

This transcript is made possible through the sponsorship of JobsOhio.

CMSAF Jim Roy (Ret.):

Again, welcome. This forum is the Agile Combat Employment, otherwise known as ACE, and then listed leadership. As you see. The group of folks in front of you there. We've got a very distinct group that is here to talk to you about ACE and the employment of our multiple capable Airmen and Guardians. First of all, to my left, I'll just go right down the line here. My left, Chief Master Sergeant Brian Kruzelnick from Air Mobility Command. All those AMC warriors out there. Absolutely.

CMSgt. Brian Kruzelnick:

There's like three of them.

CMSAF Jim Roy (Ret.):

There's three of them. They're over on this side. So I'm waiting to see where ACC and PAF and USAF are. Along with that, we've got Chief Master Sergeant Ben Hedden from US Air Force's Europe and AFRICA. Chief Master Sergeant John Storms from ACC, Air Combat Command. John. Chief Jake Simmons, Senior Listed Leader Space Operation Command. Give it up for space. Come on now. We just heard The Guardian. We just heard a new song. Wasn't that special. Thinking your living history. You just met the person that wrote that song. That's pretty great. And then also we have Dave Wolfe all the way from PACAF, all the way from Hawaii. Again, most importantly, we have you our audience. Without you, this is not possible. And as Chief Murray just mentioned, 16,000 Airmen and Guardians here this week. That is simply amazing. You should give it up for yourself. That's quite a unique challenge. That's the largest ever that I can ever remember and I've been coming to these for a lot of years. So give it up to yourself as well.

I want to start with BK. Air Mobility Command. As we talk, and normally I'd let the group tell a little bit about yourself. Because our limited time, I thought we'd dive right into the questions because really I know what's on your mind and what's on your mind is this idea of ACE and how the enlisted leadership falls into this. So BK from Premier Mobility to command from the MAF perspective, how can illicit leaders best prepare to operate using the ACE concept?

CMSgt. Brian Kruzelnick:

Well Chief, thanks for the question. Appreciate being with you, Chief Master Air Force number 16, Roy. Incredible. And you got to hold down two cops and two maintenance dudes and a space guy. So good luck to that.

Really to AFA, General Roy and Chief Master Air Force number 14, Murray, thank you for hosting this. That's a ton of people. You got to be very strategic if you want to get a cup of coffee in the morning or else you ain't getting it with that many people. And lastly, thank you. We had a little bit if we'd have more people on the panel than in the audience and obviously you guys are outnumbered by a little bit so I'll get back to you on that one. So that's fantastic.

So back to the question. How do we best suit a MAF warrior for ACE? And I'll talk to MAF because that's what I do. I think there's three parts. We need to have education. I think the other part is really understanding what we'll call MAF board gen force elements look like and then train to MCA. And then the last piece is just sets and reps and where we're going to ask you to do the work. So let's talk to education. We use the same word with a lot of different meanings. So if you haven't, I would ask you to look at the doctrine note 1-21 which is entitled ACE. Crazy Enough. And give you really good foundation

of what we're talking about. I think there might be confusion because the Vice Chief actually went further and put out a key terminology memo that kind of talks about the presentation and employment approaches to make sure we're all using the same vernacular and it means the same thing.

If you really talk about ACE, really basic, it's a proactive and reactive scheme of maneuver that increases survivability while generating combat power. Just that easy. Since it's a scheme of maneuver, that's why the AMC dude is here. I'm not pretty and witty as Ben Hedden here, but we run the scheme of maneuver, AMC and MAF is the only or the meaningful maneuver force for the Department of Defense. I say that because it's more than just Air Force, it's ACE. It's Army's multi-domain task force, part of multi-domain operations. It's Navy's distributed maritime operations. It's the Marine's expeditionary advanced based operations. It's all of that. So joint integration is incredibly important because we do have 110,000 total Force members, 1,100 aircraft. But that is not enough to go into silos of excellence for agile combat concepts. We got to come together and I would say allies and partners, but I'm sure Chief Wolfe will talk about the allies and partners piece.

