

Lieutenant General Darryl Roberson, Commander, AETC
Media Roundtable
AFA
March 2017

Lt. Gen. Roberson: I do have some prepared remarks that I'd just like to go through and they might help answer some of the questions I'm sure you have already, and then we'll just open it up for questions. But thanks for being here. It's an opportunity, always, for us to be able to share what's going on and the great work that's being done, especially by Air Education and Training Command. So thank you for your time today.

There are many things to cover, but what I want to do is hit on a few things and then we'll progress from there.

AETC is doing a lot of work. We're going to talk about RPAs, we'll talk about F-35s, we'll talk about battlefield airmen. There's a lot going on, and you know it. You've heard it from me, but we consider it the first command because that's the command that everybody comes into when you come into the Air Force. Everyone. So we train, we educate, and we recruit those that are going to become airmen for our country. And air power, in my humble opinion, truly does start with AETC and it starts with building our people.

So on the recruiting side, as you know, last year we had a huge challenge to get from 310,000 active duty airmen in our Air Force to 317,000. That was a Herculean effort by our recruiters, by our basic military training enterprise and our [ket] training enterprise to assess 7,000 more than we normally would to get up to that number. And it was important for us to do that because, as you know, our Air Force is the smallest Air Force we've ever been since World War II, and we need to get back up to some numbers that are more stabilizing for our Air Force.

So next year we're going to go, or in the year that we're currently in, we're going from 317,000 active duty to 3210,000. Then we're working our way already towards 324,000, and I'm sure that you've heard the Chief and others talking about the need for the United States Air Force to get to somewhere close to 350,000 of active duty airmen.

So we think that getting to 350,000 on the active duty side; adding an additional 7,000 in the Guard; 7,000 in the Reserves; is going to get us to around 700,000 total airmen that will be in our Air Force.

Media: Including civilians.

Lt. Gen. Roberson: Including civilians. Yes, sir.

Media: [Inaudible]?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: It's not, so next year it's 321,000. We're forecast to 324 by 2022, but that's probably going to be accelerated because we're trying to push it up to get to 350,000 total. So we still don't have the resources and funding for that future build, and that will come out as we work with the administration and congress to be able to do that.

Pilots. I'm sure you've heard as well, that we're short on them. Pretty critical levels for not just the United States Air Force, but for the Navy and for the airlines. So this has become a national problem. This is not just a military problem.

So what we're trying to do is work together with the other services, work together with our airline partners, to bring this to a national level. To work with congress, to work with the administration to figure out how we're going to posture ourselves for the long term to produce the number of pilots we need for our nation. This is an issue that we have to address together, because none of us can solve this individually. We're all competing for the same assets. So it's really important, I think, for our national security. Not just on the military side of the house, but on the civilian side of the house as well.

People tend to focus on the fighter pilot piece of it. That has tended to be the leading indicator for us, but this is across all major weapon systems. It's not just the fighter pilots that we're facing this kind of issue with.

Right now we're producing, we produced 1108 graduates from our pilot training program last year. We're going to produce 1200 this year. And we're on our way up to producing 1400 with the assets that we have available in the United States Air Force. And even that's not going to be enough to meet our requirements.

Media: When do you plan to get to 1400?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: We're working our way up to 1400 within the next two years.

We've done a few things in the immediate capability area to try to address specifically fighter pilots. We diverted two F-16 squadrons that were going to go from Hill Air Force Base as they transition to the F-35. Those two F-16 squadrons were going to be spread out among all of the total force -- the Guard, Reserve

and Active. We ended up having to take those two squadrons of F-16s into AETC, and we're now going to transition them into being F-16 fighter production units for us. Those two units are going to be based at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico, and we're spending the next two years standing all of that up. We're already in the process of doing it.

That's going to increase our fighter pilot production rate from 235 that we produced this year, to 335 total force fighter pilots. So that's going to help us in the short term just with fighter pilots, but we've still got a much bigger problem overall to address.

RPA training. Really good news here. As you know, we took a step back a year and a half, two years ago, to reset the foundation of the RPA training enterprise so that we could produce the number of RPA pilots that we needed.

Today we have more RPA pilot positions in our Air Force than any other type of pilot position. I never thought I'd say that when I joined the Air Force 33 years ago.

So we're in really much better footing now with RPA pilot production. In addition to just getting the numbers up to where we need to be, we're also now producing enlisted RPA pilots. Our first enlisted RPA pilots are going to graduate here in May, so we're only a couple of months away, and they're deep in the middle of training right now at Randolph Air Force Base. So that is proceeding along as well.

On the F-35 side of the house big news as well. We continue to advance. We went IOC as an Air Force last year. But on the training side of the house, especially at Luke Air Force Base, our training for international partners has really blossomed. So we now have many more instructor pilots that are being F-35 pilots for us, and we're increasing the number of countries that are being checked out in the F-35.

