

A Profile of Excellence

Inside the Air Armament Center, Air Force Materiel Command

Maj. Gen. Robert W. Chedister, USAF



Maj. Gen. Chedister explains the Air Armament Center's marquee program, the small diameter bomb—a highly accurate and lethal new weapon—to Dr. Jack Dwyer, DAU professor and site manager of DAU's satellite campus at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla.

Equipping the United States and its allies with sophisticated weaponry, the Air Force Materiel Command's Air Armament Center is responsible for developing, acquiring, testing, deploying, and sustaining all air-delivered weapons. It's a vital mission, and like most government agencies today, the AAC is trying to do more with less. The organization has successfully incorporated transformation and divestiture strategies, while still delivering outstanding products on time, on cost, with impressively quick turnaround—

thereby contributing significantly to the successes Gen. Gregory S. Martin, our commander, described at the beginning of his interview in this issue.

Eglin is the Air Force's largest base and, we believe, one of America's crown jewels. No other place in the country has the people, facilities, and capabilities to produce air armaments so well. We enjoy significant local and state support for our missions. We've been able to preserve the best land, water, and air range in our country for all of

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the Services to use for development, testing, and training. For all these reasons, Gen. Martin has dubbed Eglin the Nation's Center of Excellence for Air Armament.

Increased OPTEMPO and Life Cycle Management

Operations tempo has greatly increased over the last several years, and it is thanks to the people of Team Eglin that we've sustained the OPTEMPO. They respond magnificently every time the Air Force calls on them. For instance, we brought the passive attack weapon from concept to the field in under 100 days, giving the warfighter a unique capability to immobilize targets with precision, while minimizing collateral damage. In another effort, our team developed the massive ordnance air blast in only 10 weeks. Although we never needed to use it in theater, the world saw the successful tests of this weapon on television. If the mission had needed it, it was ready.

The increased operational tempo has demonstrated the need to keep life cycle management in the forefront as we develop a system. We've learned the importance of incorporating emerging technologies into our acquisition strategies. The insertion of emerging technologies can provide significant enhancements that we can design into a system to extend its useful life for the warfighter. To accomplish this, we collaborate with our sister Services to identify synergies that we can apply to our programs to increase capability and/or extend their lives.

One such collaboration is our joint effort with the Army's single manager for conventional munitions to highlight industrial base capacity and capability issues that may extend or shorten the useful life of our weapons as appropriate. The end result will be to develop more efficient methods for designing life cycle management into our systems and to apply lessons learned from the use of our weapon systems during current operations to the design process, thereby ensuring that needed capabilities are delivered.

Shifting the Focus to Capabilities

A priority for AAC is transitioning the focus from a program-centric methodology to one focused on capabilities. The universal armament interface exemplifies just such a transformation. In the past, weapon programs spent a large part of their funds integrating a new weapon onto an aircraft. The expenditure included costs for the hardware (wiring, connectors, special interface circuits) and modifications to the software of both the aircraft and the weapon. While standardizing the aircraft/store interface under MIL-STD-1760 helped to eliminate many hardware changes, software costs became the largest portion of the integration budget. A joint team from the AAC and the Aeronautical Systems Center at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, came together to develop a capability for the warfighter to reduce the weapon integration costs and provide them with plug-and-play capability, which will dramatically reduce the costs and cycle time to integrate weapons. The Army and Navy are involved in this initiative to explore and develop the technology that will allow smart weapons to be fielded without requiring changes to aircraft software.

Transformation and Divestiture

Transformation and divestiture—eliminating non-essential policies and programs and applying new ones that generate higher productivity and increased customer support—are part of the AAC's strategic plan. In June 2004, we participated in Operation Paper Shredder and eliminated nine of the 28 reports we submitted for divestiture. The AAC is also making great strides in using the streamlined model for divestiture in foreign military sales. Two years ago, the AAC team and the Air Force Security Assistance Center transformation team developed a core cadre process that proved highly successful in an initial beta test. By considering the FMS program as a single entity, the new process streamlines the reviews, places justification in one document, and eliminates potential duplication normally created by separate resources, both in personnel and funding reviews.

Leading the Way in Workforce Development

It's well known that the future of the workforce is a matter of concern. In some career fields, over 50 percent of personnel are or will be eligible for retirement in the next five years. AAC uses a three-pronged approach to ac-

comply with workforce shaping and to ensure a viable, well-equipped workforce:

Recruiting/Accession Planning

We are developing and implementing methods to attract and recruit a constant supply of new employees at the right number and skill mix.

Workforce Development

We are ensuring that the Air Force civilian workforce stays current through the establishment of a culture of learning and mentoring, one example of which is the Air Armament Academy—or A³. [For an in-depth discussion of A³, see “A Learning Transformation: The Eglin Learning Organization, Defense AT&L, July-August 2004.]

Retention/Separation Management

We use DoD- and Air Force-approved separation and retention authorities to help retain critical skills, while at the same time creating vacancies in a controlled manner.

Space prohibits my writing at length about all three approaches; however, workforce development deserves more than a mention. With support and funding from Blaise Durante, deputy assistant secretary for management policy and program integration, we created A³ about 18 months ago. Durante’s vision and ours is to establish the AAC as a global benchmark for acquisition and combat support excellence through exceptional workforce development.

A³ is both a push and pull learning facility. Leadership pushes certain mandatory courses we feel are necessary for building a rock-solid foundation within our workforce. In turn, workforce members pull—or make recommendations for—courses they believe would also assist. These courses are created and taught by subject matter experts from within our organizations. Courses that cover the joint capabilities integration development systems and the joint operations have helped lead the way to focus on capabilities. Over 8,000 people attended over 400 classes during fiscal 2004, our first year of operations.

The most visible results we’ve seen at the AAC relate to cross-pollination of various disciplines. For example, a personnel specialist attended the munitions systems effectiveness class and reported that it dramatically enhanced her ability to create or improve acquisition workforce position descriptions. In another instance, developmental testers from the 46th Test Wing attended a design of experiments class taught by their operational test counterparts in Air Combat Command’s 53rd Wing here at Eglin. They indicated that the class was rich with benchmark processes and tools they will apply to development test design and execution.

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Last year, Frank J. Anderson, president of the Defense Acquisition University, and I agreed to establish a DAU satellite office at Eglin to better support the AAC acquisition workforce. The DAU/AAC team has been a tremendous partnership. The DAU satellite office stood up the same month as A³. The classes offered have been effective as refreshers for experienced acquisition personnel and as introductory material for non-acquisition personnel. What’s more, we have avoided hundreds of thousands of dollars in annual travel expenses by hosting DAU classes at Eglin. With 23 additional DAU classes offered in fiscal 2005, bringing the total to 38 course offerings including the Level III Program Management Office Course, this benefit continues to grow.

[The AAC’s innovative workforce development initiatives were recognized in November 2004, when acting Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Michael W. Wynne celebrated AAC as Gold Winner of the first USD(AT&L) Workforce Development Award. (Defense AT&L, March-April 2005).]

By the time you read this, Eglin Air Force Base will be on the brink of an operational readiness inspection, a component of which will be a wartime materiel request exercise. Based on past experience, we are confident we’ll perform very well in this exercise, and we couldn’t be more proud to show off Team Eglin’s broad array of talent and our responsiveness and ability to get weapons to the warfighter on time and on cost.

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