But the joint integration is critical. From a MAF perspective, we need to have our Airmen understand that so much that my boss, General Minihan came up with a team he's put together called the Fight Club. And this one we talk about. With this Fight Club. It is a cross sectional team of experts that are trying to look at what is the winning scheme of maneuver in the Pacific against the PRC or against China? The joint winning scheme of maneuver. That has enlisted people and that has officers on it that are working through that. As we kind of figure that out, we went to Indo Paycom... Well, we're about to go twice to have that conversation. We also went to each one of the major commands, almost all of them, and we will hit all of them to also talk that out. And it improves every time that we look at it.

There's four major gaps in that. One is C2 and we talked about that yesterday. It's a huge AOR. And with contested logistics, with dispersed operations, that's a very hard problem to solve. Another is navigation for the same reasons. Another one will be contested maneuver. Think about running an obstacle course while people are shooting at you. It becomes a very difficult problem. Then the last one we'll call ops tempo and that's their ability to stay in the fight in the first island chain. Our Airmen are living and breathing, how to solve those hard problems each and every day on top of offering that to industry as we've done here and some of our other engagements to also try to solve those problems. We need our enlisted Airman who could be a captain and a master sergeant with a bunch of junior Airmen on a island somewhere trying to get after an objective. They need to understand what we're asking them to do.

That kind of plays into these force elements that we're going to compose that make up AFFORGEN, or in our case, MAFFORGEN. And what kind of supplements that is a multi capable Airman. I don't know if I like the term cause it freaks everybody out. If you have deployed in the last 30 years and you were asked to do something that was outside of your soul specialty, you were a multi capable Airman. We just didn't call you that, right? So that's the baseline of it. You're going to go out to our steer location, there's going to be gaps in what we're trying to get done and you need to stand in that gap, whatever that job happens to be. The Air Force's Expeditionary Center, which just happens to fall underneath AMC, teaches a level one MCA training, so everybody has the same baseline and there's different levels depending on what you're asked to do per your mission set.

We have contingency response folks at AMC. Now this is aerial porters, this is defenders, this is ATC, this is a conglomerate of specialties that all can do each other's job just as well as one another. That's probably the highest level. Those are the folks that go into an air base, assess it, open it, establish C2, and then hand it off to somebody to operate on. Not everybody's going to be asked to do that, but you all do need a baseline of what MCA is and we need our enlisted Airmen to understand that. It's nothing new. We just gave it a name and we're going to put a little structure behind it. Don't get scared. We're going to be able to get through it.

Really another piece on that is understanding mission command. And that's really just understanding mission type orders, commander's intent. When you are separated from an air operations center and you're not sure what the most realtime information is, still get after your objective at that location. And like I said, that could be a Captain or a Senior Master Sergeant and a bunch of NCOs. Still push forward, achieve your objective and then we'll push out. Because there's a short period of time to be agile. Proactive, reactive scheme of maneuver. So those are the baselines on that. The last thing is we got to get you sets and reps in the AOR.

If this is a Pacific fight, and that's what I will talk to because I'm sure the next person will talk to a different fight, we have to be able to understand what that AOR looks like and the way we're going to have to maneuver there. So Air Mobility Command does things called the Mobility Guardian exercise every two years. It is a gigantic robust joint exercise where we work through these war fighting concepts and we're going to do this year's in the Pacific, the closest to the first island chance we can without being provoking. That's what will happen. If you're an AMC and you are not in the AOR, you will run parallel exercises that match what we're doing in the AOR. So this way, everybody's participating. And this is the way we're going to try to get the sets and reps we need to win or have that winning scheme of maneuver in that AOR. And I think I talked quite a bit there so I'll stop. At the end of the day, Chief, education, we need to understand AFFORGEN, the force elements in MCA and then we need sets and reps.

CMSAF Jim Roy (Ret.):

That's great, BK. Thank you for doing that. Chief Hedden, maybe a little real world current events, if you will. Maybe what's going on in Ukraine and how that's helped the Ukrainians from our ACC concept if you will.

CMSgt. Benjamin Hedden:

People always ask what's the reason, purpose of ACE, the why? And I always just go right back to what happened in Ukraine. We're in day 209 of Russia's 72 hour military operation in Ukraine. Day 209 of their 72 hour operation. That was the second largest air force in the world, Russia invading Ukraine, with the 27th largest air force in the world. And Russia still does not have air superiority. We wouldn't live like that, right? That's the first thing you want to do. And that's what our joint partners want. The Army, the Navy, the Marines, everyone wants us to establish air superiority so they have scheme of maneuver on the ground without threats. They still don't have it. It's amazing. And how did they do that? Well they'd ACE'd. They moved their planes from the airfields they were at so when the Russians struck, they struck the spot where the aircraft were sitting yesterday. They weren't sitting there today when the missiles hit. They were sitting in another air base and they've continually moved their aircraft around and moved their surface to air missile batteries and all that stuff around.

