



COURAGE TO LEAD IN THE PROFESSION OF ARMS: COMBAT & CRISIS-TESTED CHARACTER

FEBRUARY 20-21, 2026
#NCLS2026



NATIONAL CHARACTER
& LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM

WELCOME LETTER



Dear NCLS Attendee,

On behalf of the cadets, faculty, and staff of the U.S. Air Force Academy, welcome to the 33rd annual National Character and Leadership Symposium - "Courage to Lead in the Profession of Arms: Combat and Crisis-Tested Character."

This year's symposium is especially significant as it coincides with the 250th Anniversary of American Independence—a milestone that reminds us of our nation's enduring legacy of courageous leaders. For two and a half centuries, Americans have risen to defend freedom, demonstrating character forged in combat and tested in times of crisis. Through NCLS and the Academy's mission, we honor and continue this proud tradition, shaping leaders prepared to answer the nation's call in its most challenging moments.

Over the coming days, you will hear from military leaders whose journeys exemplify the combat- and crisis-tested character at the heart of the profession of arms. As members of the military, we are entrusted with the immense responsibility to lead others—often in the most demanding and high-stakes environments. The courage to lead is not simply about making tough decisions in the face of adversity; it is about embodying moral and ethical strength, guiding those under our command with integrity, accountability, and respect. True leadership is measured not by rank, but by service and character-shaped by the crucible of both combat and crisis.

As we confront increasingly complex and unpredictable global challenges, the need for courageous, resilient leadership—tested by adversity and built on 250 years of tradition—has never been greater. By participating in this symposium, you join a living legacy of leaders who have protected and advanced our nation. My hope is that you leave this event even more committed to leading with courage, clarity, and conviction, carrying forward America's enduring story of valor and service.

Thank you for attending this year's NCLS and supporting our future leaders and our nation. I look forward to the important discussions and experiences you will bring to the symposium.

Sincerely,

TONY D. BAUERNFEIND
Lieutenant General, USAF
Superintendent

TABLE OF CONTENTS

General Information	4
Making the Most of NCLS	5
Special Thanks	6
Class of '59 Leadership Keynote	7
The Falcon Foundation "Bud" Breckner Keynote	8
Class of '73 Muse Family Foundation Keynote	9
Enix Heritage Keynote	9
Senior Leader Discussion Panel	10
Class of '93 Keynote: 12 Outstanding Airmen of the Year Panel	12
Speakers	14
Panels	17
Workshops	22
NCLS Staff	25
Cadet Executive Staff	26
Maps	27
Schedule of Events	29

C O U R A G E T O L E A D I N T H E P R O F E S S I O N O F A R M S

GENERAL INFORMATION



CONNECTING TO WIFI

1. Open your device's WiFi
2. Connect to **AF_ACADEMY_GUEST**



PARKING INFORMATION

Parking in the Cadet Area is Restricted. There is limited public parking available at Main Parking Area - Harmon Hall Upper Parking Area near Arnold Hall. Overflow parking is available at Falcon Club (shuttles will be available).



DOWNLOAD THE NCLS APP

NCLS attendees can easily manage schedules, access event content, stay updated, network and engage with sessions before, during and after NCLS.



Scan to download the NCLS App



TRANSPORTATION

Base Shuttle Service:

During NCLS, shuttle will run during peak times (around meals) and be available by request contact Transportation. Shuttle stops are located at Arnold Hall and the Falcon Club with no sign-ups required. Stops will have a contact number for transportation requests outside of peak times. Service will operate approximately 7:00 a.m. to 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

Guest Departures:

Feb. : Shuttles will depart Colorado Springs Airport (COS) every two hours from 11:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.

Feb. : Shuttle will depart Arnold Hall circle and base lodging to the Colorado Springs Airport from approximately 4 - 10:30 a.m.

Shuttle sign-ups are required at the time of registration check-in. Please note that NCLS **does not** provide transportation to Denver International Airport.

MAKING THE MOST OF NCLS

Courage to Lead in the Profession of Arms: Combat and Crisis-tested Character

Our priorities are to develop and produce warfighters to win, leaders of character and quality, and critical thinkers to adapt. The mission of the U.S. Air Force Academy is to forge leaders of character, motivated to a lifetime of service, and developed to lead our Air Force and Space Force as we fight and win our nation's wars. Our Leader of Character Framework guides the development of Academy graduates who possess the attributes necessary to fulfill the nation's expectations in their service as officers and citizens. It underpins and reinforces each of the U.S. Air Force Academy institutional outcomes and provides a platform for the growth of life-long leadership. The Leader of Character Framework's purpose is to provide all Academy personnel, military and civilian, with a deliberate, flexible, and foundational conceptual framework to use in developing themselves and others as leaders of character who live honorably, lift others, and elevate performance.



As we mark the 250th anniversary of the United States, we honor the enduring courage that won our nation's freedom and continues to inspire today's warrior leaders. From the earliest days of our nation—when we fought and won our freedom through acts of courage in combat—warfighters have defended and preserved the liberties we cherish.

The Academy's mission continues that tradition by providing the warrior leaders our nation needs, now and for generations to come.

COURAGE TO LEAD

Our NCLS 2026 theme of "Courage to lead in the Profession of Arms: Combat & Crisis-tested Character" explores the journey to become a leader of character. Our speakers and this experience highlight the essential role of courage in leadership, whether it be physical, moral, social, or spiritual, emphasizing that true character is revealed and strengthened when individuals confront uncertainty, fear, or adversity with commitment and resolve.

This year features a dynamic lineup of keynote speakers, interactive workshops, and panel discussions that reflect the evolving landscape of character and leadership in the military profession. We hope that you utilize the following pages to document your observations and lessons learned during NCLS so you may reflect on your overall experience and ultimately grow as a leader of character. Please take time to provide session ratings, testimonials and complete the comprehensive event survey after your event experience; through the session QR codes and the NCLS 2026 app.

SPECIAL THANKS

The Superintendent, faculty, staff and Cadet Wing of the U.S. Air Force Academy would like to thank the following groups for their generous support:



USAFA Academy Class of '59



USAFA Academy Class of '73
NCLS Flagship Sponsor



USAFA Academy Class of '74



USAFA Academy Class of '77



USAFA Academy Class of '83



USAFA Academy Class of '93



USAFA Academy Class of '04



Muse Family Foundation

Lt Col (Ret) Earl A. Enix '77 and Mrs. Candy Enix

The 33rd Annual National Character & Leadership Symposium would not have been possible without the following organizations and individuals who graciously gave their time and talents:

10th Air Base Wing
U.S. Air Force Academy Strategic Communications
U.S. Air Force Academy Protocol
U.S. Air Force Academy Cadet Chorale
Fairchild Hall Facility and AV Support
Arnold Hall Facility and AV Support
Polaris Hall Facility and AV Support
U.S. Air Force Academy Admissions
Mitchell Hall Staff

Permanent Party and Cadet Speaker Escorts
U.S. Air Force Academy Preparatory School
U.S. Air Force Academy Cadet Wing
U.S. Air Force Academy Davis Airfield
U.S. Air Force Academy Department of the Faculty
U.S. Air Force Academy Department of Athletics
U.S. Air Force Academy Chaplain Corps
Beechwood Productions
306th Flying Training Group

Contents of the event guide, and the words and presentation materials of the speakers are not the official views of, or endorsed by, the US Government, the Department of Defense or the Department of the Air Force.

— CLASS OF '59 LEADERSHIP KEYNOTE —

Courage in the Moment: Leadership on September 11th

Gen. Dan Caine and Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Marc Sasseville share their first-hand account of leadership and courage during the events of Sept. 11, 2001. As Air Force officers responding to a national crisis, they highlight decision-making under pressure, rapid problem-solving and the courage required to act amid uncertainty. This session offers insights on leading with conviction and calm during history-defining moments.



