

Ready, Set, Airlift! Ep. 6 Why Recruiting Should Matter To You

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Julian Hernandez (Host): Ladies and gentlemen, airmen and friends of the Alamo Wing, thank you for joining us for the sixth episode of Ready, Set, Airlift. I'm your host, Julian Hernandez, a member of the 433rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs Team. For anyone new to the show, our goal here on Ready, Set, Airlift is to bring you news and discussion relevant to the mission of the Alamo Wing and the community of people, whether they are in uniform or not, who make that mission possible.

We will have some announcements for airmen ahead of the March UTA later on, but first, on this episode, we are jumping into what has been a hot topic lately around the Air Force Reserve and the military community as a whole. We are talking about recruiting. To help us sort through the complexity of today's recruiting environment, We sat down with one of the Air Force senior leaders grappling with recruiting challenges on a daily basis.

Julian Hernandez (Host): Brigadier General Lisa Craig joining us here. She is the Deputy Commander of the Air Force Recruiting Service. Brigadier General Craig, thank you so much for being with us today and taking time. I know you have a lot on the schedule. I want to start with possibly the easiest question of the day. Why did you join the Air Force?

Brig. Gen. Lisa Craig: Well, that's a great question, Julian, and really, really it goes back to being raised in a kind of a rural area with not a lot of opportunity and really wanting someone to pay for college. I had an older brother who had

gone into the Air Force. He was a fighter pilot. But it never occurred to me to go into the Air Force until I was graduating high school and realized I had no one to pay for college except myself.

And he pointed me in the direction of Air Force ROTC, so I took it as a class. And by the end of my freshman year of college, I was offered a scholarship for the other remaining three years of school. I figured I would do my four years of service commitment out of ROTC and then move on with whatever else I was going to do in my life.

But within very, very short amount of time in Air Force ROTC, I really found my niche. And then when I came into the Air Force. I just couldn't imagine a better fit for how I choose to live my life and the people that I surround myself with. So I served seven years active duty. I had a short break in service and then I've been in the reserve for just about 27 years.

When I finish my career in May of 2024, just three months from now, I will have had 35 years in uniform and plus the four years of ROTC. So the, the decision to get college paid for got me here and the people keep me here.

Julian Hernandez (Host): Well, first and foremost, congratulations on your upcoming retirement. 35 years is quite the career and certainly no shortage of achievements in that time.

I want to visit one specific time of your career that I think is particularly relevant for our audience at the 433rd. You were the MSG commander for a couple of years, almost between October of 2014 and then June of 2016. Tell us a little bit about that time in your career and maybe some of the lessons you learned down at the Alamo wing that have helped you as you've moved on to bigger and better posts.

Brig. Gen. Lisa Craig: Well, first of all, I will always consider myself a member of the Alamo wing family. What a great honor and privilege it was to be hired as the mission support group commander. By far my favorite job ever in my entire career was being the commander there, as well as being associated with my team and the teammates in, in the Alamo wing, an amazing job and opportunity.

So at that point in time when I arrived. Our wing was rated with the worst facilities in the entire Air Force Reserve. And I didn't know a heck a lot about civil engineering and how do we get money and funding. For the betterment of

our campus and I learned very quickly and I'm really proud of the fact that we laid the cornerstones for so many of the improvements on the campus.

I also just felt such a great kinship with the mission set, we both were able to support the learning of C 5 pilots in the future, as well as support the mission writ large. Not just with the things that the mission support group does. On a routine basis, security forces, civil engineering, logistics, personnel and our two aerial ports, but what we were able to do to connect with the other groups and the rest of the mission through exercises and just through a great amount of trust building and support for one another.

not only as people, but across the mission. I just have such great pride in the team's accomplishment and how much I learned in that brief, almost two year period. It really was the stepping stone for every job I've had since. So I think of my career prior to becoming a support group commander was everything that led me to that point.