And in the last 10 days, open source, read on Reuters, the last 10 days, the Russians have lost four aircraft. Day 209, Russians have lost over 55 fixed wing aircraft. That's what people are estimating open source. 55 fixed wing aircraft. That's crazy. Ukraine's only had like 200 aircraft and they've shot down 55 Russian aircraft. So that to me shows importance of ACE because the Ukrainians are still operating 209 days in with a much smaller force and they're agile and they've been able to do it because they're NCO core. When I talked to their Chief Master on the Air Force, that's what he told me. Their success is solely on their NCO core. The Russians, they send general officers to the front lines. There's a Wikipedia page that lists all the general officers from Russia that have died in Ukraine. We don't do that. We send a master sergeant.

But if there's a logistics issue or there's problems, that's what Russia does. They send general officers to the front line because they do not have an enlisted core that they can empower like we do. The Ukrainians learned that. After the annexation of Crimea, they were like, "Hey, we need to change our structure." So they worked hard for eight years to change their military structure and empower their NCOs. They understand commander's intent and you see them all the time, "Give us the weapons, give us the weapons, give us a little bit of training and we'll take the fight to the enemy." And they've proven that and they've done a phenomenal job. And I think that right there to me is the best example of what ACE can bring for us.

So if we're in any kind of conflict with an adversary, it's the AXO back in the day, a lot of us old school folks remember that ability to survive and operate, right? And we're always worried about the chemical weapons. Now it's our ability to move our stuff before our adversaries can target us. We have to know what our targeting cycle is and we have to operate faster than they can target us. If that means we move everything every 12 hours or 12 minutes, whatever. We have to understand how fast the enemy can target us and then we have to be faster than them and we have to be able to move our stuff, take the fight to the enemy and then recover, reconstitute and launch again.

And when we do this, it's going to be a lot of times small teams. We talk about sending 20 people out to a forward operating location and the highest ranking person on that team probably going to be a Master Sergeant. Because really we always say, the backbone of the Air force is enlisted core or the NCO core. That's true. That's our asymmetric advantage over our adversaries. There's plenty of articles out there that talk about Russia doesn't have an NCO core. China wants one and they're trying to figure out how to emulate what we do. That's hard. I mean it's taken us a long time to get to where we're at and people just can't decide they want to have a good enlisted core and then two years later have it. We all know that. It's taken us decades, 75 years. And even then, we were doing it before that when we were the Army Air Corps. That's all.

CMSAF Jim Roy (Ret.):

Great. Thank you Ben. So Chief Storms, from an ACC's perspective, and Ben kind of touched on this pretty eloquently on Master Sergeant and what the leadership is. From an enlisted perspective, where do you see the leadership opportunities in ACE?

CMSgt. John Storms:

Yeah, thanks Chief. So I think that ACE is going to provide our enlisted force. Just incredible unlimited leadership opportunities. Oftentimes we'll have a young CGO or a senior NCO out there leading the team as Chief Hedden mentioned. We got to be realistic in this. We might be operating in an environment with degraded communication, inaccurate or incomplete information, oftentimes without the specialists or subject matter experts that we're accustomed to having at our traditional fixed bases. And then on top of that, we may have degraded command and control. We're going to thrust this kind of less than ideal situation on our junior leaders and ask them to go ahead and execute in accordance with the commander's intent based on the best decisions that they can make with the information they have available at the time.

So it's going to be tough, but I think if you are an aspiring leader, this is the golden ticket from Willie Wonka for leadership. It really is a perfect opportunity to express your leadership abilities. I'm excited about what's happening and as an Air Combat Command, we've kind of gone through some exercises and operations. Our enlisted leaders are stepping up to the plate multiple times over and over and over again. It's really impressive to watch, Chief. Thanks.

CMSAF Jim Roy (Ret.):

That's awesome. Chief Simmons, we often talk about the importance of space when we talk about the operation. Currently, in your position, how do you see the perspective of ACE in space operations? How do we employ the ACE fundamentals?

