CALL SIGNS

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CONTENT

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings! It is my privilege to introduce this issue of *Call Signs*, a collection of articles that pays tribute to the enduring impact of Aerospace Experimental Psychologists across defense, research, and industry.

We open with Dr. Michael Lilienthal, who reflects on a career spanning four decades. His retrospective connects personal milestones with national events, from the Cold War to AI, reminding us how human factors remain essential even as technology transforms.

Next, Dr. Dylan Schmorrow recounts his journey from AEP to President and CEO of SoarTech, now part of Accelint. His experience bridging human performance science and emerging defense technologies illustrates how AEP expertise continues to shape AI, autonomy, and mission-critical training solutions.

Dr. Dennis McBride offers a powerful tribute in "A Mentor for Generations," spotlighting Dr. Tom Mitchell as a model of recruitment and mentorship. McBride highlights how Mitchell's personal outreach efforts seeded an entire generation of successful AEPs. It's a call to action for each of us to invest in identifying and nurturing the next wave of officer-scientists.

In "From Service to Safety," Dr. Jim Patrey shares his post-retirement transition to nuclear human factors engineering at General Electric–Hitachi. He draws compelling comparisons between DoD and NRC approaches to systems safety and test integration, showing how military HFE principles translate to high-stakes civilian domains.

Turning to systems-level behavior analysis, Drs. Doug Wiegmann and Scott Shappell introduce HFACS-Workplace Behaviors. Their expansion of the HFACS framework to encompass workplace misconduct and suicide prevention offers a structured, data-driven path to improving organizational health and leadership accountability—crucial territory in today's force.

Dr. William Moroney provides a rich and entertaining chronicle in "Back in the Day," highlighting the operational breadth of AEP work during the Cold War. From hurricane penetrations in P-3s to flying radar intercepts in F-4s and anthropometric innovations, his article reminds us of the deep operational integration that has long defined our value to Naval Aviation.

Lastly, LT Kaila Vento closes with a reflective piece on mentorship and institutional continuity at NAMRL. Through interviews with Drs. Richard Arnold, Henry Williams, and Michael Reddix, she distills critical lessons in spatial disorientation research, laser eye protection, and lab-to-fleet transitions.

Thank you for reading and for remaining connected to our community. This issue is a reminder of the breadth, depth, and significance of the work we do—and the people who make it possible.

Very respectfully,

- President, CDR Brennan "Tip" Cox
- Vice President, LCDR Stephen "Bacon" Eggan
- Secretary, LT Kaila "Wizzle" Vento
- Treasurer, LT Brittany Neilson
- Editor-in-Chief, LT Adam "DOM" Braly
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THE CONSTANT OF CHANGE

Reflections on a Navy Career in the Era of Transformation

By: Michael Lilienthal, Ph.D., CAPT (Ret.), AEP #71

Current Work: Just over a year ago, a headhunter from ManTech International convinced me to move from supporting Navy and Marine Corps Test and Evaluation (T&E) for an OSD Field Office to support T&E for the Department of Homeland Security. I do remote work for their Office of T&E. I join working groups as the T&E representative to monitor and contribute to T&E planning and execution of several major acquisitions. I get involved early giving input at the start of an acquisition program reviewing operational requirements documents to ensure requirements are measurable and testable all the way to monitoring operational tests. I provide input into the independent assessments the DHS Director of T&E issues for programs. I found that my experiences at different duty stations and different assignments as an AEP contribute to my current job. I deal with testing that involves man machine interfaces, modeling and simulation, training effectiveness evaluation, statistics, questionnaire development, cybersecurity, safety, physical security, automation, machine learning, and wargaming (just to name a few).

Historical Reflections: A lot has happened in the Navy and the world since I raised my hand to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic in 1978. Some were good, some not so good: 1979 – Three Mile Island Incident, 1980- The first women naval academy graduates, 1986 – Chernobyl Meltdown, 1988 – USS Vincennes shootdown, 1990 – First Gulf War, 1991 - the World Wide Web goes public, Soviet Union dissolution, the Tailhook Scandal, 1992 - a live demonstration of distributed simulation (soon to be called Live-Virtual-Constructive) on the Senate floor, 1994 – first female pilot to fly an official combat mission, 2001 – 9/11, Afghanistan War, 2003 – Second Gulf War, 2007 - iPhone, 2012 - CRISPR, 2013 - the first aircraft carrier UAV launch and arrested landing, 2015 – Fat Leonard Scandal, 2022 – ChatGPT, Russian invasion of Ukraine. These are some of the events, inventions, and milestones that have and will shape the Navy. It supports the old saying "the only constant is change."

Point Mugu, CA (1984). Michael Lilienthal (AEP #71) pictured fourth from the right, poses on the range with the Point Magu team.

The things that I have observed that have not changed are human capabilities, limitations, and inventiveness. Even with the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI), a human is involved in the creation, maintenance, and teaming with AI systems. One quote from Proceedings March 2023 has stuck with me - "At a recent Naval War College seminar on future naval operations, a former warship captain was asked, "What is most important for a commanding officer to remember when fighting the ship?" The answer surprised the audience: "To remember that when you need it most, your most technologically sophisticated system will fail you and you need to have already planned the backup upon backup actions that you will need to take." This reminds me that the human with all his/her capabilities, limitations, and inventiveness has in the past and will step up in the future to continue the mission.

The AEPs mission has remained constant as this maritime nation sails into uncharted seas.

Fun Memories: A note about volunteering for collateral duties. I was stationed at the Pacific Missile Test Center in the 1980s. The Plan of the Day had an announcement looking for a volunteer to be the crisis negotiator for the base Crisis Response Force. I checked into it and was told I would go to an FBI two-week Crisis Negotiation Course to give me the basic tools to learn to mitigate threats involving barricaded, suicidal, and hostage situations. This sounded like a good deal. I volunteered. I was told I had to first go through a 6-day FBI Special Weapons and Tactics Training course along with 2 other JOs and 22 enlisted personnel from the base who would make up the CRF. The training dealt with exercises in basic weapons marksmanship, repelling, vehicle and building entry, crowd control, the use of flashbangs and tear gas, hand to hand combat, and lot of running, pushups, and sit ups. After completing the course, the FBI trainers recommend to my CO that I become the OIC. I never got to go to the crisis negotiator course. The OIC collateral duty was a full-time job on top of my AEP duties at Pt Mugu. What I learned and experienced gave me more than I would have gotten as a hostage negotiator.

(1984). Michael Lilienthal (AEP #71) walks the flight line with Air Force One pictured in the background.

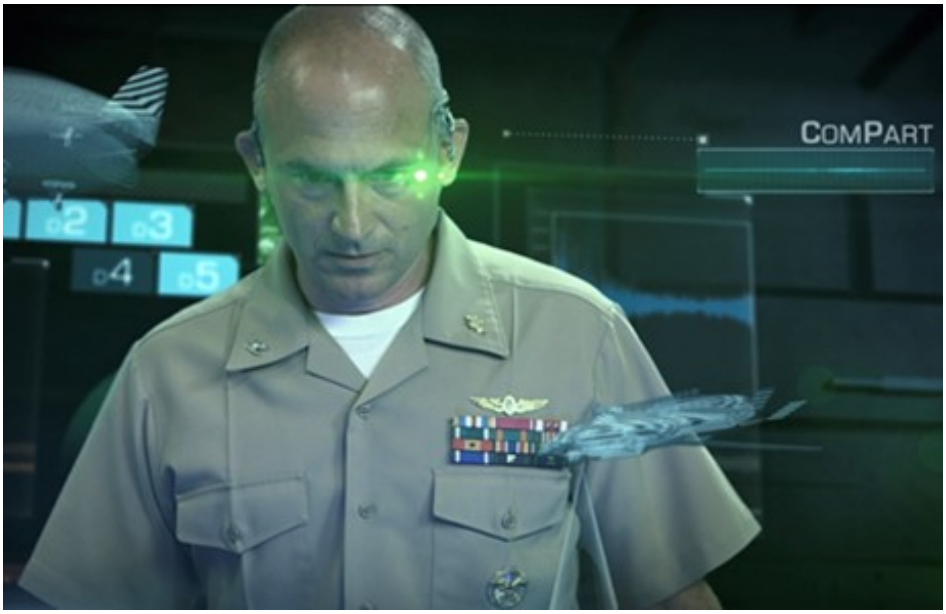
Point Mugu, CA. (1984). Michael Lilienthal (AEP #71) instructs AD3 Joe Holdner in the proper use of the .45-caliber pistol.