And then that job has laid the groundwork for everything I've done since and I rely on my experiences here in San Antonio. At that point in time, and since to really guide all of the decisions that I have a part of for our Air Force, when I look back at the readiness and how we really tried to figure out the best pathways forward in not only improving mission sets, but Optimizing how we performed in every manner just take great pride in having been associated with and having the opportunity to lead the roughly 1200 men and women of the support group and how we supported.

The roughly 3000 people in the wing at that point in time, it was just such a great experience. And I can't speak enough about that and the connections and the, and the people that made such a difference in my life and my career. It's, it's just how I, if you look in my office where we're sitting half of it is in tribute to my time at the Alamo wing.

What a great honor and privilege it is to be a member of that family.

Julian Hernandez (Host): I did appreciate coming into the office and seeing for those who can't, you know, see where we're sitting right now, there's a little mock up of a C5 tail with the Alamo wing's tail flash. So that was a nice little welcoming note for me stepping into the office.

Brig. Gen. Lisa Craig: And the Bowie knife and just a whole tribute to that wing, so. Every day I look up from my desk, that's what I see.

Julian Hernandez (Host): And, I think a powerful point for our reserve citizen airmen to remember that everything they're learning at the Alamo wing right now can serve them in an even greater mission down the line.

So to never take for granted, a UTA or any training experience or all that. But as we move to talking about your role now as the deputy commander of the air force recruiting service, first and foremost, I want, for those of. Our listeners who may not be connoisseurs of the intricacies of rank and position within the military.

Maybe just tell us a quick bit about what does it mean to be the deputy commander of the Air Force Recruiting service?

Brig. Gen. Lisa Craig: Well, the deputy commander of Air Force Recruiting Service is it's a numbered Air Force equivalent. So if we look at the structure of the Air Force. You've got the Pentagon, and then you have the MAJCOMs, and then you go down to the numbered Air Force level.

So that's the level at which this organization sits. And then under our organization is a blanket of total force. Continuity, if you will, it's an integrated mission set of active duty recruiting for the Air Force and for the Space Force, as well as reserve recruiting and Air National Guard recruiting.

We also have our fingers in the Air Force Academy, marketing, as well as Air Force ROTC and how we. Come together with not only the civilian service and how we support that particularly important to our reserve mission, as we have a status air reserve technician, that's both reserve and civil servants.

But we also work with partners outside of the Department of the Air Force, Civil Air Patrol, which is the auxiliary to the Air Force as well as things like Air Force Association and other civil support agencies and having this role as deputy commander, I get to experience and help lead across all of that.

As we work across the Department of Defense to make sure that all of the laws and policies align to best support the readiness of the forces, as I mentioned, we recruit directly for four different important entities in the Department of the Air Force. But we work across the Department of Defense, and it's been a great learning experiment for me to see not only how that plays out, but also how we can use our whole of government approach To try to support other parts of our United States government things like how do we bring folks in and train them to do many of the things we may need in other parts of the government.

I use an example of Air traffic controllers. So if you're a part of the Department of Transportation, most, if not, I would say again, a majority of our air traffic controllers across the nation came out of the military. So not only do we recruit for that total force that I already mentioned, but how we support and how Things like other parts of the government support the military is another key component of this particular position.

And then we work with things like the Department of Education to make sure that the recruiting enterprise is supported across the nation. It's been a profoundly different job than what I thought it was going to be. Somebody once mentioned that it's about shaking hands and kissing babies, much like a politician.

And there is some of that. We get to go do some pretty extraordinary things with marketing partners and out in the community. But really, it's about effecting positive change for the military and for the betterment of our society and the support of this great nation.

Julian Hernandez (Host): So that being said, anybody who's paying any attention to the recruiting environment right now understands that the message is a lot about challenges and constraints.

I want to reference just for a point to launch the discussion from is the air force times reported. Late last year that active duty Air Force had missed its goal for recruiting numbers by about 10 percent and then the reserve had missed by about 30%. And it was about the first time since 1999 that that had happened.