CMSGt. Jacob C. Simmons:

Thank you, Chief. So first and foremost, appreciate everybody being here and taking an interest in how we get after combat employment. You continue to hear that space is congested, contested, competitive, I'll add that it's complex. It is extremely complex in space. If you give me a couple of minutes, I'd like to sort level set us all on what the new conditions are in space.

First condition is space is ubiquitous. It is persistently present. It is involved in every mission, it is involved in every capability and it must be intertwined as such. Condition two is space is no longer peaceful, permissive or predictable. That is a new condition we find ourselves in. Condition three, space is a ballistic battlefield. And what I mean by that is things move in space at 17,000 plus miles per hour and with over 50,000 objects in space or nearly 50,000 objects in space, each of those have the potential of colliding at an instant and creating a cascade of long lived shrapnel. That is a battlefield that just doesn't stop. It doesn't rest. Space is a technical and a tactical terrain. We have to get after a new set of threats and we have to understand what the new thresholds are.

Condition number five is that space is not one in its own vacuum. Our Guardians and our Airmen have to operate outside of our own vacuums. We have to be integrated. We have to be interoperable. Condition six is that space is moved from being a national interest to a national imperative. We cannot fight tomorrow or let alone today's wars without space fully baked into the campaign plans and to what the Air Force is doing with ACE.

Now to get to your question, each of the services have concepts for how we get after conflict and dynamic environments. The Army has multi-domain ops, the Navy has distributed maritime ops, stand-in forces for the Marines and then the Air Force, ACE, right? Well, space is dimensionally different. We have to take a look at space from the perspective of our own dynamics and where the Air Force might look at posture and command and control, movement and maneuver, security and posture. Those are those elements of ACE. The Space Force has to take a look at things through our own set of dynamics. I would offer that some of those dynamics might be security. Security of our critical ground links, our ground stations, our networks, our nodes. Mitigation of non-kinetic and kinetic attacks. Speed to be able to disrupt, to deny and to degrade. Resiliency to overmatch and then even to overcome and if nothing else, to outlast. Then that responsiveness to be able to regroup, to be able to recover, to be able to reenter into a fight and stay relevant to the mission that's at hand.

I would suggest that our ACE from space elements bring together our anticipation, bring together our understanding of what our awareness is and our adaption to the AOR. And we have to look at getting after things, not only in an innovative way, but being able to iterate those things and integrate them into the fight faster and further in than what's ever been asked from space before.

CMSAF Jim Roy (Ret.):

And I like the way you said it. ACE from space. I don't know if anybody else wrote that down, but that's pretty unique. I'm sitting up here with a big grin on my face because to listen to these chiefs talk about the operations and how involved they are in ACE, it's tremendous for me to sit back and realize, wow, we've really made a lot of progression in our enlisted force development. So hats off to you. And with that, David Wolfe, I'd like to go to you on that particular topic. I've spent a little bit of time out in the

Pacific. A lot of time on the Pacific. A lot of things that we did in the Pacific were focused on this partner nation building, specifically for my task was the enlisted force. From your vantage point in current ops, where do you see that value of partnering with other nations and specifically to the enlisted force and how that all integrates in with ACE?

CMSgt. David Wolfe:

Thanks for that question, Chief Roy, and thank you for setting the conditions in the foundation during your leadership time in the Pacific for us to be able to operate and do what we're doing today. It certainly matters and thanks everybody for being here on this panel. My brothers from the other commands have done a great job in illustrating that. So let me talk just a little bit about specifically with our partner nations in the Pacific. We've got kind of a sliding scale, if you will, of capability and capacity with our partner nations across the Pacific. It goes something like this. Probably on the less developed end of the scale are things like a country that maybe doesn't even have an enlisted force to speak of that has much capability at all and they're more manual laborers and they don't have any real responsibilities. Something that looks a little bit more like what Chief had talked about with Russia, but maybe a little even less capable than that.

And then all the way up to some of our stronger partners who have a very well developed enlisted force and they partner with us, they have similar weapon systems to us and sometimes even they have kit that we don't have that we need. There's a spectrum. And then there's everybody in between, and everybody's kind of at a different place. So our objective in the Pacific is to develop a system where each one of those countries, no matter where they're at on that sliding scale, wherever they're at, just move them up the next step. Take them to wherever it is that they're willing to go with us.