Gen. Dan Caine

Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

Gen. Dan Caine is the 22nd Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the nation's highest ranking military officer and the principal military advisor to the President, Secretary of Defense and National Security Council. Prior to becoming chairman on April 11, 2025, Caine was the Associate Director for Military Affairs at Central Intelligence Agency. Gen. Caine has served in a wide range of operational, staff and joint assignments, primarily as an F-16 fighter pilot, weapons officer, member of the White House staff and special operations officer.

Caine was commissioned in 1990 through the ROTC program at the Virginia Military Institute, and he has a Master of Arts in Air Warfare from the American Military University. He has completed a range of national security and leadership courses, including Harvard Kennedy School's course for Senior Executives in National and International Security and the Syracuse University Maxwell School's Program on National Security. As a Command Pilot, he has logged more than 2,800 hours in the F-16, including more than 150 combat hours. From 2009-2016, Caine was a part-time member of the National Guard and a serial entrepreneur and investor.



Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Marc Sasseville

U.S. Air Force

Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Marc Sasseville was the 12th National Guard Bureau vice chief, where he assisted the chief of the NGB in performing duties as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1985. He has held squadron, group, wing and numbered air force commands. He also served as the senior defense official and defense attaché to Turkey. Prior to becoming VCNGB, he served as the commander, Continental U.S. North American Aerospace Defense Command Region and First Air Force, Air and Space Forces Northern, headquartered at Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla.

THE FALCON FOUNDATION “BUD” BRECKNER KEYNOTE



Master Sgt. (Ret.) George E. Vera

U.S. Army

Master Sgt. (Ret.) George E. Vera, retired, entered the U.S. Army in 1995 and completed his initial training as an infantryman that year. He went on to serve in the Scout Platoon, Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division (Light) and later with the Long Range Surveillance Detachment, 311th Military Intelligence Battalion, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). After graduating from the Special Forces Qualification Course in 2002, Vera was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), where he served in a range of leadership roles and deployed multiple times to Kuwait, Wake Island, Thailand, Colombia and Afghanistan.

On his fifth deployment to Afghanistan in August 2015, Vera was severely wounded during a gun battle while defending his camp from insurgents. Despite a T-12 spinal cord injury, he has dedicated himself to recovery and adaptive sports, earning gold medals as part of the U.S. team at the Invictus Games and participating in Warrior Games and multiple handcycle races. He serves as a team captain for several adaptive sports teams and is active in wheelchair basketball, track and field, and swimming. Vera is married with three daughters and enjoys spending time with his family and his two dogs, Bronco and Denali.

Courage Under Fire: Leading Soldiers in Contact

Master Sgt. (Ret.) George Vera shares lessons from his combat deployment, focusing on a 90-minute insurgent attack in which he was shot multiple times while leading soldiers under fire. Drawing on his continued Army service, he examines leadership under pressure, decision-making in chaos and the resilience needed to lead after severe combat injury. His talk offers insights on accountability, teamwork and leading when lives are at stake.

CLASS OF '73 MUSE FAMILY FOUNDATION KEYNOTE



Lt. Col. Nichole Ayers

U.S. Air Force

Lt. Col. Nichole "Vapor" Ayers was selected by NASA to join the 2021 astronaut candidate class and reported for duty in January 2022. A Colorado native, she graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy in 2011 with a bachelor's degree in mathematics and later earned a master's degree in computational and applied mathematics from Rice University in Houston. As an instructor in both the T-38A and F-22 Raptor, Lt. Col. Ayers has flown missions across the nation and internationally. On her first spaceflight, she served as the pilot of NASA's SpaceX Crew-10 mission, spending 146 days as a flight engineer during Expeditions 72 and 73, and completed one spacewalk totaling 5 hours and 44 minutes.

Courage Beyond Earth

Lt. Col. Nichole Ayers discusses the courage required to lead in high-stakes environments, drawing from her experience as an Air Force officer and NASA team member. She shares lessons on decision-making under pressure, adaptability, and leading teams in military and space operations.

ENIX HERITAGE KEYNOTE



Gen. (Ret.) Austin Scott Miller

U.S. Army

Gen. (Ret.) Austin Scott Miller served more than 38 years in the United States Army. Most recently, he was the commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan. A graduate of the United States Military Academy, he has held key leadership roles including commanding general of the U.S. Army Maneuver Center at Fort Benning, commander of the Joint Special Operations Command, and commander of assault forces in Mogadishu during Operation GOTHIC SERPENT. Gen. Miller's awards include two Combat Infantryman Badges, two Purple Hearts, the Silver Star, and 20 Overseas Service Bars, reflecting more than 10 years deployed in combat zones. In 2023, he was named a Distinguished Graduate of West Point and received the Richard M. Helms Award from the CIA Memorial Foundation. In 2025, he was inducted into the Ranger Hall of Fame. In retirement, he serves as a senior fellow for the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point and as an ambassador for a veteran and first responders non-profit.

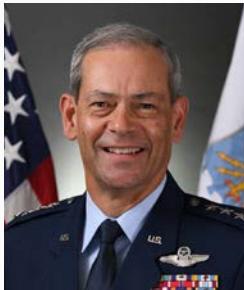
Trusted to Perform: Courageous Leadership at the Highest Level

Gen. (Ret.) Scott Miller draws on decades of special operations and command experience to reflect on two defining chapters of modern conflict: the lessons of Black Hawk Down and the challenges of ending the war in Afghanistan. From leading elite forces in urban combat to commanding U.S. and coalition forces during America's longest war, Miller offers insights on leadership under pressure, decision-making amid uncertainty, and the human cost of war.

SENIOR LEADER PANEL

DAF Senior Leader Panel

U.S. Air Force and U.S. Space Force senior leaders will discuss how moral courage, character, and judgment in 21st century conflict shape real-time decisions in combat and crisis. Leaders share strategic insights for operating with trust and initiative when information is limited and the stakes are high.



Gen. Ken Wilsbach

Air Force Chief of Staff

Gen. Ken Wilsbach is the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. As Chief, he serves as the senior uniformed Air Force officer responsible for organizing, training and equipping approximately 665,000 active-duty, Guard, Reserve and civilian forces serving in the United States and overseas. As a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the general and other service chiefs function as military advisers to the Secretary of War, National Security Council and the President.

Gen. Wilsbach commissioned in 1985 as a distinguished graduate of the University of Florida's ROTC program and earned his pilot wings in 1986 as a distinguished graduate from Laughlin Air Force Base, Texas. He has commanded a fighter squadron, operations group, two wings, two numbered air forces, two major commands and held various staff assignments including Director of Operations, Combined Air Operations Center and Director of Operations, U.S. Central Command.

Gen. Wilsbach is a command pilot with more than 6,200 hours in multiple aircraft, primarily in the F-15C, F-16C, MC-12 and F-22A, and has flown 71 combat missions in operations Northern Watch, Southern Watch and Enduring Freedom.



Lt. Gen. Gregory J. Gagnon

Commander, U.S. Space Force Combat Forces Command

As commander of U.S. Space Force Combat Forces Command, Peterson Space Force Base, Colorado, he is responsible for over 12,000 Guardians and Airmen who are focused on generating, presenting and sustaining U.S. Space Force combat-ready space control, global operations and combat service support forces. As the USSF service force provider, he is responsible to the Secretary of the Air Force and Chief of Space Operations for sourcing, training, certifying and assessing the readiness of America's Space Forces to execute service and combatant commander-assigned missions.