BEYOND THE UNIFORM

From Naval Research to AI-Powered Defense Solutions

By: Dylan "Brimstone" Schmorrow, Ph.D., CAPT (Ret.), AEP #104

It's been 12 years since I transitioned from active duty in the Navy, and looking back, the journey from a Naval Aerospace Experimental Psychologist (AEP) to my current role leading SoarTech has been both unexpected and deeply rewarding. In many ways, the work I do today at SoarTech, and now as part of Accelint, feels like a direct continuation of the mission I had while wearing the uniform: advancing warfighter capabilities through cutting-edge science and technology.



From Navy AEP to SoarTech: A Common Thread

As an AEP, I spent my career at the intersection of human performance, advanced systems, and operational needs. Whether it was leading research at the Naval Research Laboratory, managing programs at DARPA, or serving in the Office of Naval Research, my work focused on optimizing warfighter effectiveness through human-machine teaming, augmented cognition, and next-generation training solutions.

One of the most defining roles of my Navy career was at the Office of the Secretary of Defense, where I led human performance and biosystems research. That position gave me a front-row seat to how the Department of Defense (DoD) evaluates, integrates, and scales emerging technologies. I also had the privilege of serving as the Executive Secretary for the Defense Science Board's Task Force on Autonomy, where we set the vision for AI and autonomy in the DoD, long before it became the pressing topic it is today. Those experiences cemented my belief that technology isn't just about efficiency, it's about giving our warfighters an edge in an increasingly complex battlespace.

One particularly memorable project from that era was a short film I helped create, sponsored by the Human Performance, Training, and Biosystems Directorate. It was a visionary look at how AI and human performance technologies could enhance warfighter effectiveness, and I was both involved in making it and featured in it. The film explored groundbreaking concepts such as long-term, personalized training, immersive learning environments, real-time cognitive and physical status measurement, and human-machine teaming for decision-making and battlefield assistance. It also envisioned the future of combat medicine, demonstrating how real-time patient status transfer, injury scanning, and holographic medical representations could revolutionize care from the field to the hospital.

Looking back, that project was a glimpse into the future, one that is now becoming reality. The passion that drove me to work on that film is the same passion that fuels my work today. At SoarTech, and now as part of Accelint, we are developing AI-powered training systems, adaptive decision aids, and human-machine teaming solutions that turn those early concepts into deployable capabilities. Check out this movie on YouTube as it captures so much of what I still care deeply about.

SoarTech and Accelint: The Next Evolution of AI for Defense

When I retired from the Navy, I wasn't ready to stop contributing. I joined Soar Technology, Inc. (SoarTech) as Chief Scientist, a role that allowed me to apply everything I had learned in service to advancing AI and simulation technologies for the DoD. In time, I became the Chief Technology Officer (CTO), helping steer the company's technical direction as we tackled some of the hardest challenges in artificial intelligence for defense applications. Then, in 2023, my role shifted once again when SoarTech was acquired by Accelint, a private equity-backed platform focused on AI-driven national security solutions. I was asked to lead SoarTech as President and CEO, helping navigate our transition into this larger ecosystem while maintaining the technical and scientific excellence that has always been our hallmark.

So, what am I doing today? SoarTech is now Accelint's AI and Simulation Software Solutions Segment, and we are leading a growing portfolio of defense AI initiatives. The work we do is deeply aligned with what I was involved in as a Navy AEP, optimizing human performance, enhancing decision-making, and integrating AI into real-world operations. Today, we are pioneering AI-driven command and control (C2) solutions, adaptive training environments, and human-machine collaboration technologies that are shaping the future of defense.

One of the most exciting developments has been our AI Platform (AiP), a modular, scalable, and mission-adaptive AI infrastructure designed to accelerate mission execution across the DoD. Unlike generic AI solutions, AiP is purpose-built for defense applications, integrating trusted, explainable AI with real-time decision support, autonomy, and human-machine collaboration—ensuring operational effectiveness in contested and high-risk environments. We've also developed a comprehensive suite of branded solutions that support mission-critical operations:

AITeamMATE – An AI-driven platform that models human behavior to create non-player characters (NPCs) in simulations and training environments, improving realism and decision-making.

SpeechZero – A conversational AI system that combines speech recognition, natural language understanding, and response generation to enable hands-free, real-time communication without the need for cloud connectivity.

TrustMATE – A system designed to calibrate trust between humans and AI, ensuring that AI-driven decisions and actions align with human expectations and mission needs.

Scenario Director – A simulation and training tool that facilitates the creation, management, and execution of realistic, AI-powered training scenarios.

SwarmMATE – A collaborative AI framework that enables the coordination of multi-agent autonomous systems, allowing robotic and unmanned platforms to function as integrated teams.

STATS – A situational awareness and decision-support system, leveraging AI to provide real-time analysis and actionable intelligence for operators.

EpEx – An experiential learning and training solution, designed to enhance adaptive learning and improve training effectiveness through AI-driven insights.

AssistMATE – A task-automation AI assistant that supports human operators by optimizing workflows, providing intelligent recommendations, and reducing cognitive workload.

Snapshot+ Suite – An AI-powered Social Media Intelligence (SOCINT) toolset that enhances intelligence analysts' ability to track and counter disinformation campaigns.

Content Accelerator – An adaptive learning content development tool that streamlines training content creation for military learning programs.