As you know, Israel took hold of a few F-35s and they're up and flying. Japan is now training as well, and those are two FMS cases.

Media: How many Air Force F-35 pilots are there now?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: I don't know the exact number. We now have built more F-35s than there are F-22s in our inventory.

Media Roundtable - March 2017

Media: That's just for the Air Force?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: I think that's for everybody right now. The 33rd Fighter Wing at Eglin Air Force Base loaded and shot the first air-to-air missiles from an operational F-35 in January of this year, and they also loaded and released AETC's first live bombs, two GBU-12s, from an F-35. So great progress is being made on this aircraft. And our commitment to our coalition partners is only going to continue to grow. It's a great program.

We anticipate with the international partnership that we have that they, the international partners, will comprise approximately 50 percent of our F-35 instructor pilots and aircraft fleet by the calendar year 2019. There's no other program that has that kind of setup.

Media: Sorry, by what year?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: 2019.

So good stuff going on in the F-35.

Battlefield airman is the last thing that I'll say specific words on and then I'll open it up to. So last year we stood up the Air Force's new Battlefield Airman Training Program with a flag and commander and all of the normal things that you would do there at Lackland Air Force Base. And it marked the first year that we fully opened all seven battlefield airman career fields to female airmen. So that's progressing as well.

Currently there's one female enlisted trainee at Basic Military Training who's supposed to go in to become a TACP is where she wants to go. So when she graduates BMT she'll start training right away for that.

And since opening the seven career fields to women 14 months ago there have been two female airmen who qualified for and entered the TACP program, the Tactical Air Control Party training pipeline. However, neither of them has completed the program for various reasons. One was a physical injury and the other one was a determination that she didn't want to continue on in the program.

So with that, there's obviously a lot going on in AETC. We've got 60,000 people strong. Every day we're bringing in new Americans, both from ROTC units, but also straight off the street

as teenagers and young airmen, and we're forging the airmen of the future every single day. It takes a lot of work.

With that, I'll open it up.

Media: [Inaudible]. I understand the last time I'd seen you, you talked about streamlining the process of [inaudible] the battlefield training locations to three or four, or down to [three]. Could you talk a little bit about streamlining that process, and what that really means for the battlefield career field?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: Sure. Right now there are eight different locations that we do portions of our battlefield training program. And with the stand-up of the organization last year, we really consolidated. Put a commander in charge, and for us to really focus on the training aspect of this.

We think that we can do the training that we do in eight different locations probably much more effectively and efficiently, certainly with less money, if we did it in fewer locations. So right now we're in the process of evaluating bases for that consolidation. We're not quite through the full, they have to go to each base, they have to do the assessments on the facilities, the capabilities, whether they're even available, et cetera. We're, I believe we're six out of eight bases evaluated. We've got two more that we need to get through. Then we're going to put all of that information together and come up with a recommendation to present to the leadership of the United States Air Force.

Media: Those bases are all over the United States?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: They're all over. And some of them are Navy and one of them is an Army base, because we do Army parachuting training with the Army. We do some of our dive training and our water training with the Navy. So some of this consolidation will, like we need to build a water aquatics facility, training facility, separately for us. That's one of the things that depending on what bases get picked, then some MILCON money will be put into those bases to build the kind of training facility on the water side of the house that we need to do. We already know what we get advantage wise from the other services we're either going to keep based on the evaluation, or we're going to consolidate as a part of that.

Media: Can I follow up on that? Secretary Mattis has directed [inaudible] consolidate. This sounds like one of those things where maybe Special Forces of all the services could maybe consolidate training. Have you looked at that?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: Outside a scope of me for AETC, I'm on the training side of the house. I'm familiar that General Mattis has said this. This consolidation that we're just talking about was preceding, you know, General Mattis' piece. However, I'm sure that we're going to be looking at not only just battlefield airmen but across the board on how we could potentially consolidate.

Media: What other areas?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: Literally, we would look at all of our facilities, all of our bases.

Media: Pilot training?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: BRAC is an issue.

I would say on the pilot training side of the house we're as low as we can be because we're short on pilots, for sure. If anything, we need more production and more capability. So we're looking at actually expanding the number of pilot training bases that we have available to us to get after that pilot shortage.

So there are areas across our Air Force that we could probably look at it. We believe that as an Air Force we have at least 25 percent excess facility capacity. I'm sure you've seen that quoted before. So that means there is capacity out there in the Air Force for us to look at.

Media: [Inaudible]. [Inaudible] technology?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: Yes.