Gagnon was commissioned through ROTC at Saint Michael's College in Winooski, Vermont. He is a career intelligence officer with an extensive background in cyberspace operations. Gagnon has commanded at the squadron, group and joint wing levels with one command tour in Afghanistan. He is a fully qualified Joint Staff Officer. His tours include Pacific Air Forces, Air Force Space Command, Air Combat Command, U.S. Strategic Command and U.S. Space Command. Gagnon has deployed on multiple occasions in support of joint air and special operations.

SENIOR LEADER PANEL



Chief Master Sergeant John F. Bentivegna

Chief Master Sergeant of the Space Force

Chief Master Sgt. of the Space Force John F. Bentivegna serves at the highest enlisted level of leadership and provides direction for the enlisted force representing their interests to the American public and to those in all levels of government. He acts as the personal advisor to the Chief of Space Operations and the Secretary of the Air Force on all issues regarding the welfare, readiness, morale, proper utilization, and development of the U.S. Space Force.

Bentivegna entered the United States Air Force in 1994 and has served in both Maintenance and Space Operations career fields. He has held positions at the squadron, division, group, wing, Numbered Air Force, Field Command and Headquarters Air and Space Force levels and served as the Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chief Operations Officer and as the Enlisted Space Systems Operations Career Field Manager, Headquarters Space Force, Arlington, Virginia.

Bentivegna entered the United States Space Force on Sept. 1, 2020.



Chief Master Sergeant David R. Wolfe

Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force

Chief Master Sgt. David R. Wolfe is the 21st Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force and serves as the highest enlisted member of the Air Force. He is the Senior Enlisted Leader and primary adviser to both the Chief of Staff and the Secretary of the Air Force on standards, readiness, training, professional development, and effective utilization for more than 665,000 Total Force Airmen. Additionally, Chief Wolfe represents the service's interests to the American public and to all levels of government. Chief Wolfe entered the Air Force in February 1992 as a Security Forces Airman. He has extensive experience in professional military education, serving as both an instructor and commandant. During his career, he has been a Command Chief at two wings, one Numbered Air Force, and two major commands. His contingency operations experience includes tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.

C O U R A G E T O L E A D I N T H E P R O F E S S I O N O F A R M S

CLASS OF '93 KEYNOTE

OUTSTANDING AIRMAN OF THE YEAR PANEL

Earned Through Action: Courage and Leadership at Every Level

This panel features four Outstanding Airman of the Year recipients whose service exemplifies excellence, integrity and moral courage at all levels of the Air Force. Their stories offer cadets practical insights on leading from any position and earning trust through action.



Master Sgt. Selina Ortega

U.S. Air Force

Master Sgt. Selina Ortega serves as the Executive Assistant to the Air Force Reserve Command Chief Master Sergeant, Air Force Reserve Command, Robins Air Force Base, Georgia. She is the primary administrative and logistical support for highest-ranking enlisted member of the Air Force Reserve and a key advisor to the Chief of the Air Force Reserve. Additionally, she is the Program Manager for the Development and Training Flight, having oversight of 39 Coordinators and all enlisted accessions prior to their completion of formal pipeline training.

Ortega entered the Air Force in January 2013, serving as a Security Forces Apprentice. She graduated from Mental Health Technical Training School in August 2017. Her background includes all aspects of Mental Health Services, to include serving as a Sexual Assault Volunteer Victim Witness Advocate. Ortega led multiple initiatives that developed clinical and administrative opportunities for Mental Health Services personnel at Westover Air Reserve Base, Massachusetts. Prior to her current assignment, she was a Military Training Instructor for Basic Military Training, where she held numerous roles. She served as an Instructor, Instructor Trainer, the Executive Assistant to the Senior Enlisted Leader of the 737th Training Group, a Master Military Training Instructor, and an Evaluator for the Standardization and Evaluations Flight.



Technical Sgt. Matthew C. Sanders

U.S. Air Force

Tech Sgt. Matthew C. Sanders is the Noncommissioned Officer in Charge of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Equipment Section at the 19th Civil Engineer Squadron, Little Rock Air Force Base, Arkansas. He leads a team of four Airmen responsible for managing seven mobility equipment accounts and three munitions accounts with a total value of \$15.2 million. Additionally, he oversees the storage and security protocols for classified materials and explosives, ensuring the rapid deployment of EOD technicians for an average of 45 off-base unexploded ordnance responses each year.

Sanders entered the Air Force in February 2011. After graduating from Basic Military Training, he attended Basic Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning School, completing it in December 2011. His first assignment was at Osan Air Base (AB) in the Republic of Korea, where he served as an HVAC Technician. He later completed another assignment at Aviano Air Base in Italy in the same role. In May 2016, he cross-trained into the EOD Pipeline and graduated from the Naval Explosive Ordnance Disposal School in January 2017. Prior to his current assignment, he served as the Noncommissioned Officer in Charge of EOD Equipment at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California.

CLASS OF '93 KEYNOTE



Staff Sgt. Eleanor R. Warren

U.S. Air Force

Staff Sgt. Eleanor Rose Warren is a Geospatial Analyst for the 192d Intelligence Squadron at Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Va. She is responsible for exploiting and analyzing multi-sensor imagery and geospatial data. Sergeant Warren analyzes terrain and structures to determine usability and possible threats. She utilizes maps to determine location and distance from target and prepares and presents intelligence reports. Sergeant Warren compiles and maintains imagery and target folders.

Warren entered the Virginia Air National Guard in December 2020. She graduated from the Geospatial Analysis Course at Goodfellow Air Force Base, Texas in May 2022. Upon completion of initial active-duty training, SSgt Warren served as a drill status guardsman for a year, including serving as the additional duty squadron physical training leader. She was later selected to deploy with the Bilateral Intelligence Analysis Cell where she exploited full motion video alongside the Japan Self-Defense Forces and the Royal Australian Air Force.



Senior Airman Roman Bereguta

U.S. Air Force

Senior Airman Roman Bereguta is Cadet Candidate at the United States Air Force Academy Preparatory School, Colorado. Previously he served as a Certification Team Lead, 21st Comptroller Squadron, Space Base Delta 1, headquartered at Peterson Space Force Base, Colorado. He oversaw a 4-member team providing Financial Support to the USSF's largest installation budget and to more than 18,400 military, Department of Defense civilians and contractor personnel serving at 23 operating locations worldwide.

Bereguta entered the Air Force in June 2022. He completed the "Financial Apprentice Course" at Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi in October of 2022. He has also deployed in support of Operation Atlas Guardian as the lead tri-lingual interpreter for Task Force Grey Wolf, General Officer advisor and leader of Early Tactical Ballistic Missile Warning System. During the deployment, he was selected as personal interpreter for Chief Master Sergeant of the Ukrainian Air Force, Ukrainian Ministry of Defense and briefed US Congressional Delegation. SrA Bereguta was also by name requested as sole linguist in support of Security Assistance Group - Ukraine, NATO Special Operations Task Force and other classified missions.

C
O
U
R
A
G
E
T
O
L
E
A
D
I
N
T
H
E
P
R
O
F
E
S
S
I
O
N
O
F
A
R
M
S

SPEAKERS



Col. John Blocher

U.S. Air Force

Col. John Blocher is the commander of the 93d Air Ground Operations Wing at Moody Air Force Base, Ga. He graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1999, where he later became a senior pilot in the A/OA-10 “Warthog” and the AT-38. He has over 1,500 flying hours, with 150 of those as combat hours in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM. His accomplishments earned him the Bronze Star for heroism and the Air Force Commendation Medal with Valor. Prior to his assignment at Moody AFB, he was the commander of the 1st Air Support Operations Group at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. He is married to Ms. Jamie Hatch. They have three sons: Cole, Cooper, and Jack, who is currently a cadet at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

Losing control: A JTAC's courage to overcome fear and failure

Col. John Blocher discusses his greatest failure on the battlefield—a moment that led to Col. Kim “KC” Campbell being shot in her A-10 over Baghdad on April 7, 2003. He shares how this experience taught him resilience, the courage to grow from failure, and prepared him for his greatest challenge: relearning to walk, requalifying as a pilot and joint terminal attack controller after brain surgery, and returning to command the Tactical Air Control Party field.