So that being said. From your perspective, what are some of those challenges? And then more importantly, where are you guys going as far as addressing those challenges and moving in a different direction?

Brig. Gen. Lisa Craig: In 1973, the all volunteer force came about and I'm going to give you kind of this history lesson because it kind of is indicative of where we've come from, where we are currently and kind of how we envision the future.

So 1973, we become an all volunteer force. We're moving along. Everything seems pretty solid in our recruiting up until about 1999, because quite frankly, Everyone in the nation knew somebody who had served. In fact, at that point in time, one in ten Americans had served. So you might have had a family member.

There was this common understanding of the military. As we have decreased our force size, which really took place starting in the early nineties, we get to 1999. That was the first time the services were large missed their mission and goals. We just really hadn't been focusing on this ever diminishing population.

We weren't at war back in when we were loosely at war, but not in the public eye and we weren't resourcing recruiting to the degree we might have needed. So 1999 happens, the military, almost all services miss their mission goal that year and we plus up resourcing and we put more emphasis into marketing and we really start building into understanding.

This changing demographic of the nation and, and we had closed a bunch of bases and 9 11 happens and we get a whole surge of patriotism, but we also became very insular. We put, you know, bars up on the gates and it was very hard to get on a military installation. It still is for the most part. So we become what we call Fortress America.

Well, it's, you can see the military in the distance, but again, we have less and less people who have served. We have less and less people who are familiar with the military. And now we've sort of closed off. The bases from society. So there are these mysterious places and not everybody really understands what we do in the military.

All you see is the far off places and the news, right? Which isn't always super favorable. Well, we move along and, and as the force was drawing down, we didn't need to recruit as many folks, but we started to see a diminished. Perhaps interest or awareness as we were in the 2010s, when we as a nation shut down for COVID in 2020, a whole host of different factors converged.

And it was the first time that we really connected all of those dots that the mission set was perhaps struggling. Then you couple it with the generation of youth that were coming up, a little bit more skeptical of organizations, and now I'll use that term very broadly much more in tune with their own personal interests and maybe how they could further those.

And then COVID compounded that. So as we flushed through those years, those, those two really hard hit years where we weren't in schools, there weren't a lot of events where we would be out in the marketing space. The youth of America were becoming a little bit more skeptical. We had a lot of challenges across society.

You start seeing a lack of trust in government and in the military and in police forcing and, and the long drawn out wars \, that were a result of nine 11. And . We start to see this diminished awareness and interest. So that's how, what got us to 2023 and the mission being so challenged.

And it was exceptionally challenging, as you noted, for our part time force, our reserve and guard, even though we have full time reservists and guardsmen, we know that. It was more challenging for those mission sets because now the stability of the force that was exiting. active duty service, they were no longer able to affiliate because they were staying in the reserve.

So that compounded the problem for the Air Force Reserve and the Air National Guard. So in the, in the lead up to failing those mission sets we did meet the Space Force mission that year. It is, it, it's the only one we met. What we have Done to address those challenges is really Almost in sports term, it's getting back to the basics, blocking and tackling.

How do we go out there and sell the Air Force brand and the sub brands? How do we make America more aware of the fact that we exist and we have 250 different specialties across the service that you can become a professional at a particular career, as well as join the profession of arms?

How can we open our bases a little more and go out into communities? And it's really great because our reservists are not just near an installation. They're across the landscape of America and can connect us in a much more broad way. We've also worked through a lot of policy change things that make us a little bit more relevant with society without changing the quality of the people that we bring in.

I'll give you an example. Our tattoo policy. When I joined in 1989, you could never have a tattoo that was visible at all when you were in any uniform combination. So that meant above the sleeve length and certainly you couldn't see it on face color hands. And then we've changed as society has moved along, and most recently, as we noted, the, the changes when we were looking at failing this mission set, was to allow some hand tattoos and some tattoos behind the ear or on the back of the neck.