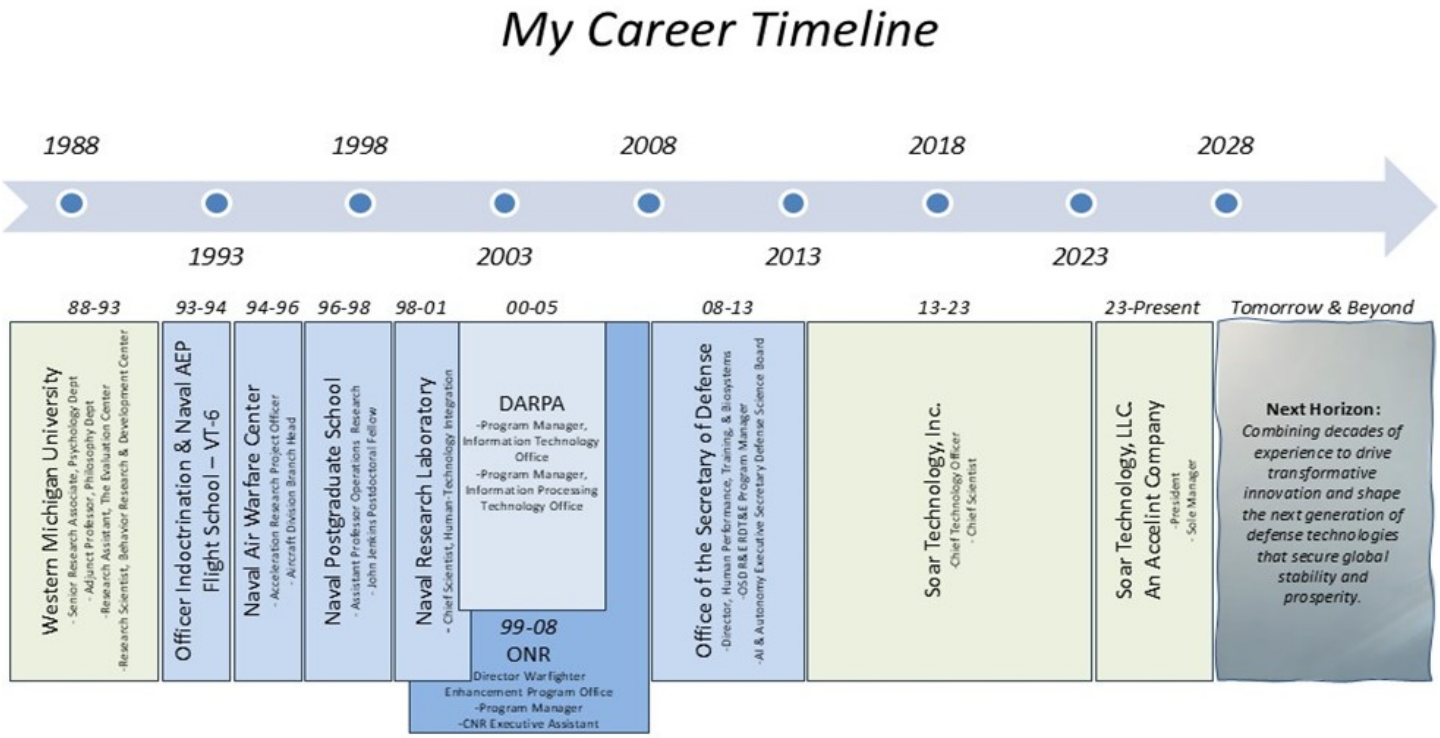
SkyFall – A parachute descent training simulator deployed across Navy and Air Force locations, delivering highly immersive emergency descent training.

These innovations aren't just concepts, they are deployed and making an impact. Whether it's enhancing the Navy's training programs, enabling faster decision-making in command centers, or optimizing logistics and readiness, SoarTech continues to push the boundaries of AI's role in defense. For more details on our AI applications and capabilities, you can check out our website here.

Lessons from the Navy That Still Shape My Work

Leading SoarTech through our acquisition and integration into Accelint has been its own kind of mission, one that has tested every lesson I learned in the military. Navigating the transition from a small, independently owned company into a private equity-backed enterprise has meant managing cultural shifts, ensuring strategic alignment, and maintaining our core values amid rapid growth. The leadership skills I developed in the Navy, whether in a lab, a boardroom, or a Pentagon office, have been instrumental in guiding this process.

But beyond leadership, there's a deeper connection to my AEP roots that still influences everything I do. The idea that technology should serve the human, not replace it. The understanding that usability, trust, and integration are just as important as the raw capability of a system. The fundamental belief that innovation should always be in service of the mission. Those were the principles that guided my work in uniform, and they remain the principles that guide SoarTech today.



A Look Ahead

As I look forward, my focus is on ensuring that SoarTech, now part of Accelint, remains at the forefront of DoD AI innovation. We are currently executing 30 active projects across our campaign areas, with new contract awards and pending proposals that will shape the future of AI for defense applications. By 2027, Accelint has a bold vision to be the leading AI partner for the DoD and national security organizations, and I see SoarTech as a key driver of that goal.

In many ways, my career has come full circle. The work I do now, building AI-powered tools that improve warfighter performance, enhance decision-making, and enable autonomy, is an extension of the mission I started in the Navy. And just like my days as an AEP, the challenge remains the same: how do we ensure that people remain at the center of the technological revolution that is transforming warfare?

Capturing the Journey

In reflecting on my career—where I've been, where I am now, and where I'm headed—I wanted to capture the essence of my journey in a single timeline image and in a single statement. This isn't just a summary of roles and accomplishments; it's a representation of how my experiences in defense research, acquisition, and technology development have shaped my approach to leadership and innovation.

"With a career spanning over three decades at the intersection of defense research, acquisition, and technology development, I bring a unique blend of operational expertise, technical leadership, and strategic vision. My work has driven innovation in AI, augmented cognition, and human systems integration, delivering transformative capabilities for warfighters and advancing national security priorities. Leveraging deep expertise in program management, acquisition strategy, and cross-functional leadership, I have consistently led the successful delivery of complex, multimillion-dollar programs on time and within budget. My ability to navigate and bridge the worlds of technology, business, and policy uniquely positions me to deliver high-impact outcomes for defense-focused organizations and investment partners."

This statement encapsulates the driving force behind my career and the work I continue to pursue today, developing and delivering advanced technologies that strengthen national security while ensuring they remain focused on the people who rely on them. It's an honor to continue serving that mission, even outside the uniform.

Very Respectfully,
Dylan

A MENTOR FOR GENERATIONS

How CDR Tom Mitchell Shaped AEP Recruitment

By: Dennis K. "Muffin" McBride, Ph.D., CAPT (Ret.), AEP #72

Hello, shipmates. This piece isn't meant to be technical or perfectly written. Instead, it's a reflection on two key things:

1. A throwback to AEP recruitment and the model created by one of our most successful officers.
2. A throw-forward, based on lessons learned from that model.

I want you to think back for a moment: How did you get here? Who revealed us and our awesome AEP program to you? Who was that one person that was vital to your recruitment? How pivotal was that individual's personal/professional approach with you? Was she or he truly knowledgeable about AEP world? Bear these questions in mind.

Recruitment is a "contact sport" – a profession or a duty that requires major, conscientious, dedicated effort. My claim and pleading is that it is crucial that we constantly re-dedicate our focus on recruitment. It's the lifeblood of our Corps!

A major part of accessioning new talent to Navy-AEP service materializes from our personal connections. Although it's difficult to estimate the relative percentages that originate from official "Big-Navy" advertising versus from our own networking, it's clear that a very substantial portion of our 173 members came aboard as a direct result of personal outreach. And it is equally clear that this approach is highly effective.

Most of us have an intuitive knack for spotting potential candidates who (necessarily) fit two profiles:

1. "At least a shapable," squared-away Naval officer profile
2. A scientist in uniform - specifically an AEP profile.

Fortunately, our candidates are often people we already know from grad school or professional societies we're all part of. We seem to "know – intuitively – a good candidate when we know one."

This sixth-sense approach is extremely underrated, both for its usefulness in accession to active duty and to graduation from 'Flight Surgeon School,' but more importantly, for gauging a candidate's likely success for a full career. It also gives the AEP franchise an additional, real-life advantage. Our newly-winged tigers are PCS'd into what might feel like an imposing, unknown, complex professional, administrative, and personal environment. But ideally, they do so holding hands with their AEP recruiter – who is at this point already performing duties as lifelong mentor. How does this model work?

No one embodies the deep essence of recruiting-to-seamless mentorship better than did (and still does) CDR Thomas Mitchell (AEP #61). His career in uniform, itself, was truly outstanding in many ways. Tom's leadership of a multitude of human factors programs at duty stations spanning the gamut from NAVAIR to NPS, and across country from Arlington to Monterey, still teaches us how to do what we do.