Senior Master Sgt. (Ret.) Israel Del Toro

U.S. Air Force

Senior Master Sgt. Israel “DT” Del Toro, Jr.’s life has been shaped by perseverance and devotion to family. Orphaned as a young teenager, he became the provider for his siblings, honoring his father’s dying wish to always care for family. Del Toro’s Air Force service was marked by extraordinary resilience—after a devastating combat injury left him with severe burns and a 15 percent chance of survival, he endured countless surgeries and intensive recovery to not only return to duty, but also become the first 100% disabled Airman to re-enlist.

Del Toro’s determination inspired many as he set world records and earned a gold medal at the 2016 Invictus Games. Today, he shares his story nationwide, helping others find hope and strength through adversity.

Unbroken Courage: Leading Beyond the Wounds

Senior Master Sgt. (Ret.) Israel “DT” Del Toro shares his story of resilience forged in combat and sustained through leadership. After being severely wounded and declared 100% disabled, Del Toro defied the odds by reenlisting and continuing to serve in the Air Force. He explores courage under fire, leading through adversity, and how purpose, faith and teamwork can transform trauma into lifelong service. Author of “A Patriot’s Promise.”

SPEAKERS



Col. Justin Elliott

U.S. Air Force

Col. Justin “Astro” Elliott is the division chief for NORAD and USNORTHCOM’s Integrated Operations Division at Peterson Space Force Base, Colo. In this role, he supervises 200 operators from nine U.S. and Canadian military branches, overseeing the execution of current and future NORAD and USNORTHCOM operations across all domains. He has previously served in F-15E and F-35 squadrons as an instructor pilot and evaluator, as a Weapons Instructor and Operational Test Pilot in the 422nd Test and Evaluation Squadron, and as an Experimental Test Pilot in the 40th Flight Test Squadron, 96th Test Wing, Eglin AFB, Fla. Col. Elliott commanded the 59th Test and Evaluation Squadron at Nellis AFB, Nev., where he led the test and evaluation of the F-35, F-22, F-15EX, F-15E, F-16, and A-10. More recently, he served as commander of the U.S. Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron, the Thunderbirds, leading the team through 150 air shows across 70 U.S. and international cities while flying his F-16 mere inches apart from others at speeds exceeding 600 mph.

Courage with Purpose: The Charge of Elite Organizations

Col Justin “Astro” Elliott discusses the challenges of leading the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds – an elite team charged with pushing boundaries beyond societal standards. As the only person in history to complete all three of the Air Force’s elite flying programs (USAF Weapons School, USAF Test Pilot School, and Thunderbird 1), he merges technical, leadership, and emotional lessons to remind us that cultural identity – whether a squadron, service, or nation – comes from an organization’s people and their shared sense of purpose.

C
O
U
R
A
G
E
T
O
L
E
A
D
I
N
T
H
E
P
R
O
F
E
S
S
I
O
N
O
F
A
R
M
S



Master Sgt. (Ret) Dustin Goodwin

U.S. Air Force

Master Sgt. (Ret.) Dustin Goodwin is a supervisory training instructor at the 343rd Training Squadron, Security Forces Academy, Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas. He oversees the opposing forces section and serves as an instructor for the Combat Leaders Course. He is responsible for utilizing current enemy tactics to enhance training for the Basic Defenders Course, Basic Officer Course, and Advanced Combat Leaders Course, delivering training to 5,000 Airmen, 125 company-grade officers, and eight international students across nine major commands and 14 partner nations within the Security Forces enterprise. He enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 2001 before medically retiring as a master sergeant in 2014.

Courage to Lead; Psychological versus Physical

Dustin Goodwin recounts the events of a day in Jalalabad, describing the chaos, exhaustion and fear of close combat. He contrasts the reality on the ground with after-action reports and explains the psychological versus physical aspects of combat insights that apply to both warfare and military leadership.

SPEAKERS



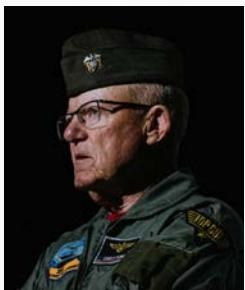
Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Edward Mechenbier

U.S. Air Force

Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Edward Mechenbier, Class of 1964, is a consultant to defense companies, serving on several private and public boards. He continues his public service by working with military veterans at Marion Correctional Institute in Ohio. He flew an F-4C in Vietnam, where he was shot down on his 113th combat mission and a prisoner of war for nearly six years. Through more than 40 years of aviation service, he flew the F-4C/D, the F-100, A-7 and C-141C. For more than 30 years he was the television host for several major airshows throughout the country, including the United States Air and Trade Show held in Dayton, Ohio and the Miramar Air Show in San Diego, Calif. He is a distinguished graduate and a command pilot with more than 3,600 flying hours.

Honor, Resilience, and Leadership: A POW's Perspective on Courage in Service

Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Edward Mechenbier exemplifies the highest ideals of military service. Shot down over North Vietnam and held as a prisoner of war for nearly six years, he endured hardship while upholding the core values of duty, honor and country. He shares lessons on moral courage, perseverance and leadership under adversity. Author of "Life on a \$5 Bet."



Capt. (Ret.) Charlie Plumb

U.S. Navy

Capt. (Ret.) Charlie Plumb is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and a jet fighter pilot who flew 74 successful combat missions in Vietnam. On his 75th mission, just five days before the end of his tour, he was shot down, captured, and spent 2,103 days as a prisoner of war in communist prison camps, enduring torture. Captain Plumb has shared his story of survival in over 5,000 presentations to audiences in every state and 24 foreign countries. He and his wife, Susan, have four children and four grandchildren.

Courage Under Fire: Lessons in Leadership from Six Years as a POW

Capt. Charlie Plumb, a former Navy fighter pilot and Vietnam prisoner of war, shares a message of resilience, integrity and courage in military leadership. Drawing from six years as a POW, Plumb explores what it means to lead when stripped of rank and resources. His story challenges leaders to embrace accountability, maintain honor under adversity and inspire others through character and conviction. Author of "I'm No Hero."

PANELS

NASHVILLE STORYTELLERS CONCERT

Stories in Song: Courage, Character, and Leadership Through Music

This session features acclaimed Nashville singer-songwriters who use music to tell stories of resilience, service and leadership. Through live performances and candid conversation, these artists share how their craft reflects themes of courage, sacrifice and the human spirit—values that resonate within the military. Attendees will explore how storytelling can inspire character and strengthen resolve.



Lee Thomas Miller

Miller is a songwriter from Nashville, Tennessee. He has had 18 top 20 singles with 7 reaching #1. His songs have reached radio play over 25 million spins with streaming numbers reaching into the hundreds of millions. He won both a CMA and an ACM award for Song of the Year with "In Color". "You're Gonna Miss This" won Song of the Year at both the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers and Nashville Songwriters Association awards and single of the year at the CMA awards. His accomplishments include 3 Grammy nominations, a teen choice award, 13 BMI awards and 4 nominations for 'Song of the Year'. Miller has also been given four "Songs I Wish I Had Written" trophies as voted on by the professional membership of NSAI. Miller has had success as a record producer with a pair of top 20 hits for artist Steve Holy including his #1 record "Brand New Girlfriend". He recently cowrote Scotty McCreery's "It Matters To Her".