These partnerships are so important because as General Wilsbach said yesterday in his panel, you look at the roster that we've put together of players that we've got on our team and it's a pretty long list and pretty capable countries that have experience and willingness to play on the same team with us. Then you look at the roster that China's been able to put together and it's one and a half maybe, and capability isn't something that can really be talked about because there isn't much of it.

I can't emphasize enough the importance of all of us in this room taking on the responsibility of communicating to our youngest people why this stuff is so important. My brothers did a great job of talking about the scheme of maneuver and what ACE is all about, but why do we have to do that? We have to do it because China's ambitions will take us to a place that we don't want to be. What might that look like? Right now if you want to take a vacation, you just go on the internet and you book a flight and you book a hotel and you go. What if 25 or 30 or 50 years from now, because you've been talking bad about the regime, you're not able to fly anywhere because you don't have a social credit score that's high enough for you to be able to do that? So now if you want to go somewhere, you've got to drive to take your family to Disney. You think that sounds a little bit crazy? That's exactly what we're up against is a regime.

The Chinese Communist party that would have control over everything on the globe, not just in their region if they reach their ultimate goals. And maybe that's not in anybody's lifetime in this room, but certainly it could be in your children's lifetime or your grandchildren's lifetime. And it's our responsibility as freedom loving democracy leaders in this world to make sure that nations like that don't have the capability to complete their objectives. And it is that enlisted force that is going to be the foundation of whether or not that objective is reached. Every morning when the party wakes up in China, they should be looking out across the landscape and seeing us operating everywhere and then just going back to the drawing board because we've done something else that's complicating their calculus and that's pushed them back on their timeline with their ambitions. And it's going to be each and every one of you that's in

this room that's going to figure out how to change that value of X in their equation that makes them think twice about advancing their goals.

CMSAF Jim Roy (Ret.):

That's awesome. I think it was BK that mentioned about the education, teaching this concept. And Chief Storms, if I could just ask you maybe just to drill in a little bit more. When we talk about the education factor of it and the teaching of it, how do you see that Master Sergeant out there to be able to employ their leadership skills in the ACE concept? How would you advise that first senior NCO out there?

CMSGt. John Storms:

Yeah, thanks Chief. I think our senior NCOs are enlisted force period. I don't think we have to teach them how to lead. Our Airmen do remarkable things every day. They make the incredibly complex seem ordinary every day. If you were lucky enough to sit in the 12 Outstanding Airmen of the Year banquet last night and you heard the accomplishments of some of those Airmen, they were all leading and doing it really, really well. So if you're one of those 12 OAY, congrats. What awesome accomplishments.

But I think as we prepare our enlisted force for ACE ops, we have to develop exercises and training scenarios that are realistic and tough. And we have to allow our enlisted leaders to take prudent risk in training and not be afraid to make mistakes. As we do our debriefs, the feedback has to be timely and accurate and add some value and make sure that we're learning from the mistakes that we've made. As a force, we need to realize that we'll learn just as much through failure as we will through success. And ultimately, that's what's going to prepare us for when it matters most when we're trying to do this in combat.

CMSAF Jim Roy (Ret.):

That's a great idea. Chief Simmons, if I could ask, you mentioned a little bit about jointness and how the Army does this concept, how the Air Force is doing it, how the other services do it. If you can drill down on that just a little bit more, how do you see a Guardian or an Airman being able to express their leadership in those joint environments? Because it's not just about our education. It's about also educating our other service leaders as well.

CMSGt. Jacob C. Simmons:

I appreciate that. Certainly it's all about how we utilize and empower our Guardians and our Airmen. As Chief BK was saying, many of our Airmen have already experienced what it's like to be a multi capable Airman. From the get go, every single Guardian is cross-functional and every Guardian is deliberately designed to be cross utilized. We have to look at our Guardians and our assigned Airmen and we have to give them the opportunities to be the experts. We know that they are the experts. We have to actually give them the opportunity to be the experts. Our space and our cyber and our intel Guardians that are cross functional, I call them are sci fighters. These Guardians get after it in a couple of different ways, if you'll permit me.