Media: Are you looking at it including the [inaudible] training? And if you do [inaudible]?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: The answer is no, and the reason is because we have been solely focused on replacing the T-38 for our pilot training program. And again, in my capacity as the Air Education and Training Command Commander, that is outside the scope of what I would be responsible for. So the United States Air Force, right now, is solely focused on replacing T-38s for our pilot

Media Roundtable - March 2017

training program with the T-X. And that's reflected in our RFP, the release for proposal that we put out in late December.

Media: And as a follow-up, you talked about the [inaudible] strain on increasing [inaudible].

Lt. Gen. Roberson: Right.

Media: Specifically the impact on the pilot training. But there's also a big push to increase maintainers.

Lt. Gen. Roberson: Absolutely.

Media: So I was wondering [inaudible].

Lt. Gen. Roberson: In fact the biggest reason that we need to increase is on the maintenance side of the house. But we have other issues as well. Security forces. There's a lot, in fact I would tell you that broadly speaking we are short of people across the United States Air Force. Okay? So it's not just any one AFSC.

Maintenance is one of those drivers that we started, the reason we went to 317 last year in large part was because of our significant deficit on the maintenance side of the house. And again, if you reflect back on how we got here, when the F-35 was coming on board we anticipated being able to retire the A-10. We were planning on moving our maintenance folks from the A-10 side of the house over to the F-35 side of the house. Congress said not so fast, you need to maintain the A-10 and that system. So then we had to come up with other ways to meet that maintenance requirement.

And as you know, we're doing contract CLS support in large part to help us maintain those airplanes until we can build the number of maintainers that we need to take their place.

Media: Good morning. [Inaudible], Inside the Air Force.

Can you just tell us a little bit about what you're learning over the course of bringing the enlisted airmen into the RPA program? I know it's still a little bit early, but if there are some lessons learned, and changes that you might be exploring.

Lt. Gen. Roberson: It's a great question. They are halfway through, in fact just slightly forward of halfway through with the very first class. And, as you know, we're putting all of

them through the exact same program that as I place for the officers. So we deliberately are doing that.

Now this first group of EPIC class, and EPIC is the Enlisted Pilot Initial Classes. EPIC is what it stands for. So the very first class of these EPIC enlisted members are former, they're very experienced enlisted members who may have even come from being sensor operators in the RPA. So they're very familiar with the operations, the concepts, how we do all of this together. So they're highly experience and we put them through first to get there, not only to see how it goes as far how they're doing in the program, but to get their inputs, their thoughts on how to make it better for the classes that follow. Especially people that aren't as experienced as they are.

So right now that class is doing very well. We're getting inputs from them, but I will tell you, there's nothing significant that we're seeing right now, neither from their performance, nor from their inputs.

Now when they graduate we'll do a full-up assessment, we'll get all of their inputs and we'll look at what we need to do. And each of the EPIC classes, there's three EPIC classes. Each of those EPIC classes vary now. They're going to get less experienced and have less familiarity and in the last EPIC class we've got a couple that are not familiar at all. We very deliberately put people that may just come in without any knowledge whatsoever on this.

And so when we get through all three EPIC classes, and we get all that feedback, then it will be a good time for us to assess what needs to be changed, and what tweaks we want to make.

Media: If I could follow up, you mentioned [inaudible] numbers. I believe the latest NDA [inaudible] about how many enlisted airmen the Air Force should have --

Lt. Gen. Roberson: Right.

Media: Is that changing your [inaudible] for the goals on those?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: Not at this point. So the NDA language is in there. We understand the intent. We fully, whatever the law says that's what we're going to do. But we're going to have to build to it. Initially they thought we could get to significant numbers very quickly, and like any production line, you know, to get there it takes a little bit more time. But the intent is to

Media Roundtable - March 2017

try to meet whatever congressional guidance we get for the enlisted RPA.

Media: I think, and I would have to check, but I think it described it as they just wanted to have a preponderance?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: Yes.

Media: How are you interpreting that?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: Well, at least greater than 50 percent. So, you know, and we'll see. As we go through this, we don't have a number. We don't have a set. You know, we're discovering as we go through this as well. And so I think that there will come a point where we'll be able to give a, you know, be able to make a reasonably informed decision about ratios and how we want to employ this. Because this is a changer for concept of operations as well for us, which has to be taken into account.

Media: [Inaudible], National Defense Magazine.

General Goldfein yesterday talked about the need to work with industry to develop technology for future conflict in the multi-domain battle space.

Lt. Gen. Roberson: Yes.

Media: And in your side of the house are there any specific procurement needs? Any programs that you specifically want to work with industry --

Lt. Gen. Roberson: Yes, very much so. The T-X is where we are going to be getting to that concept of fusing domain information and presenting it in a way that is translatable to combat [health]. That's just another reason why we're so excited about the T-X. The T-38 is 50-plus years old and it's just not able to keep up technologically with where we're at today in the world as General Goldfein described during his presentation. The T-X is going to allow us to incorporate much of what he's talking about into a training program starting at the very basic level. So our students in pilot training when that T-X comes along are going to start to be exposed to that fusion of information, a cross-domain kind of operation from the very beginning, and it's going to be a game-changer for us.