But another massive part of Dr. Mitchell's impact was (and still is) his success at recruiting, especially as he leveraged personal connections back to his Ph.D. program, and specifically to Professor Ed Mulligan, as well as to other faculty at the University of Georgia. *(Note: We lost Dr. Mulligan recently – please look for an article about his contribution and loyalty to "the Corps" in a future issue.)*

Case in point: The attached photo (next page), taken during a break at one of our early 1980s, all-AEP conferences (this one was in Pensacola), shows four of CDR Mitchell's UGA recruits. Pictured from left to right, is Dennis McBride (#72), Thomas Mitchell (AEP #61), Thomas Crosby (#65), David Gleisner (#77), and Leland Goodman (#75). Kathy Stewart (AEP #80) wasn't commissioned yet, so she is "not pictured." Also missing are the many Naval officers (and civil servants, as well as contractors) that Tom brought into our eco-system and/or mentored from other university programs, labs and Service communities (he, himself had served honorably as a commissioned "Shoe").

Collectively, CDR Mitchell and his direct recruits (i.e., not even counting his many recruits' recruits) accounted for more than a century of dedicated service - including active duty and direct service beyond. For Tom and his charges, there would accrue numerous promotions, assignments at probably all of our 'then available' duty stations, portfolios commensurate with rank - responsibility ranging from LT(JG) to Captain, creation and leadership of programs nominally

Pensacola, FL. Pictured above (L-R): Dennis McBride (AEP #72), Thomas Mitchell (AEP #61), Thomas Crosby (AEP #65), David Gleisner (AEP #77), and Leland Goodman (AEP #75) pose for a picture during a break at an AEP conference in the early 80s.

assigned to flag officers, command authorities ranging from collateral duty public affairs to major laboratory vice-commander, selection to laboratory command, national-level e.g., DARPA program management, ONR as well as Medical R&D program officer roles, two collateral assignments as AEP specialty leader, the awarding of many military decorations and honors, and most importantly, the documented leadership and transition of countless successful human factors programs that have made real differences for Naval Aviation.

For all the professional success and programs objectives accomplished, the officers involved agree - and they never forget -- that it was Dr. Tom Mitchell - that one individual who "saw something" in us, shepherded us in and dutifully, selflessly mentored our careers. We all tried our best to emulate him professionally, but we fell short. He was and continues to be available, probably still, no-notice, 24/7.

Speaking for all of us who learned from CDR Mitchell – his many recruits – we can never thank him enough for the honor and privilege of serving with him, the Navy, national security, and one another - the "Corps." We think there should be an AEP recruitment award named in his honor.

So, looking forward, we must continue to re-double our focus on creating and nurturing each next generation. 'Lessons learned' says that we should emulate Tom's strategy to the degree that we can. You are encouraged to call him if you want to learn how…

FROM SERVICE TO SAFETY

A Navy Veteran's Second Act in Nuclear Engineering

By: Jim Patrey, Ph.D., CDR (Ret.), AEP #110

Hard to believe my Navy retirement was nearly 7 years ago! Since them, I've done a few different things, amongst them travel to 30 states and 10 countries, including stints living in Hawaii, the Philippines, Ohio, Florida and Quebec, with some of that travel just for fun and exploring, others from involvement with humanitarian missions/ministry. Living out of the U.S. during COVID and travelling (we were actually in Taiwan when COVID hit, just across the strait and a few hundred miles from the now infamous lab in Wuhan) was an adventure unto itself; we spent 2 years in Quebec, one of the slowest locations globally to fully open up from COVID, with restrictions still I place in even 2022. If I never see one of those giant nasal swabs again (I estimate that I had 2 dozen different tests and 6 weeks in quarantine), it would be too soon!

Ultimately, we decided to head back to the U.S., for our youngest daughter to finish high school, settling in at Wilmington, North Carolina so as to be in the U.S., near family, and enjoy the beach. Needing something to do and exploring the companies in the area, I ended up finding a human factors engineering position at the nuclear engineering branch of General Electric (now GE Vernova) called General Electric – Hitachi (GEH; so named because of a partnership with the Japanese company Hitachi). As you have no doubt noticed in the news, nuclear energy has risen in esteem internationally, being viewed as a primary alternative to produce energy.

GEH has been one of the benefactors of this renewed interest, having a history of building nuclear plants both in the U.S. and overseas. They were able to win two contracts for building new plants, which meant they needed to rapidly scale up their engineering staff to meet this massive demand (for which they've grown from ~250 engineers about 3 years ago to over 1000 now); and the human factors engineering (HFE) group grew from 3 people to nearly 50 over that time period (one of our career nuclear HFEs noted that this is probably the single biggest nuclear HFE group in the world). Part of the challenge in that scale up was that there were few nuclear engineers in existence, so they've patched together teams of operators (most of whom are former Navy nukes) and other engineering specialties to supplement the existing nuclear engineers in what is as diverse of a technical group as you'll ever see!

Within nuclear HFE, we have former enlisted and officer Navy nukes, H.S. grads through Ph.D.s, workers spanning 8 time zones from California through Spain, psychologists as well as degrees in Industrial, Systems, Mechanical, Electrical, Aerospace and Human Factors. One of the reasons that an HFE plan this industry can work with such disparate specialties is that it has a highly regimented approach. Most of you have probably heard of the Three Mile Island nuclear incident. The post-accident reviews revealed a host of human errors driving the events that happened, one of the more significant being the creation of an "alarm avalanche" where one simple disruption to the water flow around the reactor triggered nearly 50 different alarms, making it impossible for the operators to determine root cause and the proper mitigations. This was recognized as an engineering design deficiency and as a result the Nuclear Regulatory Committee drove towards formalizing an approach to HFE that would prevent future design flaws culminating in the Human Factors Engineering Program Review Model (NUREG 0711).

In addition to the formalization proscribing such an approach, arguably much clearer and more detailed than the DoD's Human Systems Integration program, they also have particular requirements for establishing the credential and qualifications for anyone serving as a nuclear HFE, partially based on training and education, partially from experience, and in all cases validated by someone who is qualified, with distinct qualifications for each technical area (we have over 20 in our qualification documentation).

The technical approach is also a bit different. My recollections of the DoD approach was often scrambling to find any time to do HFE in the larger design process. Nuclear HFE, in contrast, is highly iterative, with frequent and regular opportunities to influence design early in the process, rather than last minute corrections to a mostly complete product. Similarly, it is HFE that runs the verification and validation process, akin to opera-

tional test and evaluation in the DoD, and accordingly has an ability to influence strong design decisions through their equivalent of a test plan.

So as much as I can recall the humor with which us aviation types would regard the Navy nukes, with their high resistance to change and regimented ways, I have to admit that they've got an approach to HFE that is better than any other I've seen, one where it is mandated by regulation, fairly resourced, and integral to the system safety. While I'd still say aviation is a much cooler (e.g., "Top Gun" vs "Down Periscope"), there is much to appreciate about the HFE approach in nuclear energy, as well as how much it is driven by the Navy ethos from the reactor operators that served and the legacy from sailors such Admiral Rickover. While not as much fun as flights to Ireland, Hawaii or Italy or as exciting as carrier landings, I suppose I've traveled around the world just to land in another part of the Navy's footprint!

Tackling Destructive Behaviors with HFACS-WB

By: Douglas Wiegmann, Ph.D., AEP #101 and Scott Shappell, Ph.D., CAPT (Ret.), AEP # 91

Over 25 years ago, two former Aerospace Experimental Psychologists, Drs. Douglas Wiegmann (AEP #101) and Scott Shappell (AEP#91) developed the Human Factors Analysis and Classification System (HFACS). The goal was simple but transformative: shift the focus of aviation mishap investigations away from individual blame and toward a systems perspective that accounts for supervisory, organizational, and environmental contributors. HFACS quickly became the Navy's preferred method for examining mishaps in Naval Aviation and the DoD, allowing leaders to connect frontline errors to institutional shortcomings.

Its success didn't go unnoticed. Over the past two decades, HFACS has been adapted across commercial aviation, healthcare, rail transportation, oil and gas, manufacturing, and even sports and entertainment. In every case, the framework's strength lies in its ability to reveal not just what failed, but why the system allowed the failure to occur.

That same structured approach is now being applied to one of the most pressing and complex challenges facing organizations today: destructive workplace behaviors. These include sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, hazing, suicide, and attempted suicide. While these incidents may appear unpredictable or purely personal, HFACS-WB—short for HFACS for Workplace Behaviors—demonstrates that such acts are often the product of predictable and preventable systemic conditions.

From Unsafe Acts to Destructive Behaviors

Whereas the original HFACS model culminated in unsafe acts, errors and violations that directly preceded an accident, HFACS-WB shifts its focus. The model's base is now populated by destructive behaviors, the observable actions that create harm within an organization. These include both impulsive actions, such as a heat-of-the-moment assault or suicide attempt, and deliberate behaviors, including premeditated harassment or violent retaliation.

But HFACS-WB does not stop at behavior. It preserves the three critical tiers that make HFACS such a powerful diagnostic tool: Behavioral Preconditions, Supervisory Factors, and Organizational Influences. These layers form a hierarchy of contributing factors that shape the workplace environment and make destructive behaviors more or less likely.

A Case from the Field

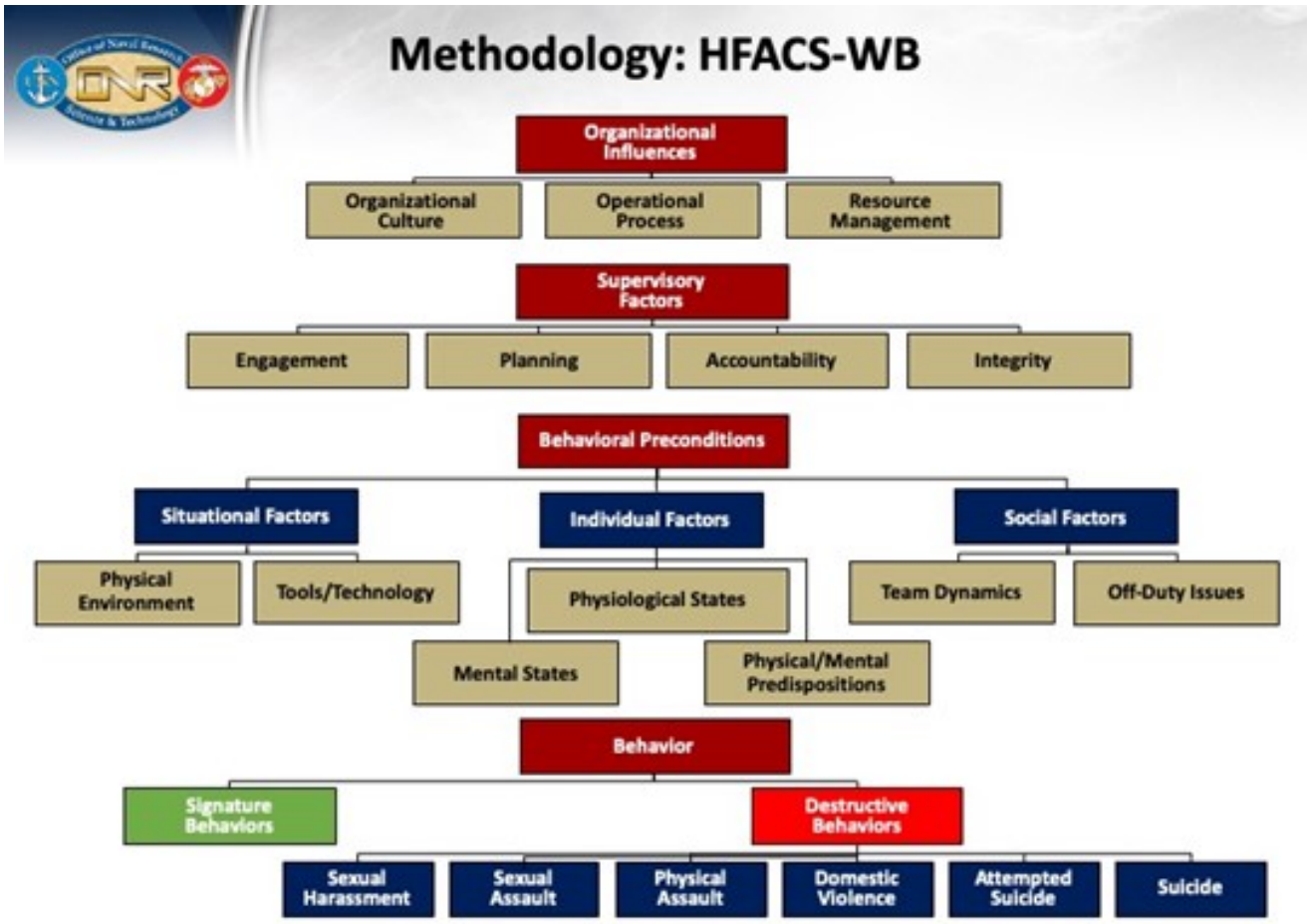
This theoretical framework becomes especially powerful when applied to real-world incidents. One such example involves Petty Officer Second Class Lester Carl Gruber. A high-performing, third-generation sailor, Gruber's early career was marked by professional recognition and upward mobility. However, a series of personal losses—including the death of his father and a marital separation—coincided with a visible decline in his well-being.

Gruber's behavior became erratic. He withdrew from peers, experienced financial hardship, and was frequently intoxicated during off-duty hours. Colleagues noticed the change, but supervisors remained disengaged, assuming emotional issues were outside their purview. Eventually, Gruber was arrested for assaulting a civilian during a night out.

Applying HFACS-WB to this case reveals the event as part of a more extended, system-enabled sequence. Organizationally, support services were fragmented and underutilized. Counseling appointments were difficult to secure, and behavioral training was delivered with minimal follow-up. Supervisory leadership focused on disciplinary measures but offered no real engagement with Gruber's struggles. Team dynamics had eroded, and his mental state was deteriorating. The assault, rather than an isolated act of aggression, was the endpoint of a cascade of missed opportunities.

Patterns, Not Outliers

The Gruber case is not unique. In fact, when researchers applied HFACS-WB to a sample of 215 attempted suicide cases in the U.S. Navy, they found consistent evidence of systemic failure across all levels of the framework. Every case in-



volved identifiable behavioral preconditions, often compounded by poor team environments and unresolved stress. More than half involved supervisory breakdowns, particularly in recognizing distress, planning for workload mitigation, or following through on referrals. Organizational issues were also pervasive—chiefly around access to care, communication gaps, and a workplace culture that emphasized performance over wellness.

These patterns support what many frontline leaders have long intuited: destructive behaviors are rarely out-of-the-blue. They result from cumulative stressors and gaps in leadership accountability, made visible only after the damage is done.

HFACS-WB as a Tool for Prevention

Perhaps the most valuable contribution of HFACS-WB is its potential to shift organizations from reaction to prevention. By mapping events through the model, leaders can see where the cracks form—long before behavior escalates into harm. More importantly, the model can be used in aggregate across incidents, allowing commands or agencies to spot recurring weaknesses, whether in supervisory engagement, team climate, or organizational priority-setting.

HFACS-WB is not a compliance tool. It is a learning system, one that gives leaders a vocabulary and framework to talk about human behavior systemically and constructively. Whether applied during event reviews, safety stand-downs, or leadership training, the model encourages a deeper examination of how the organization creates or prevents space for destructive behaviors to take root.

A Culture Worth Building

As with its predecessor in aviation safety, HFACS-WB is built on the premise that most failures are not new—they are repeated. What changes is whether the system chooses to learn from them. HFACS-WB gives organizations that opportunity.

By expanding our definition of human factors to include psychological safety, supervisory trust, and behavioral risk, we begin to create work environments where people can thrive. The end goal isn't just fewer incidents—it's a stronger, more resilient culture. And that, just as it was in the cockpits of naval aircraft decades ago, remains the mission.

The development of HFACS-WB has been made possible through support from the Office of Naval Research, specifically under contract N00014-19-C-2020 and the current grant N00014-23-1-2554.

BACK IN THE DAY

By: William F. Moroney, Ph.D., CPE, CAPT (Ret.), AEP # 46.

I was talking with my son, a former EA6B/EA 18 G pilot, about flying in a variety of military aircraft. He said it probably couldn't be done these days, except at places like Test Pilot School. But I thought I would share my flying experiences with current AEPs. I was on active duty from 1968 to 1989 as AEP # 46.

Prelude

I remember cycling about 5 miles as a teenager in New York City to the Marine Air Terminal (part of LaGuardia). In those days I would walk into hangers, and I would wander around among the aircraft like I knew what I was doing. I was exposed to a fair number of refurbished World War II aircraft like the B26 intruder. My family would routinely attend airshows at NAS Floyd Bennett in Brooklyn New York. So, I knew a little about military aircraft before entering the Navy.

NAMI

I was recruited by Tom Hallahan (AEP # 28) and after completing my PhD in experimental psychology, I reported to NAMI and started wandering around NAS Pensacola. I completed flight training in the T-28 in spring of 69. I got my solo flight a little early in the syllabus when I induced GLOC in my instructor. I clearly remember him saying "It's okay I'm back now" and being threatened with all sorts of harm if I mentioned the incident to anyone. In those days, NAMI had its own A1E, and as soon as I completed flight training in the T-28, I started grabbing time in the right seat.

T-28 Aircraft. U.S. Navy National Museum of Aviation photo No. 1996.448.162.128

Only the left seat had controls, but I learned a little navigation and flew on multiple cross-country flights. I also had multiple flights in the backseat of T-2s (carrier quals and banner towing). I hit the jackpot when I volunteered to be a subject in an experiment that tested neck strength with weighted helmets in NAMI' s Centrifuge (or maybe it was NAMRL's) and required a flight in an F4. I also struck up some friendships in the helicopter community, and until the operations officer inquired about my qualifications, I got flight time in the right seat of an SH3.

NAMRL

The big break came when my outstanding mentor CDR. Bob Kennedy (AEP #10) got me involved in the evaluation of motion sickness in C-121s, P-3s and C- 130s. We flew seven hurricane penetrations as we rotated among each of the aircraft. When AEPs were tasked to analyze anthropometric data I became the "Navy's Anthropometrist". I remember looking up the job description; that assignment increased my access to a variety of airframes, in both the training command and operational units. It was like the fox counting the chickens as I learned about different aircraft and reviewed accident/injury reports. Eventually we developed a screening process and patented an anthropometric measurement device.

Point Mugu

My second tour was at the Naval Missile Center now the Pacific Missile Test Center. I was in high-tech heaven. Timing couldn't have been better because there was a shortage of NFO's at the time and I was ready to fill that slot.

I learned the basics of operating the F4 radar from a retired Chief Electronics Technician, who operated the test bench and was kind enough to educate this AEP Lieutenant. At that time the F-14 was becoming operational, so I got to fly lots of target presentations and participated in some air combat maneuvering. While I could track commercial aircraft and cooperating military aircraft, I was easily fooled by countermeasures. Nonetheless, I got to fly with both developmental and experimental squadrons in a variety of environments and locations.

I got involved in developing an energy management helmet mounted display which we evaluated in an F4 and later in a USAF T-37. At that time, I was also part of a team that developed a system to prevent gear up landings, which led to an invention disclosure. As part of that process, I rented an F4. I remember thinking: What is an experimental psychologist doing renting the Navy's premier fighter for $5000 an hour (including the pilot and fuel)? While at NAS Point Mugu. I participated in the development, test, and evaluation of multiple systems including a very early airborne laser designator which required flights in an OV10 and an understanding of how USMC Forward Air Controllers did their work. There were a few nighttime missile shots and range clearing flights.

One memorable range clearing flight required me to use my high school spanish and advise a Cuban "fishing" vessel to change its heading, as they were entering

a hot range. They didn't change their course, but the crew came on deck and waved at us as we photographed each other. Point Mugu provided opportunities for low level navigation in A6Bs, target presentations for the fleet, flying on the Air Combat Maneuvering Range, low-level flights against SAM sites (during which our shockwave leveled a USMC shelter). Perhaps the highlight was a cold missile sensor soak, which required us to climb to more than 50,000 feet. I still wish I had a photo of the darkness of space, our corkscrew contrail, and the curve of the earth which extended from San Diego to San Francisco and from San Clemente Island to east of the dry lake at Edwards Air Force Base. Really awe-some!!

A right front view of an EA-6B Intruder aircraft from the Marine Electronic Warfare Squadron 2 (VMAQ 2) parked on the flight line - NARA & DVIDS Public Domain Archive Public Domain Search

NPS

My next tour was in the Operations Research Department at the Naval Post-graduate School and at the collocated Naval Aviation Safety Center (where I both taught and qualified as an Aviation Safety Officer. I got exposed to the black shoe Navy and VP squadrons at Moffett Field. Some of my students arranged for me to participate in operational flights. On one of those flights I learned that I could not talk clearly when my adrenaline dried my saliva as a Soviet fire control system locked up on us about 0300 in the middle of the Pacific. But we got good data and that was the mission.

About this time, I was assigned to a team selecting a replacement for the A7 and F4. Team members are required to be designated as Weapon System Acquisition Manager (WASM). Someone wanted me and suddenly I was grandfathered as a WSAM.

Pax River

My next tour was in the Crew Systems Department at NAS Patuxent River. The anthropometry efforts continued, and I supported the development of EA6B upgrades and TEAMS (Tactical EA6B Mission Planning System). It was nice to see some of that work implemented when years later my son got me access to an EA6B simulator. I continued working on the energy management displays with the Air Force and evaluated a horizon projection system for NASA in their T-38.

NADC

Unfortunately, about this time, my detailer told me that I was having too much fun and that as a CDR, I needed to get into management. So, my last tour was at the Naval Air Development Center, where I participated in the development of the Navy's stealth A-12. While that program was cancelled, I expect that some of our concepts have been incorporated into the sixth generation F-47.

I also got a little stick time in P-3s, and a H-53. In the latter, I learned about Stability Augmentation Systems (SAS) during a flight on which the pilot had arranged for the crew chief to selectively degrade the system by pulling circuit breakers. He said he wanted to see how much I could sweat. It falls in the Rites of Initiation category along with "let's get the Doc sick" maneuvering. My last flight was in a F/A18, and of course we went supersonic after some aerobatics, which would have received a rating of: Extremely below average.

Positives and Negatives

Overall, working with the fleet was a positive unique learning experience. I would be remiss if I didn't also express gratitude to the many civilian engineers and scientists who took the time to educate me. My lessons learned are:

1. Always ask, particularly when the worst thing Schedules can say is No,thanks" .
2. Learn about your customer and their technological requirements and constraints. Realize that you are in their house and be curious about what they do and why. Then offer a different perspective when that seems appropriate.

On the negative side, I lost three good pilot friends in crashes during my career. I'm grateful for all the camaraderie and support by all who shared their experiences with me.

FLY NAVY

LISTENING TO LEGACY

Lessons from the stories of NAMRL's AEPs

By: LT Kaila A. "Wizzle" Vento, Ph.D., MSC, USN, AEP #169

With stories from:

Richard D. Arnold, Ph.D., AEP #115, Henry P. Williams, Ph.D., AEP #105, & Michael D. "Bat" Reddix, Ph.D., CDR (Ret.), AEP #100

The Naval Aerospace Medical Research Laboratory (NAMRL) exudes a quiet sense of significance, a presence that is felt in every corner. It's not just the hum of equipment or the technical cadence of research briefings. It's the presence of history—not framed on walls, but walking beside you, offering insights drawn from decades of service. As a junior Aerospace Experimental Psychologist (AEP), arriving at NAMRL felt less like stepping into a workplace and more like entering a lineage. The science being done here is at the forefront of Naval aviation, but it is grounded in the lived experience of those who have spent their lives shaping it.

It's not every workplace where decades of experience, memory, and identity are passed around the conference table. At NAMRL, though, the past and the present sit side-by-side. Dr. Richard Arnold, Dr. Henry Williams, and retired Commander Dr. Michael Reddix are more than the Science Director and Senior Scientists—they're living bridges to a generation of AEPs who helped shape the direction of naval aeromedical research. Each of them has served as a uniformed AEP and continues their impact today as civilian research scientists. They've held titles, led programs, and won prestigious awards. But what's stuck with me most are their stories.

Not Just Research, But A Journey

The stories don't always come out in structured meetings or formal sessions. More often, they emerge casually—passing each other in the hallway, during moments between experiments, or while discussing a new project. At first, I didn't quite know how to respond. There's a certain humility required when you're in the presence of people who were developing critical aviation safety equipment before you even started graduate school. You quickly learn that when an older scientist begins a sentence with "Back in the day...," it's not just nostalgia—it's usually the start of a lesson disguised as a story. There's also a deep sense of responsibility that starts to take root the more you listen.

These stories span everything from high-pressure test flights and long nights in the lab to the moments of camaraderie that helped carry them through. One tale might touch on the challenge of building a new simulator under budget constraints; another on the first time they flew in the backseat of a jet, experiencing firsthand the sensations they were trying to understand through data. Some memories are humorous—like the infamous Pensacola

Dr. Richard Arnold stands in front of the Disorientation Research Device, the Kraken. As Director of the Naval Aerospace Medical Research Laboratory, Arnold is responsible for the command's mission to mitigate and prevent leading factors associated with aviation mishaps as well as to protect and enhance the health, readiness, and performance of aircrew.

Dr. Henry Williams, senior research psychologist at NAMRU-Dayton, uses flight simulation platforms to conduct research in spatial disorientation.

McGuire's Irish Pub food fight—but they all convey something deeper: the commitment, creativity, and camaraderie that have always been the foundation of this work.

They never present these stories as instructions, but if you listen closely, the guidance is there. I've come to realize that they aren't just reminiscing. They're offering a roadmap for navigating this career—how to lead a team, how to balance ambition with patience, and how to stay curious even after 30 years in the field.

Learning from Legacy

One recurring theme in these conversations is the constant need for adaptability within the field. Whether it's vision sciences, personnel selection, or spatial disorientation, the tools and platforms are always evolving. The questions we ask today are different from when they were asked in the late 1990s and early 2000s—but the underlying principles haven't changed. Safety, human performance, operational effectiveness—these remain our compass.

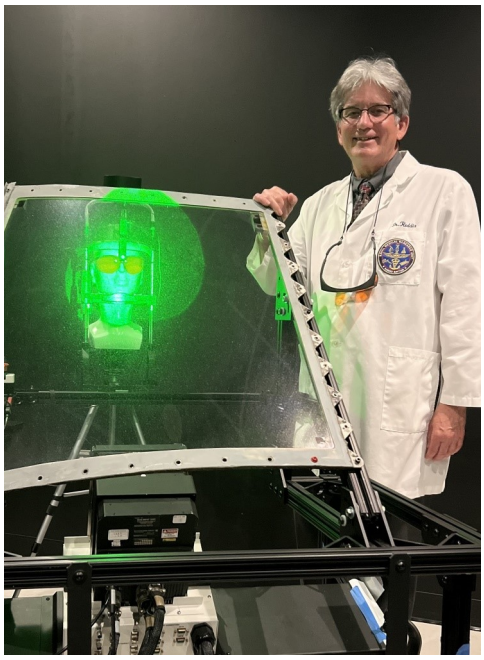
Dr. Richard Arnold's leadership has been instrumental in guiding the Naval Aerospace Medical Research Laboratory (NAMRL) through pivotal transitions, notably the 2011 relocation to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base (WPAFB) in Ohio. This move, mandated by the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Act, was more than a change in geography; it represented a strategic integration with the Navy's Environmental Health Effects Laboratory to form the Naval Medical Research Unit–Dayton (NAMRU-D). This consolidation enhanced collaborative research efforts with the Air Force Research Laboratory's 711th Human Performance Wing, fostering advancements in aeromedical and human performance research.

Under Dr. Arnold's direction, NAMRL expanded its research capabilities, including the acquisition of advanced motion simulation platforms. These facilities have been central to investigating spatial disorientation (SD), a phenomenon where pilots experience a misperception of aircraft attitude, position, or motion relative to the Earth's surface. SD remains a significant factor in aviation mishaps, particularly under conditions lacking clear visual references, such as night operations or degraded weather environments.

Dr. Henry Williams has played a central role in advancing vestibular and motion perception research, critical components of understanding and mitigating spatial disorientation. His work has contributed to modeling how pilots perceive motion under stress and how sensory conflicts—between visual, vestibular, and proprioceptive cues—can lead to disorientation. These models support both improved simulator-based training and aircraft system design. More recently, Dr. Williams has integrated cognitive workload and eye-tracking data into disorientation studies, helping to better characterize pilot responses under pressure. His approach balances technical rigor with a deep respect for the physiological limits of the human body—an essential perspective in aviation safety research.

Dr. Michael Reddix has led efforts to develop and implement laser eye protection (LEP) spectacles in response to the growing threat of ground-based laser interference with aircraft operations. This initiative, prompted by a U.S. Coast Guard requirement, involved the development, field testing, and acquisition of LEP systems designed to safeguard pilots against laser exposures that could compromise visual performance. The program's success was achieved through rapid prototyping, interagency collaboration, and rigorous evaluation, culminating in the integration of LEP into operational use across various military aviation platforms.

When discussing the LEP program, Dr. Reddix emphasizes the collaborative nature of the project and its impact on pilot safety, rather than personal accolades. His focus remains on the practical outcomes of the research and the enhanced protection it affords to aviators in the field. That grounded humility is a theme



Dr. Michael Reddix, a senior research psychologist at NAMRU-Dayton, stands with a set of laser eye protection spectacles.

shared across all of their stories.

A Quiet Responsibility

As a junior AEP, there's an instinct to prove yourself—to show you belong in the same field as those who came before. But listening to these scientists, I've come to understand that it's not about matching their accomplishments. It's about carrying the work forward with the same care, the same sense of service.

I don't have decades of experience. I don't have programs named after me or peer-reviewed publications numbering in the hundreds. But what I do have is the chance to learn directly from those who helped build the foundation I'm standing on.

I've also come to see that being an AEP isn't just about technical expertise. It's about navigating the human side of research: building trust, knowing when to lead and when to follow, understanding how our work fits into the larger mission of keeping aviators safe. It's about embracing the long game, knowing that the impact of your work might not be visible today, but could be vital tomorrow.

NAMRL as More Than a Lab

NAMRL isn't just a research facility. It's a crucible for operationally relevant science. For decades, it has stood at the intersection of innovation and application, focused on one goal: sustaining and improving the performance, health, and safety of Naval aviators. From the early days of flight medicine to cutting-edge motion simulation and cognitive workload assessment, NAMRL has adapted with the fleet and anticipated its needs.

Walking through its hallways, seeing experiments in progress, or observing the research participants who come through for studies—you begin to feel the pulse of a lab that is still very much alive. NAMRL doesn't exist in the abstract; it exists in the lived realities of aircrew who depend on us to get it right. That's the heartbeat behind the science.

The presence of these scientists, and those AEPs who served at NAMRL prior and after them, reinforces that connection. They are proof that continuity matters. That a lab's strength isn't just in its equipment, but in the people who carry its mission forward, decade after decade.

A Charge to All AEPs

The AEP community is unique—not only because of the scope of our work, but because of the continuity that binds us. We are few in number, yet our reach touches every corner of human performance in aviation. From selection and training pipelines, to flight deck safety, to cockpit integration and cognitive workload—we are the bridge between the human system and operational excellence.

Listening to the stories of those who have served before us, I am reminded that our profession is not just a technical specialty—it is a legacy. One that was built through long hours in the lab, flightline observations, operational work, and decades of scientific stewardship. That legacy continues today, and it will continue tomorrow—but only if we commit to preserving and building upon it.

To the incoming AEPs—whether you're still in training or stepping into your first billet: know that you are not starting from zero. You are standing on the shoulders of those who spent their careers shaping this field. Their work cleared the path for yours. But it's up to you to walk it with intention. Your role is not only to contribute new research, but to learn the history, to understand what's come before, and to ask how you can carry it further.

To the currently serving AEPs—those mid-career, seasoned officers balancing leadership and technical expertise: you are the stewards of our present. The examples you set, the mentorship you provide, and the questions you continue to ask are vital. You have the chance to preserve the culture of thoughtful inquiry and operational relevance that has always defined our community. Invest in your junior officers. Make space for stories. Share your hard-earned lessons. These are the things that endure.

To all of us—no matter where we are in our careers: we owe it to those who came before us, and to those who will follow, to do this work well. To lead with humility. To study with rigor. To speak with purpose. To never forget that our research serves people—aviators, aircrew, maintainers, corpsmen, and commanders—whose lives and decisions rely on what we design, discover, and recommend.

The stories I've heard at NAMRL aren't just about research—they're about legacy, service, and identity. They are a reminder that we are part of something much larger than ourselves. We are not just scientists. We are military officers, researchers, historians, mentors, and—most importantly—servants of operational readiness and human safety.

So, as we step forward—whether into the lab, the squadron, the program office, or the cockpit—may we carry with us the quiet professionalism and enduring curiosity of those who paved the way. And when the time comes, may we pass on their stories—and our own—with the same clarity, humility, and purpose.

Because in the end, it is not just our discoveries that shape the future of Naval aviation. It is the people who choose to remember why we do this work—and who commit, every day, to doing it well.

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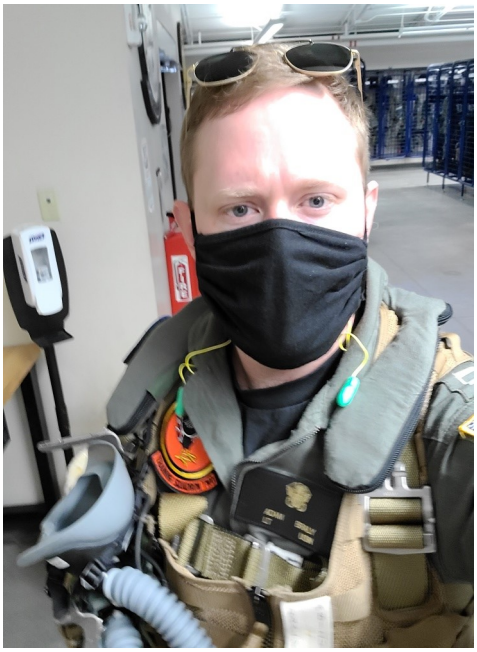
LT Adam "DOM" Braly, Ph.D., AEP #162 on his journey from books to boots



What is your Academic Background?

I was pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science at the University of Central Oklahoma when I discovered experimental psychology during my third year. I took a Social Psychology class and became fascinated with concepts like social cognition and priming. After class one day, I stayed behind to talk to my professor, and we ended up having an hour-long conversation about how science helps us understand human behavior. He invited me to join his lab as an undergraduate research assistant, and that's when everything changed.

I started participating in studies, learning about experimental design and statistics, and quickly became hooked. I switched my major to Psychology later that year. After graduating, I stayed on to pursue a Master's degree, where I focused on nonconscious priming, implicit bias, and racial discrimination.

In my second year of grad school, my advisor introduced me to human factors psychology. He described it as the intersection of humans and technology, which felt like a perfect fit for my interests. I applied to PhD programs and started my doctoral journey at Texas Tech University, where I studied driving behaviors and perceptual processes. Midway through the program, I transitioned with my advisor to Rice University, where I ultimately completed my PhD.

How did you learn about the AEPs?

Like many graduate students, I hit that moment of existential doubt in the middle of my PhD, wondering what I was going to do with my life and whether it was all worth it. I started browsing job opportunities online and stumbled across a post that led me to the Aerospace Experimental Psychologist website. I was immediately intrigued and reached out through their contact page.

A week or so later, Brennan "TIP" Cox (AEP #142) reached out to set up a call. He walked me through the role and gave me his pitch. At the time, I was still in my third year of grad school, so it was early for serious talks, but TIP and I kept in touch. Over the next couple of years, we met up at conferences, did informal interviews, and had lunch whenever our paths crossed. I'm incredibly grateful for his thoughtfulness and persistence. Without his outreach, I might not be here today.

What was the most challenging part of AEP training?

There are two challenges that really stood out to me.

First was the academic portion of flight training. As Ph.D. students, we're used to deep, analytical learning, reading, synthesizing, and questioning. But that approach doesn't always work here. This training phase often rewards straightforward memorization, and exams can be intentionally tricky, aiming to test your ability to retain and recall rather than critically evaluate. That shift in mindset was tough. I had to learn to silence the overthinking part of my brain and focus on pure recall.

The second major challenge was the swim qualifications. Going in, I thought I was a decent swimmer, but I was wrong. A lot of AEPs say the dunker is the hardest part, and while it's definitely intense, for me the toughest thing was the survival float. Something about having your face in the water for extended periods just didn't sit right with me. It's still not my favorite.

What was your most memorable moment during training?

Two things come to mind.

First, flying. Learning complex topics like weather, navigation, and aerodynamics was challenging, but it all came together the moment I stepped into the cockpit. I was lucky to fly with reserve pilots who were just maintaining currency, and they gave me every opportunity to sit in the front seat and really be hands-on. Flying at 200 knots, pulling loops and figure-eights, even trying a Split-S, was absolutely exhilarating. One of the coolest experiences of my life.

Second, the people. I went through training with a cohort of seven other Aerospace Physiologists, and the bond we formed during that time was incredibly strong. It's rare to be surrounded by such a supportive, driven group of individuals who are all going through the same challenges you are. Those relationships are for life.

What are you working on now?

Right now, I'm serving in an acquisition billet at PMS 408, where we lead Expeditionary Medicine efforts within Navy Medicine. Our goal is to bring structure and rigor to the acquisition and sustainment of expeditionary medical capabilities.

Specifically, I serve as the Assistant Program Manager for the En Route Care System and the Expeditionary Resuscitative Surgical System. I manage funding, acquisition strategy, and lifecycle support as we move through our Major Capability Acquisition program. There's definitely less flying and aviation research these days, and more Word docs and PowerPoints, but the work is challenging, meaningful, and rewarding in its own way.

▲

Milton, FL. Pictured above: LT Adam Braly (AEP #162) poses for a picture before his first flight in the T-6B Texan.

▲

Norfolk, VA. Pictured above: LT Adam Braly (AEP #162) stands in front of the USNS Cody (EPF-14) which will carry one of the Navy's Expeditionary Medical Units.

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