One is giving them the opportunity to show what they know in the situational awareness and being able to anticipate what's coming. They see things at ground truth that we don't always see. And if we think that everything has aggregated up to the senior leaders without talking to the person at the edge, then we are missing a large portion of what the true fight is all about. We need to leverage the interdependencies. That's in garrison, that's in theater, that's in coalition, that's in industry, that's within

the joint fight. Those interdependencies matter as a Guardian. Because we know, as I said before, that we should not be operating within our own vacuum.

We have to have persistent power projection. Space relies on the base. We are employed largely in place and if we're deployed out, we are supported typically by a garrison. That base power projection is our lifeblood, it is our runway, it is the oxygen that we need in order to operate. And then the last piece that I would say is that we have to empower at the edges with the authorities to be able to execute at speed. That means we have to be able to trust those leaders at the very front end, the very front edge of the space fight. I think that that is how each of our Guardians have to approach any contest moving into the future.

CMSAF Jim Roy (Ret.):

That's great. Chief Hedden, if I could maybe just ask you, I think it was Chief Wolfe that mentioned about his theater of operation, how they're setting those conditions from an USAFE-AFAFRICA environment. How are you all setting those conditions to utilize ACE concepts?

CMSgt. Benjamin Hedden:

Well, I think part of it goes back to the partners. I think right now we're doing a lot of scheme maneuver, doing a lot of the ACE. But I think we're looking more in the future when we go in conflict, we're not going to go by ourselves. We're going to go with our partners and allies. And you look at NATO, 30 members right now, about to be 32., my boss said over 600 F35s will be in NATO. That's amazing if you think about that. The interoperability we're going to have from that and over 4,500 F16s ever made. There's a bunch of those out there in Europe too. We start talking about the cross servicing.

So if you have an F35, you should be able to drop into an Italian F35 base and without any US Airmen there and get your jet turned and take right back off. I think that's where we want to go in the future and this ability to... Instead of us having to move our Airmen forward to service our aircraft or turn our aircraft, "Hey you have F16s and you guys been working on it for 20 years. We have F16s. Why does it have to be a US Airman that hot pits and F16?" It doesn't need to be. We should be able to do that and then take right back off. I think that's where we're trying to go.

As we set the theater, we're looking at prepositioning, a lot of WRM at certain locations. So that way if you think about the buildup for conflict and how long it takes, lucky for us, we have our squadrons that are signed in Europe, we belong to EUCOM, so we're able to move already in our theater and go to a lot of these installations. That might be a place in conflict we would go. So we're doing this real time. Airmen gets to see these airfields. We operate these airfields maybe for a couple weeks at a time or a month at a time. And then we go back and then maybe we leave some stuff there. That way when something happens, we're ready to drop right in and we've done this before. It'll be very smooth and we don't have to rely on a bunch of strategic airlift to move WRM and stuff over. We're ready if the bell rings.

CMSAF Jim Roy (Ret.):

That's great. Unfortunately we're getting close to that time. I wish we had another three hours because I've got a lot of questions for the chiefs up here, but unfortunately we're getting at that point in time. But let wrap it up this way. When we talk about the multiple capable Airmen and Guardians, the idea and the example that these gentlemen up here express and the knowledge that they have in this concept and the leadership that they provide to the Force is an example. For myself, I was the United States Pacific Command Senior Enlisted Leader at one time, and I've seen it from that particular view.

Obviously, a lot of my questions are really focused in on the joint operations because I think that's how we do these kind of things. And I think it's important for us as Airmen and Guardians to not just share this amongst ourselves, but we've got to share it with our joint partners because they have to understand the concept.

They have to understand, just like Jake mentioned, he understands how the Army does that operation. I'm not saying he is the only one, but I'm picking him out because he mentioned it. You've got to express that to your peer and our other services as well so that they understand what the United States Air Force and the United States Space Force is doing in this environment. I remember when AEF was brand new. That's a long time. I'm dated, I realize that. And we spend an awful lot of time, how do we market this? How do we sell this? And I say that kind of rippingly because you don't think of a concept having to market it or sell it, but we don't operate as sole entities. We operate as a joint team. The leadership team that you have up here knows it, understands it and is able to express that. I turn to you and ask you to do the exact same thing with your peers. So if you would, let's please give them a hand of appreciation for each of you. Chiefs, thank you. You did a fantastic job. Thank you.