We had Already reduce some of the restrictions on lower arm tattoos. Obviously, we don't want them to be inflammatory or derogatory tattoos or something that would be looked at as extremist or purporting violence, anything like that. So the tattoos are still reviewed. But somebody with great ASVAB

scores with a, a small tattoo on their hand or behind their ear is still a great airman.

And so, that keeping up with society, those types of policy changes, allowing folks that are legal aliens who want to become citizens to join and gain their citizenship as they graduate BMT, those types of policy changes, Do not impact the quality of the recruit. They just allow us to open the aperture a little bit more.

And so making those kinds of changes was imperative. And then again, getting back to the basics of going out into schools and going out into the community, working with our marketing teams to really bring that brand awareness has been instrumental in us. Turning the tide. So as of right now, the regular force is not only meeting their mission for the most part they are booking jobs three plus months out, kind of back where we were before the pandemic hit.

We are still a little short on the regular force on special warfare and some of the exquisite capabilities that we look for on the officer side electrical engineers, certain medical specialties. Those are a little bit more challenging for us to recruit to. On the reserve side, we are almost meeting mission.

We're just about 2 percent off for this fiscal year. And what we're working also to do for the Air Force Reserve is to retain every great airman that we already have in our roles and that we're training. So while retention isn't necessarily a recruiting mission, it is hyper important because retaining an asset is one less recruit we need to bring in into the future.

So staying in service and finding those flexibilities is, is another part of what we do on the recruiting and retention side in the Air Force Reserve, which is a little different than what we do for our regular Air Force specialties.

Julian Hernandez (Host): So across the air force to meet changing challenges and adversaries that are on the horizon, \ the mindset of accelerate change or lose has become a key part of the air force message and how they're going to transform for the future.

The recruiting service, I'm sure is a huge part of that as well. Changing some of the methods and increasing the ways of outreach. I think two things that are worth highlighting is. The recruiting service has started to use an app to increase its contacts and its ability to reach perhaps that younger demographic that is more technologically inclined and less likely to pick up a flyer, read a printed material, and then also programs that encourage airmen or, , future airmen who

decide to take that step, encourage them to bring those they know and, let them become a part of the recruiting function as well.

Brig. Gen. Lisa Craig: Yeah, so I want to go back. You started with Accelerated Change or Lose, and General Alvin, our now Chief of Staff of the Air Force, when he was the Vice Chief was directly engaged with us to get these policies over the finish line, this, all this change that we were seeking Really, in a much more compressed manner he met with us on a weekly basis.

When you're talking about one of the top four star generals in the entire Department of Defense, putting that much time, energy, and attention, the rest of the Pentagon then followed. And one of those programs, which you mentioned, was our stellar talent acquisition, recruiting, and retention opportunity star.

Where you can refer recruits as any airmen in the military and refer them into service across the Department of the Air Force. That's RAGAF, Space Force. Reserve or guard, any airman or guardian can make a referral and get an Air and Space Achievement Medal if that person actually comes into service. And that was one of those pieces that General Alvin leaned into and really had us break down some of the barriers and resistance to change.

And while that may not contribute large numbers yet we've seen some great success with those referrals and the best methodology for getting that referral over. And I'll give you one, one other referral program that we have. Is through our Aim High app, and if you go to any of the download stores, like the app store and the Google Play store, you can download the Aim High app as an airman, and if you use your military email address to sign into that, you will get credit Across the board.

Now, the other part of that referral, as you mentioned, is somebody who is awaiting to go to BMT. So whether that's a reservist sitting in our DNTF, a guardsman, or somebody that's waiting to go to basic military training for either the Space Force or the regular Air Force. If they make a referral that becomes an airman, they actually get a stripe upon graduation from basic military training, which directly equates to money.

So they don't get an achievement medal. They get something even more tangible and, and much more quickly realized. So we're really reliant on that, but you can use the Aim High app to make those referrals. The Aim High app is also just such a great tool. It has the listings of all the different Air Force specialties we have and descriptions of what those are.

It has some workouts in there for not only prepping for somebody to get ready for basic training, generally staying fit, but also it has our special warfare fitness regimes. Which, for any of us, would be great fitness opportunities to follow along with, what some, of our Special Warfare Airmen do to remain fit and stay healthy

parents can follow their basic trainee or, or support family members can follow their basic trainee through BMT. They have pictures that upload as they're going through. It's just a great app. So I would encourage our our listeners to potentially look into that app. Whether you're an airman or not, referring somebody is just a great thing to do for our nation.

Julian Hernandez (Host): Well, and for our airmen, I think. Joe or Jane Airman, they hear a lot of these discussions about policy and changing the mindset at the 30, 000 foot level. But, you know, they operate at the 10 foot level or, we'll call it the micro level. So I think also something that gets mentioned a lot is a generational change in the question.

Why? A lot of, Airmen, younger airmen particularly Will, will hear these sort of things, and the first thing that pops into their mind is, well, why? So as a senior leader, what is your response to the question? Why should I, as a regular airman be invested in the recruiting

process?

Brig. Gen. Lisa Craig: So I look around and the people, as I mentioned at the beginning of this telecast, are the reason that I stay.

And they're the friends that become your family and the family that become your friends. And if you already have folks that, that Are leaning into life like our airmen are wanting to be better and wanting to make our nation better and wanting to support and defend our constitution. Wouldn't you want to bring those same people?

In not that we all need to think, act, and behave like one another to have people who you trust and value relationships with alongside as your fellow airmen and teammates really does make us a better force. And we are looking for that national landscape demographic and diversity while you know, it's become this controversial topic in many, in many circles.

To me, it represents the best decision making. So, as I mentioned, I came from a poor, rural background, and I'm going to approach Decisions, one, because I'm a

female, one, because I've been in the service for a long time, and my age, and the generation I grew up in, but how I was raised, and, and who poured into me, and how I think about things, and that's going to be different than somebody that was raised in an urban environment, or in the south, in a, in a rural place different from where I grew up in the Pacific Northwest.

How we approach problems, and How we think about things, how we relate to people, we bring the best of America and we become a representative force because we refer people along the way. And to me, that's the beauty of the diversity opportunity. So the why is not only to make ourselves better, but to make our nation stronger and to be relative to, to those whom we serve.

Julian Hernandez (Host): That was just the first part of our conversation with Brigadier General Craig. On our next episode, in honor of Women's History Month, she'll address how being a woman has affected her 30 plus year career, and she'll share insights from that long and storied career in the hopes of helping young women considering military service today.

To get notified as soon as that episode drops, make sure you are subscribed to Ready, Set, Airlift! on Apple Podcasts, Amazon, Spotify, Pandora, TuneIn, or wherever you like to listen to us. Also, make sure to check out our Facebook and Instagram pages, or our website for the latest news about the Alamo Wing.

Before we go, some announcements for our Airmen ahead of the March UTA. In case you haven't heard, our Wing Commander, Colonel William Gutermuth is retiring this July. Air Force Reserve Command has selected Colonel Douglas Jeffrey to serve as the next leader of the Alamo Wing. If you'd like to learn more about him, his biography has been emailed out.

The Contingency Response Flight is going to conduct some training in their area of the wing footprint this weekend that will affect the availability of parking near their building. Be on the lookout for roped off areas and plan accordingly.

Julian Hernandez (Host): The San Antonio Spurs are holding a military appreciation night on Sunday, March 3rd.

All Alamo Wing Airmen are eligible for discounted tickets. For more information, visit the team website.

On that note, we are going to wrap up this episode of Ready, Set, Airlift. We appreciate you spending some of your time with us. Remember, we are always looking for your feedback and comments about the show.

Drop us a line via email to [airliftpodcasts at gmail. com](mailto:airliftpodcasts@gmail.com). That's [airliftpodcasts at gmail. com](mailto:airliftpodcasts@gmail.com). I've been your host, Julian Hernandez on behalf of the 433rd PA team. Stay safe and have a productive UTA.