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TOP STORY

# Air Force unveils new training initiatives at annual military affairs luncheon

By Sara Samora | The Herald-Zeitung Jun 19, 2019

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Jackie Heitkamp speaks to members of the military during the Military Affairs luncheon at Se House on Tuesday, June 18, 2019.

Mikala Compton

Artificial intelligence will play a big role in the training of U.S. Airmen in the future, as attendees learned during the Greater New Braunfels Chamber of Commerce's second annual Military Affairs Committee Luncheon on Tuesday.

The event began with a welcome by Shane Wolf, the 2019 Chair of the Board, and James Whitmore, Air Force veteran and 2019 Military Affairs Committee Chair, followed by the invocation and Pledge of Allegiance by Army veteran Chuck Teeter.

New Braunfels Smokehouse catered food, and the guest speaker was Air Force Brig. Gen. James Sears Jr.

Sears is the director of plans, programs and requirements at Headquarters Air Education and Training Command at Joint Base San Antonio.

In short, Sears allocates where the \$7.6 billion goes when it comes to recruiting, as well as educating and training 60,000 Airmen and women on 22 bases.

"I'm the guy who puts the tape on how we recruit, train and educate the world's greatest Air Force," Sears said.

Sears then began to break down the plan on how the AETC will improve the USAF training and progress faster than in the past.

“(There are) three things we’re going to be reimagining in air education and training at AETC today versus what we went through,” Sears said.

## **Technology advancement**

The training for the Air Force is changing with the times. Some of the training involves artificial intelligence, virtual reality and augmented reality.

According to the 2018 AETC Strategic Plan, AI is being used for intelligent tutors. The AI will sense what the Airman’s strengths and weaknesses are during his or her learning experience.

From there, the AI will allow the Airmen to learn at their own rate, regardless if they aced and become an expert of that subject.

“You can actually repeat maneuvers that you couldn’t repeat before,” Sears said.

Sears said the simulator is the instructor, and if they do a loop, the “coach” can inform them when they’re not doing it right and then tell them how to correct it.

In 2018, 13 students completed the first iteration of the Pilot Training Next utilizing simulators and virtual reality. The course took six months to complete, and according to the AETC website, allowed the students to

“learn in a collaborative environment in a learner-centric way.”

Moreover, the course encouraged them to learn on their own, to make mistakes, and have them figure out the solution.

In January 2019, the second class learned how to fly the T-6A, using virtual reality simulators.

This Continuum of Training is cost effective as well accelerates the production of training new pilots.

Also, the Air Force announced in 2018 that the Advanced Pilot Trainer (Boeing T-X) will replace the T-38C Talon aircraft at pilot training bases.

The T-X is scheduled to arrive on JBSA-Randolph in 2022.

## **Learning opportunities and analytics**

Airmen will also be able to train from anywhere, anytime, and on any device, thanks to cloud-based systems.

“Coaches that use AI will be able to make sure that the way you’re leaning is at a pace that is suitable for you,” Sears said. “Airman-centricity.”

According to the 2018 AETC Strategic Plan, the cloud-based systems will support cross-domain and multi-system learning.

This will allow students to gain “real world” skills, as well as hands-on experience.

Furthermore, the strategic plan said big data analytics would create algorithms to predict accession, certification, attrition and future outcomes like course-taking patterns.

“As a supervisor, I can see what courses you’ve taken, how you did, and eventually we’ll get to tools that will push you and that’ll hold you back,” Sears said. “It’ll understand and know if you’re reading faster or slower.”

And if the Airman is going slower, Sears said the reason could be due to the material’s difficulty, or that they need to stand up and take a break.

### **The earlier the better**

In addition to accelerating learning, the 2018 AETC Strategic Plan states this will allow Airmen to be matched with developmental opportunities before going on to the next program.

“It’s time to get that training earlier, immersing in your ambition before you ever get out,” Sears said.

With these initiatives, Sears said these three things are no longer time constant, and allows Airmen to incorporate the mission, putting the focus on the future.