Tim Nichols

Nichols has over two dozen smash hits, a Grammy, a CMA Award, and two Academy of Country Music awards for Song of the Year, as well as being a member of the Nashville Songwriter Hall of Fame. He co-wrote Tim McGraw's "Live Like You Were Dying," the ten week #1 smash that won every major song award presented for country music. Other Nichols' hits, "Heads Carolina, Tails California," and "Cowboys and Angels" helped launch the careers of Jo Dee Messina and Dustin Lynch. Chris Young topped the charts for three weeks with the Nichols/Brett James composition "The Man I Want To Be." In 2022, Cole Swindell put a new twist on the Heads Carolina classic, staying at the top of the country charts for 5 weeks and winning the Academy of Country Music Song of the Year Award. Nichols' recently collaborated with Top and his record producer on "I Never Lie"—Top's first song to reach the top of the country charts, as well as receive a CMA nomination for Song of the Year and a Grammy nomination for Best Country Song.

C
O
U
R
A
G
E
T
O
L
E
A
D
I
N
T
H
E
P
R
O
F
E
S
S
I
O
N
O
F
A
R
M
S

PANELS

“Family First, Mission Always” Fireside Chat

This panel brings together two dual-military couples who have lived the realities of service, leadership, and family life for years. Each couple shares candid stories about balancing careers, families, enduring deployments, and making the choice to commit to a lifetime of service—all while upholding the values of the profession of arms.

Their experiences span different eras and operational environments, offering cadets a rare, authentic look at what courage and character mean beyond the Academy gates.



Col. Paul J. Brehm

U.S. Air Force

Col. Paul J. Brehm is the division chief for future operations at Headquarters, U.S. Air Force Academy. His previous assignments include executive officer for the principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for special operations, special assistant to the vice commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, and commander of the 8th Special Operations Squadron, then the largest CV-22 squadron in the Air Force.

A native of Madison, Wisconsin, Brehm is a 2004 graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, where he was a four-year letter winner and captain of the men's swimming team. He has accumulated more than 3,600 hours of flying time, including 1,400 hours of combat time, as an instructor pilot in the CV-22B, evaluator pilot in the U-28A, and wingman in the F-16CJ. Brehm is married to Col. Sarah Brehm, commander of Cadet Group 1, and they have two children, Henry and Hannah.

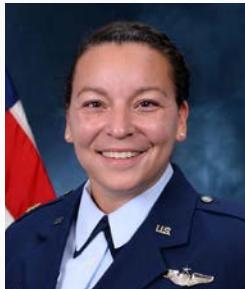


Col. Sarah Brehm

U.S. Air Force

Col. Sarah Brehm is the commander of Cadet Group 1 at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Colo. She guides military, leadership, character development, and expeditionary skills training for a 1,000-member cadet group in addition to providing facilities and logistical support. Prior to her current position, she was a senior research analyst at the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation (CAPE), Global Shaping Division, Pentagon, Washington D.C. She served as the commander of the 34th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) located at Hurlburt Field, Fla. Employing U-28A aircraft, she was responsible for global special operations taskings as the Air Force component member of the United States Special Operations Command. She is a 2004 graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy and has spent most of her career in special operations aviation assignments. She is a command pilot with over 4,000 hours of flight experience in the DA-20, T-6A, T-1A, C-21A, and U-28A.

PANELS



Maj. Andrea Moffett

U.S. Air Force

Maj. Andrea “Mystique” Moffett Maj. Andrea “Mystique” Moffett is the chief of standardization and evaluation at the 94th Flying Training Squadron, U.S. Air Force Academy, Colo. As an evaluator pilot in the TG-16A and TG-17A, she oversees the evaluation of 250 instructor pilots, ensuring the accuracy and compliance of multiple flight publications that support 15,000 annual sorties, 10 course syllabi, and 54 qualifications and certifications. Maj. Moffett commissioned through the U.S. Air Force Academy in June 2016. Following commissioning, she served as a military training officer at the Academy’s Preparatory School before completing undergraduate pilot training, flying the T-6A and TH-1H. She subsequently flew the UH-1N “Huey” at F.E. Warren AFB, Wyo. She has served as aircraft commander and instructor, with additional roles as standards and evaluation liaison officer, group executive officer, and chief of training. Maj. Moffett has accumulated over 700 flight hours in the UH-1N, many in support of Operation GLOBAL CITADEL.



Maj. Kaz “Dexter” Moffett

U.S. Air Force

Maj. Kaz “Dexter” Moffett serves as executive officer and senior instructor of physics in the Physics and Meteorology Department at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Colo. He commissioned into the Air Force in 2015 through the U.S. Air Force Academy and earned a Master of Science in Nuclear Engineering from the Air Force Institute of Technology in 2017. At the Academy, Maj. Moffett contributed to research in the development of sulfur-doped silicon for solar technology and infrared detection. His graduate thesis focused on the initial characterization of hydrothermally grown single-crystal thorium dioxide, supporting the development of a proprietary solid-state neutron detector. Following graduation from AFIT, he completed ICBM REACT Initial Skills Training at Vandenberg Space Force Base, Calif., earning academic distinction. He then served in the 321st Missile Squadron at F.E. Warren AFB, Wyo., as missileer, crew commander, mission lead, and instructor. Selected for the U.S. Air Force Weapons School at Nellis AFB, Nev., he later joined the 319th Missile Squadron as training flight commander, chief of weapons and tactics and squadron weapons officer.

C O U R A G E T O L E A D I N T H E P R O F E S S I O N O F A R M S

PANELS

“Lifetime Of Service” Fireside Chat

This fireside chat features two U.S. Air Force Academy graduates—separated by 36 years—sharing candid perspectives on courage, leadership, character and service. The 1980 graduate discusses lessons from Cold War training and traditional command structures, while the 2016 graduate offers insights from the digital era and evolving military leadership. The session’s conversational format encourages honest reflection and meaningful dialogue with cadets.

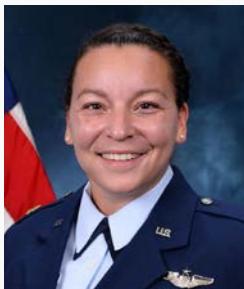


Col. (Ret.) Gail Benjamin Colvin

U.S. Air Force

Col. (Ret.) Gail Benjamin Colvin, is the former chief of staff and chief business officer at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs. In these roles, she oversaw the Academy’s 550-person staff, managed a \$450 million budget, and supported both commissioning and university missions, as well as the installation’s 10,000-member workforce and \$9 billion in infrastructure. Her 30-year military career includes command at the squadron and group levels, as well as key assignments with the Joint Staff, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, and as chief of joint doctrine for the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. She also led the U.S. delegation to the NATO subcommittee on Allied Joint Doctrine.

A Brooklyn, New York, native and 1980 Academy graduate—the first class with women—Colvin serves on several government and community boards in Colorado, including the Colorado Federal Executive Board and the Colorado Springs Black Advisory Council. She has been recognized with the 2007 USO Military Leadership Award, NAACP’s 2008 Roy Wilkins Award and the Academy’s 2020 Distinguished Graduate Award.