Media: Is that the only example right now? Or --

Lt. Gen. Roberson: No. That's just probably the best example. But using live virtual constructive to create environments that we can't replicate in reality is so powerful for us. Again, when you're trying to integrate space and air and cyber, in the real world you're limited on what you can do. You need all those assets. But in the live virtual constructive world, we're able to replicate the scenarios, the environments, and the information that's coming in to be able to put together in a much more trainable way.

Media: When you were talking about the increased number of pilot [inaudible], does that mean you might be able to [inaudible] procure more RPAs [inaudible] these pilots? Or are you pretty good with equipment [inaudible]?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: Again, the number of aircraft that we buy is outside of my land for AETC. We are establishing the training pipeline, the undergraduate RPA pilot, and I don't know if you're aware, but we're, AETC is bringing on the FTU, the Formal Training Units from Holloman into AETC in FY19. So in a couple of years AETC is going to have not only the undergraduate RPA training, but we're going to have that next level too.

So Holloman Air Force Base as a whole, because we have AETC F-16 flying going on there, and now we're going to have RPA training at Holloman. That's the two missions that are there in large part. There's other missions as well, but so Holloman Air Force Base is going to become a part of AETC as well. And that's going to give us an opportunity to kind of relook at how we're doing the whole RPA training enterprise and it's going to allow us to look at better ways of doing what we're doing now.

Media: [Inaudible]. I wondered if you could give an update on the investigation of the F-35 [inaudible] that happened [inaudible]? I wonder if there was [inaudible] and that is what [inaudible]. At this point do you have any information how that [inaudible] if it happened again?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: As you know, any time we have an accident like this we do a safety investigation right away, as quickly as we possibly can. And in some cases if there's concern that this is a fleet-wide issue, there is the potential that we will literally ground the whole fleet. If it's important enough. If we think that there's a safety issue. This is not unprecedented. I'm sure you've seen us as an Air Force ground a whole set of airplanes because there's a safety issue that we think is

important enough and we don't want to compromise losing somebody's life or any of that.

In this case the Safety Investigation Board met. They concluded that this was not something that we needed to stand the whole fleet down for. And that there was analysis done on exactly what happened.

So what I will tell you is there's no safety issue here and that the investigation revealed some things that we can do to make sure it doesn't happen again, and we're putting those in place.

Media: Can you talk about what some of those things are?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: It's actually a combination of items that you would expect. It's procedures from the air crew; it's procedures from the ground maintenance crew; and it's actually changes in some of the programming to the start sequence from the engine maker and the aircraft maker.

Media: Sorry, you said changes in procedures, is that basically something that the aircraft does?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: Sure. So the aircraft, in its start sequence, has a set of standard procedures. So all of that was looked at and determined that there was no safety problem that was fleet-wide, and that there were small tweaks just like we always do with these kind of things to make sure that we don't have these issues again.

Voice: [Inaudible] make sure that [inaudible]. [Inaudible].

Media: Let me ask about T-X. The last time we saw you down in Washington you probably had about seven potential competitors. Now we're down quite a few. Are you at all concerned that you have less choice going into the final stage of the competition?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: First of all, the RFP has been released, which means that I am out of giving any comments or any inputs on the T-X itself. What I can tell you is there's going to be robust competition. We're excited about that robust competition. We can't wait for a winner to be selected. And we can't wait for that airplane to be fielded for us, because, like I said before, it's going to be a game-changer for us we need this badly I our Air Force.

Media: I just wanted to ask on the [LPC]. [Inaudible] the Air Force intend to generate [inaudible] reform across the entire [inaudible]? And [inaudible] budget wise, and getting an update on [inaudible] the Navy for the cost share on that.

Lt. Gen. Roberson: Outside the scope of my authority and responsibility. In the training environment, we're not there. That's more operationally focused. So that would be ACC and Headquarters Air Force. In AETC we have nothing to do with that.

Media: Okay, for [LPC]?

Lt. Gen. Roberson: What we do is we take whatever's available and we use it and in most cases, especially in AETC, it's unclassified. It's the training environment. We have international partners and all that kind of stuff. So our, like what will happen with the T-X, the integration and training with the simulators, with the tablets, with their desktop, with data links to be able to work with the simulator and the airplane while they're flying, all unclassified networks that are training oriented versus operational.

Media: Okay.

Lt. Gen. Roberson: I hope that was at least worthwhile. AETC is a big command. There's a lot going on every single day. We've got a lot of airmen that are working real hard. We're short on bodies. We're short on pilots. And we're working hard to get to where we need to be.

So thanks.

#