, the Alfonza W. Davis chapter of Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., the nonprofit formed to preserve the memory of those African-American airmen, was formed in Omaha.

It is headed today by Bellevue resident Bob Rose, who joined the organization in the mid-1990s and has been a leading figure ever since, having

long served as chapter president.

Like many such service organizations, however, the Alfonza W. Davis chapter, is struggling. Its paid membership has declined from a high of 196 in the mid-1990s to just eight today.

Rose is worried. Worried the achievement of those black aviators, whose success helped neutralize anti-black prejudice in post-war America, is being lost to memory. He is worried the chapter's goal, which is to "perpetuate the legacy of the Tuskegee Airmen through youth" might fade.

"We try to convince the youth of today that just like the Tuskegee Airmen you can do anything you want to do, if you are prepared," he said. "And in today's world, 'prepared' is spelled S.T.E.M. — science, technology, engineering and math."

That commitment was last expressed July 5 when the chapter delivered \$3,500 in scholarships to three young women, thus fulfilling both its commitment to encouraging youth and to making no distinction by race in either chapter membership or awards.

The chapter's other major function is to introduce youth to flight simulation machines at Offutt Air Force Base and the University of Nebraska at Omaha. While constituting an attempt to interest youth in science and technology, the trips have become few in recent years.

Rose says he just doesn't have the adults he needs to do the calling, organizing, delivering, chaperoning, picking up and bringing back home that is involved in every student day trip.

He said an active corps of about 25 to 30 members would solve the problem, but he wonders how that can be achieved.

"All organizations are suffering the same problem and holding things together with a few core people," he said, "You have to have people if you make commitments. I hate to make commitments I can't keep. That's the worst thing you can do."

The story of the Tuskegee Airmen is worth preserving, he said.

"Without the success of the Tuskegee Airmen we would not enjoy the country we have today," he said. "They opened up society by earning the respect of a lot of people. Prior to the Tuskegee Airmen the general assumption was that blacks were incapable of handling sophisticated equipment."

"That was untenable after the Tuskegees."

Rose can be reached at 402-292-8912 or at rdrjr@cox.net.

Bellevue Board of Education adds new military advisor

Col. Gavin Marks, 55th Wing commander at Offutt Air Force Base, will serve as Bellevue Public Schools' Board of Education military advisor.

As military adviser and non-voting member of the BPS school board, Marks' primary duties include participating in the monthly board meetings and also offering advice to the board members regarding the military population in schools.

Marks said he's looking forward to the role of BPS' military adviser and working with the district and board members.

"As all parents know, quality education in a safe environment is of utmost importance," he said.

"If our service members have concerns about their children's school, they are distracted from their duties.

"It is certainly one of the first things military parents research when they learn of an upcoming relocation and are considering where to live. When it comes to Offutt AFB, any anxiety about this is quickly eased as they learn about the wonderful offerings and services provided by BPS."



U.S. Air Force photo by Charles J. Haymond

Tech. Sgt. Nick Doage, 217th Engineering and Installation Squadron quality assurance, assembles a hard drive rack July 10 inside the Martin Bomber building at Offutt Air Force Base. Air National Guard members from the 217th and 210th Engineering Installation Squadrons out of Illinois and Minnesota traveled here to aid the 55th Communications Squadron in laying new fiber-cabling for the 97th Intelligence Support Squadron and other various squadrons.

Guard units aid Offutt Cable Dawgs in flood aftermath

By Charles J. Haymond

55th Wing Public Affairs

OFFUTT AIR FORCE BASE, Neb. — Air National Guard members from the 217th and 210th Engineering Installation Squadrons out of Illinois and Minnesota traveled here to aid the 55th Communications Squadron in laying new fiber-cabling for the 97th Intelligence Support Squadron and other various squadrons.

Traditionally, a normal day for the 55th CS cable dawgs would include: engineering projects, creating materials lists and installing cables inside plant cabling and installing backbone-cabling between buildings.

"The entire base was greatly impacted by the historic flood in March 2019, and the workload for almost every shop has exponentially increased and some equipment and underground cabling was damaged or lost," said Tech. Sgt. Joel Willitzer, 55th CS project manager.

"We have been busy replacing the cabling and equipment to accommodate thousands of displaced personnel and allow them to continue performing their critical missions."

The old Air Force Weather Agency space inside the Martin Bomber building is being renovated to help members from the 97th ISS and other squadrons that were displaced after the flood. This area will be used by various squadrons on base so they can continue to perform classified missions.

The Communication Squadron requested help for the MBB project from multiple Air Force E&I units and the 207th and 210th were quick to accept the task.

"The flood greatly increased the workload on the CS, causing the need for rapid response team such as

E&I team to assist with larger projects such as this one," Willitzer said.

The E&I team arrived here in early July. Their job is to evaluate the site inside the Martin Bomber building so they can determine the soundness of the building infrastructure.

Once they have heard their customer's request, the team help's build a plan while also creating a materials list which includes items needed to complete the project. From there, the team develops drawings and instructions on how to successfully complete the project.

The team is also designing the path and running thousands of feet of new fiber-cabling into the area to provide Non-Secure Internet Protocol Router, Secret Internet Protocol Router, and National Security Agency network connectivity to the personnel in that designated area which will be approximately 330 NSA clients and a combined 100 clients for NIPR/SIPR.

"E&I units are frequently requested to go conduct engineering surveys to develop a project," said Capt. Brian Barnard, 217th E&I Squadron cyberspace operations project engineer.

"The E&I community has been assisting the United States Strategic Command project for the past few years and it is a wonderful chance to be able to come back and assist Offutt AFB again."

Once this team is done with their survey an additional team will come to complete the install. Willitzer is very happy that the team came in to aid them in this mission.

"We are extremely grateful for the assistance and the team is very professional and knowledgeable," said Willitzer. "They are very dedicated and are doing a great job prioritizing our needs to make sure they are met."

55th Mission Support Group under new leadership

By Charles J. Haymond

55th Wing Public Affairs

OFFUTT AIR FORCE BASE, Neb. — Team Offutt welcomed a new 55th Mission Support Group commander during a change of command ceremony July 24.

This ceremony depicts the formal transfer of authority through the exchange of a guidon as a symbol providing assurance that the unit will never be leaderless.

Col. W.R. Alan Dayton took over command of the 55th MSG from Col. J. David Norton who has served in the position since 2017.

Col. Gavin Marks, 55th Wing commander, gave opening remarks declaring the importance of a leader and the massive responsibilities they carry.

"Command is not a prize; it doesn't work that way," Marks said.

"Rather, command is a cherished honor and privilege. It is one that is accepted soberly, and executed faithfully, because those who are given the opportunity to command do so knowing the true gravity of the responsibilities they are inheriting."

During his speech, Marks shared a conversation from a recent phone call he had with the outgoing commander. Norton was asked what he would miss about Offutt AFB.

"I'm not surprised by what he said he would miss;

the 55th MSG team, Team Offutt, and in the great global community that we have," Marks said. "That is the type of leader Norton is; selfless, humble, and a true servant leader."

Marks' final message about Norton also allowed us to know what he said to Norton's new boss.

"He is getting a true superstar," Marks said. "Someone who is the textbook definition of an inspired leader, someone who will mow down obstacles in his path and someone who brings results like only a few leaders can."

Norton said he and his family are looking forward to what his next assignment and the new journey will bring them. Before departing, he had some remarks for his old command.

"For me this occasion is bittersweet, emphasis on the word bitter," Norton said. "While my family and I look forward to the next adventure, this is a difficult place to be leaving for many reasons but above all, as you heard from Col. Marks, I will very dearly miss the people here. What an incredible team to be a part of."

While dealing with this humbling experience, Dayton is ready to take charge of the 55th MSG and continue to provide service to Team Offutt.

"(Being chosen was) very humbling," Dayton said. "You have my loyalty and I pledge to carry on this group's legacy of service."



U.S. Air Force photo by Charles J. Haymond

Col. Gavin Marks, 55th Wing commander, passes the 55th Mission Support Group guidon to Col. W.R. Alan Dayton, during the 55th Mission Support Group Change of Command ceremony July 24 inside the Offutt Air Force Base Fire Station. Col. W.R. Alan Dayton took over command of the 55th MSG from Col. J. David Norton who has served in the position since 2017.