Maj. Andrea Moffett

U.S. Air Force

Maj. Andrea “Mystique” Moffett Maj. Andrea “Mystique” Moffett is the chief of standardization and evaluation at the 94th Flying Training Squadron, U.S. Air Force Academy, Colo. As an evaluator pilot in the TG-16A and TG-17A, she oversees the evaluation of 250 instructor pilots, ensuring the accuracy and compliance of multiple flight publications that support 15,000 annual sorties, 10 course syllabi, and 54 qualifications and certifications. Maj. Moffett commissioned through the U.S. Air Force Academy in June 2016. Following commissioning, she served as a military training officer at the Academy’s Preparatory School before completing undergraduate pilot training, flying the T-6A and TH-1H. She subsequently flew the UH-1N “Huey” at F.E. Warren AFB, Wyo. She has served as aircraft commander and instructor, with additional roles as standards and evaluation liaison officer, group executive officer, and chief of training. Maj. Moffett has accumulated over 700 flight hours in the UH-1N, many in support of Operation GLOBAL CITADEL.

PANELS

“Courage in Captivity: Lessons of Endurance and Integrity” POW

Two former Vietnam prisoners of war share their experiences of endurance, resilience and leadership under extreme adversity. Stripped of rank and freedom, they led with courage and integrity, illustrating the core values of the profession of arms when everything else is lost.



Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Edward Mechenbier

U.S. Air Force

Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Edward Mechenbier, Class of 1964, is a consultant to defense companies, serving on several private and public boards. He continues his public service by working with military veterans at Marion Correctional Institute in Ohio. He flew an F-4C in Vietnam, where he was shot down on his 113th combat mission and a prisoner of war for nearly six years. Through more than 40 years of aviation service, he flew the F-4C/D, the F-100, A-7 and C-141C. For more than 30 years he was the television host for several major airshows throughout the country, including the United States Air and Trade Show held in Dayton, Ohio and the Miramar Air Show in San Diego, Calif. He is a distinguished graduate and a command pilot with more than 3,600 flying hours.



Capt. (Ret.) Charlie Plumb

U.S. Navy

Capt. (Ret.) Charlie Plumb is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and a jet fighter pilot who flew 74 successful combat missions in Vietnam. On his 75th mission, just five days before the end of his tour, he was shot down, captured, and spent 2,103 days as a prisoner of war in communist prison camps, enduring torture. Captain Plumb has shared his story of survival in over 5,000 presentations to audiences in every state and 24 foreign countries. He and his wife, Susan, have four children and four grandchildren.

C O U R A G E T O L E A D I N T H E P R O F E S S I O N O F A R M S

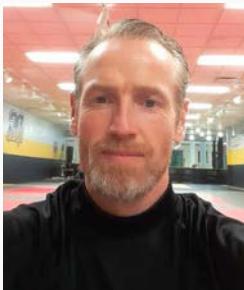
WORKSHOPS

Leveraging the Martial Way: Forging “Whole” Warriors to Lead in Future Conflicts



Dr. Monte Anderson

Lt. Col. (Ret.) Dr. Monte Anderson, Class of 1992, works as an assistant professor of physics in the Department of Physics and Meteorology, teaching quantum physics and conducting research in Atomic/Nuclear Physics. He completed graduate pilot training at Vance AFB, Oklahoma, and has 3,300 flying hours as an Air Force pilot in over 10 aircraft, including numerous combat missions in the AC-130 “Spectre” gunship, the legendary U-2 “Dragon Lady,” and Cessna C-208 “Caravan.” His notable assignments include U-2 test pilot and Air Expeditionary Advisor Squadron Commander, for which he was awarded the Bronze Star medal. Dr. Anderson retired from active duty while serving as a physics professor at the Academy. He worked as a Senior Laser Optical Scientist/Physicist at the Air Force Research Laboratory before returning to teach physics in the Quantitative Reasoning Center (QRC) and the Department of Physics and Meteorology.



Mr. Daniel Iberri-Shea

Mr. Daniel “Danny” Iberri-Shea is an instructor of English and Academic Success Center faculty member at the U.S. Air Force Academy. He holds degrees in speech communication and rhetoric from Northern Arizona University and has coached collegiate debate at Northern Arizona University, San Francisco State University, CSU dash, Pueblo, and USAFA. A U.S. national finalist in collegiate debate, he has coached teams to top-32 national finalists and provided public speaking coaching to Miss America and the U.S. Air Force 2nd Lt. Madison Marsh. Drawing on experience as a USA Judo Dash certified coach and 3rd degree black belt with over 100 tournaments, Iberia Shea integrates martial arts and rhetoric to develop confident, disciplined leadership under pressure.

WORKSHOPS

Task Force Hope

Task Force Hope gives participants practical tools to prepare for, lead through and recover from crisis and moral injury. Developed over 15 years, it evolved from a Squadron Officer School paper to a proven resource used by more than 2,000 Air Force captains, Air War College students and various military units. Participants frequently say, "Why didn't I hear this earlier in my career?"



Col. Jonathan Sawtelle

U.S. Air Force

Col. Jonathan Sawtelle is the Air Force Weather Career Field manager at Headquarters Air Force, the Pentagon, Washington D.C. He commissioned in 2003 through Air Force ROTC and has completed four deployments in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. He served as an Air Staff program element monitor, an executive officer to the Air Force deputy chief of staff for operations and a legislative liaison on Capitol Hill. Sawtelle's squadron command was at Squadron Officer School where he invested in nearly 2,000 officers and civilians from every Air Force career field.



Lt. Col. Brandon Murphy

U.S. Air Force

Lt. Col. Brandon Murphy, Class of 2007, currently serves as the commander of the 306th Operations Support Squadron at the U.S. Air Force Academy. He leads 75 personnel and manages operations for various airmanship programs and flight training across multiple squadrons and airfields. Murphy also supports the Air Force's Parachute Demonstration Team, the Wings of Blue, as a UV-18B Twin Otter pilot. He graduated from the Academy with degrees in systems engineering management and military strategy and completed over 200 combat missions in support of Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn. He is a distinguished graduate of several military institutions and a senior pilot with almost 1,000 combat hours.



Maj. Tara Holmes

U.S. Air Force

Maj. Tara Holmes is the chief of cadet development at the Center for Character and Leadership Development at the U.S. Air Force Academy, where she leads character and leadership development for 4,200 cadets and oversees a 152-member staff. Holmes plans and executes developmental programs focused on cadet honor education and collaborates with faculty, staff and other military service academies. Holmes has held various instructor roles throughout her career, including as an electronic warfare officer on the B-52H Stratofortress and an instructor combat systems officer on the T-1A Jayhawk.

She earned a doctorate in business and management from the University of Maryland and is an Air Education and Training Command Master Instructor with 21 Pacific Power Projection missions.

WORKSHOPS

From War Stories to Warrior Narratives

This workshop explores how writing personal narratives can strengthen self-awareness, values and aspirations by connecting past experiences to present challenges and future goals. Unlike a simple story, a narrative is a deliberate account with a clear structure that helps organize one's development. Warrior narratives provide important examples of moral and physical courage.



Marc Napolitano, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of English, U.S. Air Force Academy

Dr. Marc Napolitano is an assistant professor of English and Fine Arts at the U.S. Air Force Academy, where he also serves as the Academy's Director of Faculty Development. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees in English from Villanova University and went on to complete his doctorate in English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Dr. Napolitano teaches courses in composition, literature, theater, and film studies, drawing on his deep engagement with the cultural and artistic dimensions of narrative and performance. Prior to his current appointment, he taught at the United States Military Academy, where he instructed a range of courses spanning writing, literature, drama, and film. His research interests include nineteenth-century British literature and theatrical and cinematic adaptations of British novels.

NCLS STAFF

C O U R A G E T O L E A D I N T H E P R O F E S S I O N O F A R M S

Col. Matthew Horner

Permanent Professor and Director, Center for Character & Leadership Development

Lt. Col. Mark George

NCLS Program Director

Mr. Kevin Beechwood	Tech. Sgt. Sierra Halstead	Mr. Mark Reyes
Ms. Charissa Blanco	Maj. Derek Hartman	Ms. Kristina Riggs
Tech. Sgt. Brittany Block	Maj. Brinetta Hence	Master Sgt. Leona Rodriguez
Maj. Michael Brifnek	Mrs. Diana Hoobler	Mr. John Rollence
Mrs. Danielle Brines	Dr. Michele Johnson	Mr. Edward Saxer
Capt. Anna Broadbent	Senior Master Sgt. Travis Konrath	Mr. John Setar
Ms. Tali Burress	Mr. Hodge Lundy	Tech. Sgt. Rip Sira
Ms. Wendy Cook	Mr. Blake Macias	Tech. Sgt. Alethia Smith Santiago
Senior Master Sgt. Craig Crabtree	Master Sgt. Charles Marsh	Ms. Kate Spessa-Scott
Ms. Irina Damy	Ms. Gina (Nikki) Mench	Dr. Justin Stoddard
Master Sgt. Rebecca Danis	Dr. Bob Munson	Maj. Scott Unrath
Maj. Shawn Emery	Tech. Sgt. Jeremy Neubauer	Mrs. Ashlee Voie
Tech. Sgt. Sahara Ducat	Lt. Col. Robert Newton	Mrs. Mary Willis
Mrs. Sarah Frazier	Lt. Col. Ralph Ojeda	Ms. Amber Zurita
Mr. Rocky Gaines	Mrs. Cassandra Payne	
Ms. Caprice George	Tech. Sgt. Mac Redfern	

CADET EXECUTIVE STAFF

Cadet Executive Staff

C1C Jaime Snyder, Cadet-In-Charge

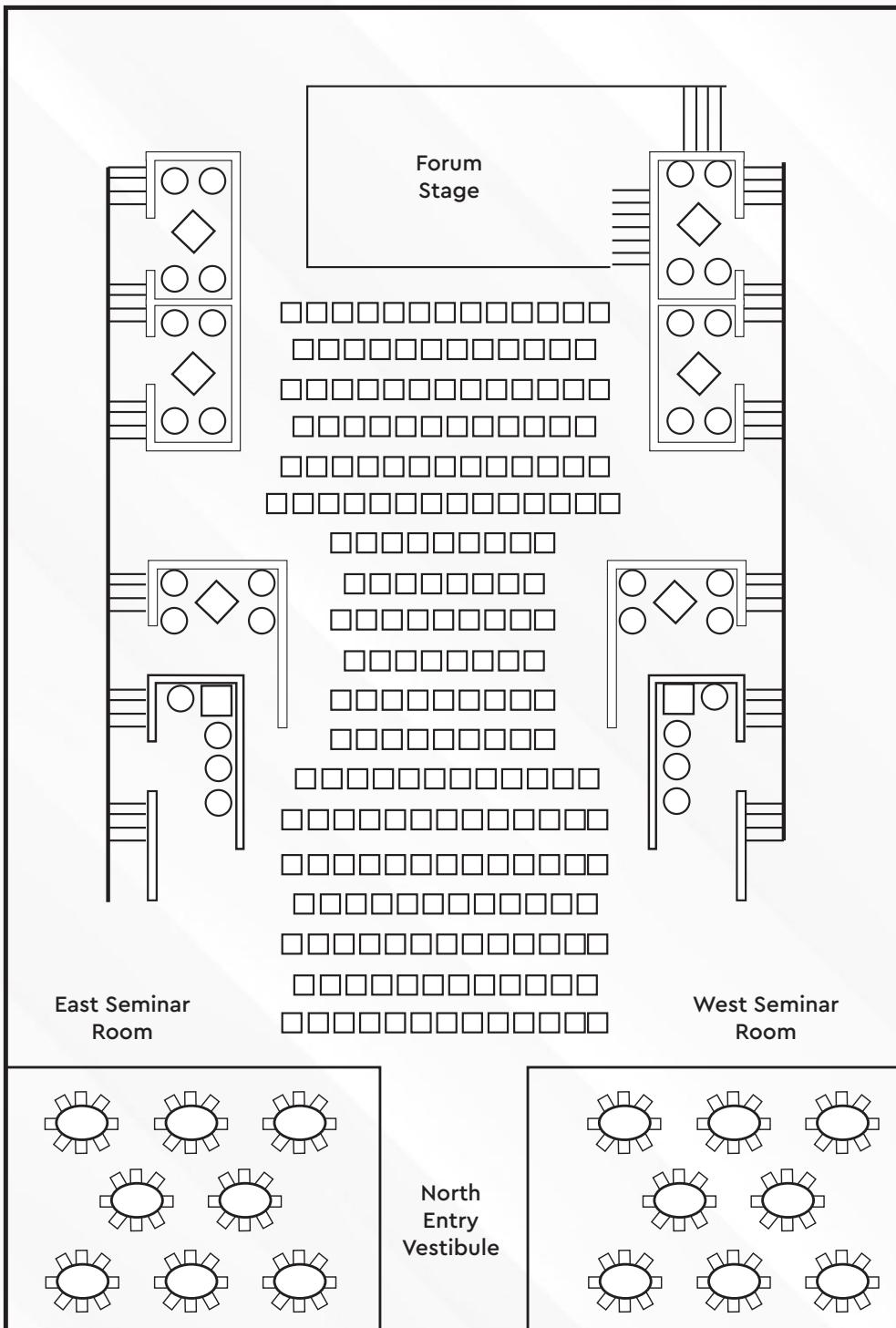
C2C Lorien Martin, NCOIC

C1C Will Beaman
C1C Georgina Buchanan
C1C Elizabeth Canfield
C1C Roy Castellanos
C1C Te'Anne Dailey
C1C Jacob Dorsey
C1C Campbell Dorsey
C1C Eris Dugan
C1C Abdalla Elrahhal
C1C Fallon Eggett
C1C Tatiana Ellison
C1C Parker Fitzgerald
C1C Griffin Greenwood
C1C James Holcomb
C1C Ian Miles
C1C Lucas Morales

C1C Abram Schwach
C1C Mona Shetye
C1C Destiny Speltz
C1C Chakeith Watson
C1C Tyne Watts
C2C Abigail Anderson
C2C Sophia Brinker
C2C Matthew Dickson
C2C Elijah Dominguez
C2C Dominic Evanina
C2C Sulyn Gibbons
C2C Samuel Ingram
C2C Grace Kurian
C2C Ava Lawless
C2C Noel Migliaccio
C2C Aditya Nair

C2C Natalie Rupp
C2C Jenason Spady
C2C Will Torres
C3C Nadav Arieli
C3C Gabriella Bakus
C3C Hannah Betke
C3C Nicholas Borowski
C3C Alan He
C3C Amanda Malsam
C3C Amelia Martin
C3C Andrew Padgett
C3C Darian Presley
C3C Paige Ramage
C3C Tess Stolle
C3C Jackson Summers

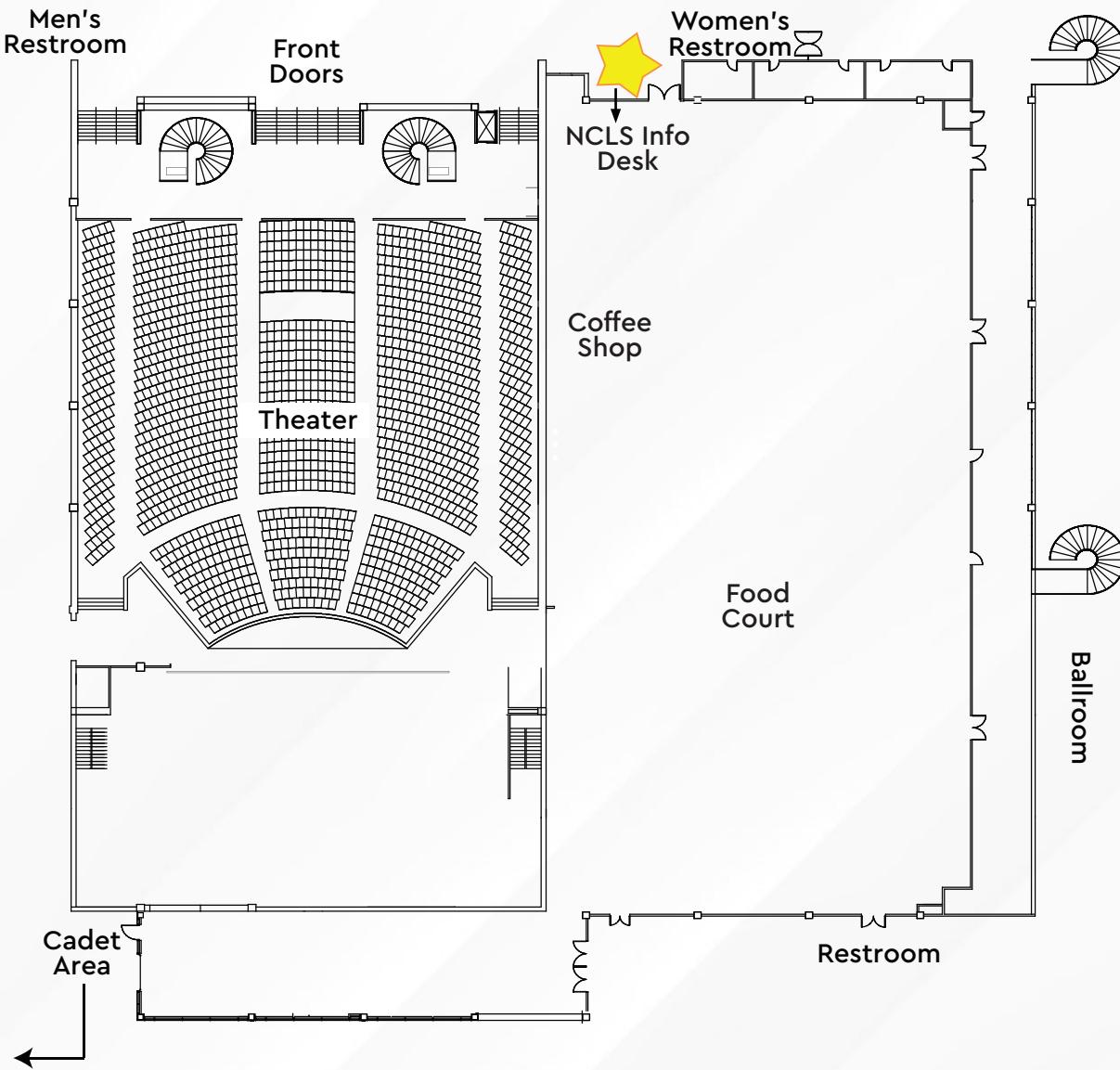
MAP OF POLARIS HALL



C O U R A G E T O L E A D I N T H E P R O F E S S I O N O F A R M S

MAP OF ARNOLD HALL

C O U R A G E T O L E A D I N T H E P R O F E S S I O N O F A R M S



SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Day One – Friday, February 20, 2026		Location
9:15-10:30 a.m.	Workshop Leveraging the Martial Way	Polaris Forum
	Workshop From war stories to war narratives	Polaris West Sem
	Workshop Task Force Hope	Polaris East Sem
	Visiting Students Icebreaker - Visiting Students Only	Arnold Ballroom
10:45 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.	Workshop Leveraging the Martial Way	Polaris Forum
	Workshop From war stories to war narratives	Polaris West Sem
	Workshop Task Force Hope	Polaris East Sem
12:15 – 1:00 p.m.		Lunch
1:00 -2:00 p.m.	Speaker Meet and Greet	Hap's Place Cadet Lounge
2:15-2:45 p.m.	NCLS Opening Ceremony - Lt. Gen. Tony D. Bauernfeind	Arnold Hall Theater
2:45-3:30 p.m.	Keynote Class of '59 Leadership Keynote - Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Marc Sasseville	Arnold Hall Theater
	Master Sgt. (Ret.) Dustin Goodwin	Polaris Forum
	Col. John Blocher	Fairchild F1*
	Panel Outstanding Airman of the Year (OAY)	Fairchild H1
4-5 p.m.	Nashville Storytellers Concert	Arnold Hall Theater
	Col. John Blocher	Polaris Forum
	Gen. (Ret.) Austin Scott Miller	Fairchild F1*
5:15-6 p.m.	Keynote Class of '74 Wakin Award & Class of '73 Muse Family Foundation - Lt. Col. Nichole Ayers	Arnold Hall Theater
	Col. Justin Elliott	Fairchild F1*
6-8:10 p.m.	Social Hour and Cadet Engagement Dinner	McComas Lounge

*USAFA Personnel Only



NATIONAL CHARACTER &
LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM

C O U R A G E T O L E A D I N T H E P R O F E S S I O N O F A R M S

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Day Two – Saturday, February 21, 2026		Location
6:30-8:30 a.m.	Breakfast	
8:30-9:15 a.m.	Keynote Falcon Foundation Bud Breckner Keynote Master Sgt. (Ret.) George Vera Fireside Chat “Lifetime of Service”- Maj. Moffett & Col (Ret) Colvin	Arnold Hall Theater Polaris Forum
	Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Edward Mechenbier	Fairchild F1*
9:30-10:15 a.m.	Senior Leader Panel - Department of the Air Force Capt. (Ret.) Charlie Plumb Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Marc Sasseville	Arnold Hall Theater Polaris Forum Fairchild F1*
10:30-11:15 a.m.	Keynote Enix Heritage Keynote - Gen. (Ret.) Austin Scott Miller Senior Master Sgt. (Ret.) Israel Del Toro Lt. Col. Nichole Ayers	Arnold Hall Theater Polaris Forum Fairchild F1*
11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Lunch	
12:30-1:15 p.m.	Col. Justin Elliott Fireside Chat “Family First, Mission Always” Maj. K. Moffett, Maj. A. Moffett, Col. P. Brehm, and Col. S. Brehm Master Sgt. (Ret.) Dustin Goodwin	Arnold Hall Theater Polaris Forum Fairchild F1*
1:30-2:15 p.m.	POW Panel “Courage in Captivity: Lessons of Endurance and Integrity” - Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Mechenbier and Capt. (Ret.) Plumb Master Sgt. (Ret.) George Vera Senior Master Sgt. (Ret.) Israel Del Toro	Arnold Hall Theater Polaris Forum Fairchild F1*
2:30-3 p.m.	Challenge Ceremony - Chief Master Sgt. John C. Alsvig	Arnold Hall Theater
3:15-4:30 p.m.	Cadet Experiential Debrief (Visiting Students Only)	Arnold Hall Ballroom

*USAFA Personnel Only

** Speakers, sessions and locations are subject to change, please check the event app for the most current information

NOTES

C O U R A G E T O L E A D I N T H E P R O F E S S I O N O F A R M S



NATIONAL CHARACTER &
LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM



**NATIONAL CHARACTER
& LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM**