



# KUKA'ILIMOKU

154th WING HAWAII AIR NATIONAL GUARD | JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM



A FOND  
FAREWELL TO AN  
UNFORGETTABLE  
COMMANDER



# Inside KUKA'ILIMOKU

JULY  
2019



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Published by  
**154th Wing Public Affairs Office**  
360 Mamala Bay Drive  
JBPHH, Hawaii 96853  
Phone: (808) 789-0419



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#### Articles:

- Articles range from 200 to 2,000 words. All articles should be accompanied by multiple high-resolution images.
- Include first names, last names and military ranks. Always verify spelling.
- Spell out acronyms, abbreviations and full unit designations on first reference.

#### Photographs:

- Highest resolution possible: MB files, not KB.
- No retouched photos, no special effects.
- Include the photographer's name and rank, and a caption: what is happening in the photo, who is pictured and the date and location.

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# THE AIRMAN SAFETY APP HAS ARRIVED

## AN EASIER WAY TO PROMOTE FLIGHTLINE SAFETY

by Senior Airman **John Linzmeier**

In the land of ‘make believe,’ occupational hazards wouldn’t be a problem, because a wave of a magical wand would simply make any safety concerns disappear. Unfortunately, the Hawaii Air National Guard doesn’t have any wands, but it now has the next best thing – the Airman Safety App.

The Airman Safety Action Program, also known as ASAP, is an online resource which has enabled users to report work safety issues since it was created in 2009. Now, through the Airman Safety App, members can anonymously report safety issues whenever they are encountered.

Within minutes of identifying a potential hazard, such as a hole in the ground or an improperly designed aircraft part, a mobile report can be initiated on-site and submitted directly to the ASAP Safety Center. All data is matriculated to the appropriate major command, where practices can be improved and resources can be allocated to resolve problems.

The program is being held to promote a healthy safety culture and a work environment where everyone’s voice is important, especially in the occurrence of human error.

“We need people to know how valuable it is when they speak up for safety issues while on-the-job,” said Maj. Nicholas Rodriguez, 154th Wing chief of safety. “This app gives them a way to do that without going through any lengthy administrative processes or having to identify themselves or deal with any form of retribution. This way we can take actions and make everyone else aware, so the same mistake is not repeated.”

The U.S. Air Force modeled ASAP after similar programs which are practiced throughout the aviation industry. According to the U.S. Air Force Safety Center, more than 70 U.S. airlines have been reporting upwards of 50,000 potential hazards every year and global reports are approximately ten

times larger.

“Throughout aviation history,” said Rodriguez, “we’ve noticed that mishap rates have been going down, down and down over the years and eventually it kind of leveled off. But through our safety culture we are trying to facilitate, we are hoping to get the mishap rate down even further than it has ever been before by encouraging our Airmen to participate and identify hazards when they see them before they turn into mishaps.”



While the program has been designed to raise safety standards in the aviation department, reports submitted in the app are not limited to the flight line. Hazards can be reported from virtually any location, to include deployed environments, can be reported and will promptly be evaluated by ASAP Safety Center team members.

To download the Airman Safety App on a mobile device, visit the Apple App Store and the Google Play Store.





**Lt. Gen. L. Scott Rice, Director of the Air National Guard visits the 154th Wing on June 20th-21st. During his visit, he met with and recognized members of the organization and also held two Town Hall meetings where he addressed current and future events with The Guard. The 204th provided transport to Kauai where he met with Kokee GSU Airmen as well as making other trips to geographically separated units.**



# AIR NATIONAL GUARD DIRECTOR VISITS TEAM HICKAM

by **Staff Sgt. James Ro**

Lt. Gen. L. Scott Rice, Director of the Air National Guard, and members of his staff recently visited the 154th Wing at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam June 20-21.

The three-starred general visited to see and experience the 154th Wing's wide mission sets, discuss leadership initiatives and interact with the Airmen who comprise the ANG's largest wing.

"This place called the Hawaiian National Guard has made a name for itself; You have made a name of itself," said Rice, who last visited in January 2017. "Everyone of you can add to this big picture of creating a better environment for our kids, family, and spouses, I want to thank you for how you bring all of this together."

During his two-day visit Rice, spent face-to-face time with Team Hickam Leadership, including Brig. Gen. Gregory Woodrow, 154th Wing commander, and Col. William Burks, 15th Wing commander.

Rice had the opportunity to tour the F-22 Raptor maintenance facility and held two town hall gatherings where he shared his vision for the Air National Guard, addressed questions and expressed his gratitude towards the Airmen and all that they do.

"You are making a difference in the world in this island, this location, this Hawaii National Guard is making a difference for all of us. And I really thank you for that," said Rice. "You've really done quite a job pulling yourself together, becoming an organization, becoming a unit, and there's nothing you can't do."

Members of Pacific Air Forces Command, Maj. Gen. David Burg, ANG Assistant to COMPAFAF, Col. Chris Faurot, PACAF Headquarters ANG forces director and his deputy, Lt. Col. Jhonny Polanco, were also in attendance.

Rice's career began in 1980, when he was commissioned through the Reserve Officer Training Corps at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York. He graduated from pilot training at Reese Air Force Base, Texas, in 1982. Prior to his current role as director of the Air National Guard, Rice served as The Adjutant General and Commander, Massachusetts Air National Guard, Hanscom AFB, Massachusetts.

The visit included a flight on a 204th Airlift Squadron C-17 Globemaster III, as a means of transportation to the island of Kauai where he met with Geographically Separated Unit Airmen as well as making

other trips to the 297th ATCS GSU Unit located in Kapolei.

During a second town hall gathering, Rice with several outstanding performers, to include outstanding performers including Command and Control Battle Management Operations Airmen of the year and also presented Brig. Gen. Gregory Woodrow, 154th Wing commander, with his coin and thanked him for all his accomplishment, leading to his retirement next month.

"Is this a great place to work because we add value to this country? He had done that for me, and he has done that for all of you," said Rice. "This is an exceptional wing commander. He is one of our top ten of almost 100 Wings that we have. Well done Woody, Well done."

In his closing remarks, Rice reiterated his feelings of appreciation for Airmen of the Hawaii Air National Guard and said, "Bottom Line, I have a tremendous amount of respect for all of you and doing what you do. And for that you can be proud, and I am very very honored to stand her in front of you as the director of the Air National Guard and say, I had the opportunity to serve with you." Thank you for all you do, thank you."



# AIR FORCE ACADEMY CANDIDATE OVERCOMES ADMISSION TRIALS

by Senior Airman John Linzmeier.

Rejection can be hard to accept sometimes; especially for a high-school student who's been denied entrance to her dream college. While most are left with no choice but to move on to other options, some people just don't seem to take 'no' as a final answer.

When Anuheia Pikake Alama heard about her denial to the Air Force Academy, she was 'absolutely crushed.'

The news wasn't easy to digest for the Waianae High School student. For a short-lived period, feelings of distraught affected her focus on schoolwork and athletic performance in her wrestling.

But Alama isn't the kind of person who lets circumstances set her back for very long. With the support of her family and a resilient attitude, she shifted her focus to alternative paths.

As a member of the Junior Reserve Officer Corps, Alama had several role models and peers within the military community. One of her friends in the U.S. Navy inspired her to take a vocational test at her local Military Employment Processing Station. Her test results were high, and it attracted the attention of a local recruiter from the Hawaii Air National Guard.

"When I spoke with the recruiter, it was eye-opening," said Alama, "because I realized this might be another chance to go after my goals - but in a different way. He explained how I could stay home and continue my education while I served. I felt like this was my calling."

Serving as a part-time guardsman seemed to be a viable and exciting alternative for Alama. However, the recruiting process dragged on for several months due to a medical discrepancy. On paper, her condition was listed as a total showstopper, but Alama didn't see it that way.

In the face of her potentially disqualifying condition, Alama attended to a lengthy series of appointments to resolve the issue. Her persistence eventually paid off when she proved to medical staff how she

was 'fit-to-fight' and the discrepancy was waved.

In June 2017, she was able to enlist as a Material Handler in the 154th Logistics Readiness Squadron. While she joined for a host of career-focused reasons, her enlistment also included a few things she didn't bargain for.

"I didn't see this coming," she said, "but the HIANG really has something special. There's just so much love here. The people I'm surrounded by are more like a family than they



are coworkers. Come to find out; I live next door to a lot of them. It's just been a tight-knit community."

It wasn't long before commanders and supervisors took notice Alama's leadership potential; so, when the opportunity came to submit applicants for the Air Force Academy's Preparatory School, a package was submitted for Alama.

The 'prep school' is a 10-month-long course which helps prepare students for the AFA's four-year curriculum. When Airmen and civilians are enrolled, they become 'cadet candidates.'

However, Alama's medical status had, once again, been in conflict with the prep school's stringent standards. But this time,

she was even more prepared to handle it. After working closely with several agencies to reassess her health condition, her medical clearance was authorized, and the school request was finally processed.

On June 3, 2019, at the close of a drill weekend, members of her unit gathered for a team picnic. Members of Alama's family also attended the event to witness a special moment in her career. Col. Joyce Merl, 154th Mission Support Group commander, made a formal announcement to the crowd - Alama received her letter of acceptance.

Now, Alama is the first traditional member of the HIANG and Waianae High School to be accepted into an Air Force Academy program. Upon completion of the 10-month preparatory school, she will potentially be admitted to a four-year enrolment at the AFA, followed by a commission into the U.S. Air Force.

"We could tell she's been through an emotional roller coaster up to this point," said Merl, "It was clear that she was so excited to have a second chance to apply and she stayed motivated the whole time. I have a lot of confidence in her and it's just nice to witness the future of the Air Force."

As an AFA graduate, Merl said officers who complete the program are received with a level respect in all their preceding assignments, accompanied by higher levels of expectations. While the next several years of intensive schooling may appear to be a daunting task for some, Alama didn't seem hindered by the obstacles which lay ahead of her.

"Anything that you're uncomfortable with will be intimidating, but you just have to take it head on. Always be open minded, because you can always adapt to the environment; even for something as simple as the weather. I've been living in Hawaii all 20 years of my life, and going to somewhere in Colorado, where it drops down to 36 degrees in the summer. It's going to be years of challenges, but I know I'm on a mission now and am open to anything that will bring me closer to my goals. I'm nervous, but I'm ready."



# MEDICAL EXPERTS JOIN PARTNERS IN INDONESIA, IMPROVE PANDEMIC RESPONSE ABILITIES

by Senior Airman Orlando Corpuz

Hawaii Air National Guard (HIANG) Airmen from the 154th Medical Group detachment 1 conducted a Subject Matter Expert Exchange (SMEE) with counterparts from the Indonesian Armed Forces in Jakarta, Jun. 18-20.

The SMEE focussed on military medical response to a biological pandemic and was part of the National Guard's State Partnership Program (SPP) which links a state's National Guard with a partner nation in support of mutual interests.



"The Pandemic Subject Matter Exchange is a premiere program for the Hawaii National Guard State Partnership Program," said Lt. Col. James Faumuina, 154 MDG Det 1 commander. "Through this engagement we're able to bring together experts from both Indonesia and the State of Hawaii in the areas of pandemic detection, response, and mitigation."

The Hawaii delegation consisted of eight medical Airmen from the medical detachment, a medical operations officer from the Hawaii Army National Guard and two experts from Hawaii civilian agencies: Hawaii Disaster Management Assistance Team (DMAT) and the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA).

Topics ranging from pandemic detection, crisis planning, logistics and response operations were discussed during the three-day engagement. Visits to the Indonesia Health Crisis Center of the Ministry of Health and the National Hospital for Infection Central allowed for close examination of how pandemic response is conducted in Indonesia.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines a pandemic as a worldwide spread of a new disease. In an increasingly interconnected world, the threat of another pandemic is ever present; collaboration is needed to build capability of nations to respond to the next pandemic.

"When you're talking about a worldwide spread of a disease, one of the big things is to have cross border relationships and to be able to gather information and to be able to share information," said Maj. Timothy Hiura, 154 MDG Det 1 physician. "It's through learning from each other's strengths and weaknesses, from the teaching of our methods and the learning of theirs that partnerships are forged."

For island communities such as Indonesia and Hawaii, their relative isolation does not exclude them from a pandemic; both are world wide destinations and crossroads for tourists and business travelers alike.

"If an outbreak is detected, having capacity to respond is key," Hiura said. "The quantity and quality of the response can make a huge difference."

As an enhanced-response-force-package unit (CERF-P), 154 MDG Det 1 capabilities make it uniquely qualified for pandemic response. In addition to military medical training as a CERF-P unit, many members have civilian occupations as doctors, nurses, first-responders, or other medical specialties; a majority of the subject matter experts were drill-status Airmen.

For Capt. Jorena Young, 154 MDG Det 1 clinical nurse, the experience provided valuable insight not normally available in Hawaii.

"I feel we have a lot to learn from other countries' militaries because we haven't experienced it, especially in Hawaii we don't see as much as they do...they have 17,000 plus islands they have to take care of in Indonesia, while we only have our eight," Young said. "They have a lot more experience that we can learn from and take those lessons back with us."

Rounding out the team were experts from civilian Hawaii emergency response agencies.

Sentiment from Edward Caballero, a civilian medic and Hawaii Disaster Medical Assistance Team operations branch leader mirrored what many involved with the SMEE felt; that collaboration improves pandemic response.

"I think that the collaboration between the state partners was incredible," Caballero said. "There was mutual understanding from both sides. It was reassuring to know that the military is developing these partnerships should the unfortunate situation occur where we need additional resources beyond our capabilities."

Although the SMEE was in execution of the National Guard State Partnership Program, according to Faumuina, it supported the larger DoD initiative of Global Health Engagement (GHE).

"We've been working with our counterparts in Indonesia for three years now," Faumuina said. "The level of



communication and exchange between our two countries has cultivated a relationship where we're moving towards unison to further the US Indo-Pacific Theater Support Cooperation Plan, through the strategy of GHE."

The exchange continues in September when Indonesian medical experts visit the HIANG.



# 'PUEOS' RETURN TO EUROPE FOR AIRLIFT OPS



by **Senior Airman John Linzmeier.**

**A**irmen assigned to Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam flew airlift missions throughout Europe June 13-21, for an international-crisis-response exercise, Swift Response 19.

This is the second time a total-force team from the Hawaii Air National Guard's 154th Wing and the active-duty 15th Wing participated in the exercise with multinational forces in a series of airdrops.

Swift Response is recognized as one of the premier military crisis response training events for airborne forces around the world. This iteration included approximately 5,600 participants from eight allied nations that trained in Bulgaria, Croatia, and Romania, with staging bases in Germany, Italy, Slovenia and the United Kingdom, from June 13-25.

"Swift Response has been a great overall experience," said

1st Lt. Justin Sato, 204th Airlift Squadron pilot. "The execution of multiple missions with the Army and international military members showed me how effective we can be as a cohesive force."

Daily operations for the Hawaii-based Airmen began and ended at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, where they loaded war-fighting assets onto a C-17 Globemaster III. Each payload included a team of U.S. Army paratroopers along with their support equipment, with some loads including 17,000-pound artillery units.

The exercise featured two overnight, joint forcible entry operations; entailing the insertion of hundreds of U.S., Italian and Spanish paratroopers into drops zones. Both operations were made possible through an armada of C-17 and C-130 aircraft, flown by aircrews from Canada, Italy,







Spain, NATO and other U.S. Air Force units.

The JFE movements involved U.S. Army paratroopers with the 1st Battalion, 143rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade and 2nd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division, who jumped alongside international forces.

"We're always looking forward to jumping with our partners, and these guys [the 204th AS] have made it a very smooth operation for us so far," said Texas Army National Guard Capt. Ryan Crider, 1st Battalion, 143rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade jumpmaster. "The idea behind airlift is it allows us to secure our objective, such as an airfield, and bring as much combat power to the fight as quickly as possible. Afterward, we're going to move out to more rugged training areas so we can destroy our common threat."

After his team leaped off the C-17 and into darkness, the Soldiers began a field training exercise and joined forces with Soldiers from Germany and the Netherlands. Crider said the field conditions were designed to be severe, to simulate the challenges his troops may face in a real battlefield environment.

While the airdrops were carried out by pilots and loadmasters with the 204th AS, maintenance Airmen from the 154th Maintenance Squadron played an integral role in the successful airdrops. These specialists and crew chiefs accrued more working hours on the Globemaster than any aircrew member, making sure the aircraft was mission-ready when called upon.

In addition, a small team from the 154th Maintenance Squadron flew with the aircrew as flying crew chiefs during each JFE, to ensure inflight airworthiness

is maintained while also making certain the aircraft could arrive and depart safely from each remote location. One of these flying crew chiefs was Staff Sgt. Michelle Ganoy, who said she volunteered for the additional responsibility so she can be involved with a broader mission-set.

"This was my first time going up as a flying crew chief for an airdrop," said Ganoy, "being a part of missions like these are a great reminder of how important every role is in mission readiness."

While exercise Swift Response is held in a time zone that's 12 hours separate from the Hawaii islands, the Hawaii Air National Guard remains capable of joining partners in a total-force fight whenever they're called upon; whether their global reach is needed amongst allies in Europe or any other given continent.



# 154TH WING COMMANDER'S CAREER CELEBRATED DURING 'FINI-FLIGHT'



AFTER 33 YEARS OF SERVICE AND MORE THAN 7,100 HOURS OF FLIGHT TIME, BRIG. GEN. GREGORY S. WOODROW TOOK HIS FINAL FLIGHT AS COMMANDER OF THE 154TH WING. UNDER HIS LEADERSHIP, WOODROW WAS KNOWN FOR EMPOWERING HIS AIRMEN TO TRY NEW THINGS AND ALWAYS MAKING IT A PRIORITY FOR THEM TO TAKE CARE OF ONE ANOTHER. GOOD LUCK ON ALL YOUR FUTURE ENDEAVORS AND MAHALO FOR MAKING A LASTING IMPACT IN OUR HIANG OHANA.





**You'll be missed Brig. Gen. Woodrow!!!**





# HAWAIIAN RAPTORS DISPERSE FOR TYPHOON EX

Photos by **Senior Airman John Linzmeier**



**GUAM**



**SAIPAN**



**REPUBLIC OF PALAU**





**U.S. Air Force Security Forces Defenders from the 154th Security Forces Squadron are deputized by a local police chief April 25, 2019, at the Palau International Airport, Republic of Palau, authorizing them to protect valuable aircraft and assets during their stay.**

**A 199th Fighter Squadron pilot from the Hawaii Air National Guard answers questions about the F-22 Raptor during a static display tour at the Francisco C. Ada International Airport, Saipan, April 23, 2019.**



## Story by **Pacific Air Forces Public Affairs**

Pacific Air Forces Airmen and aircraft from across the command joined together at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, April 22, 2019 to participate in a dispersal exercise throughout Micronesia.

The exercise, named Resilient Typhoon, is designed to validate PACAF's ability to adapt to rapidly developing events, like inclement weather, while maintaining readiness in support of allied and partner nations throughout the region.

The exercise tests PACAF's ability to execute flight operations from multiple locations in order to maintain readiness and involves Airmen and aircraft concentrated in one place – Andersen AFB – separating via a dispersal, recovering, and then rapidly resuming operations at airports and airfields in: Guam, Tinian, Saipan, The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and Palau.

Scheduled training activities include: airfield rescue firefighting, post-disaster communications, and the rapid movement of people and cargo which share resources and foster interoperability.

“Operational environments and global threats evolve rapidly,” said Brig Gen Michael Winkler, PACAF director of strategy, plans and programs. “We must ensure that all forward-deployed forces are ready for a potential contingency with little notice and that we can move more fluidly across the theater to seize, retain and exploit the initiative in any environment.”

The general added that while Andersen serves as a premier power projection platform, a number of factors – to include weather – can influence how PACAF maneuvers and postures forces in the region. Over the past year, the threat and impact of inclement weather has become increasingly relevant

in the wake of typhoons that created training stoppages during the most recent iterations of both the Vigilant Shield and Cope North exercises in Guam.

Units and aircraft participating in the Resilient Typhoon exercise include: F-16s from Misawa Air Base, Japan's 35th Fighter Wing; F-15C Eagles from Kadena Air Base, Japan's 18th Wing; C-130Js from Yokota Air Base, Japan's 374th Airlift Wing; C-17s and F-22s from Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam's 15th Wing and 154th Wing (Hawaii Air National Guard); and supplemental capabilities and personnel from the 36th Wing, Andersen AFB, and 3rd Wing, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska.

Military forces routinely operate and train from and in the vicinity of Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), as well as the FSM and Palau in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

“Pacific Air Forces appreciates the long-history of support it has enjoyed in the region and strives to be a good partner with the people across Micronesia in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific,” Winkler said. “These exercises serve to enhance our relationships, while also providing invaluable training and operational readiness. Our Airmen will be exercising innovative concepts with as light and agile a footprint as possible, while upholding the strictest safety and environmental standards.” Static displays of the aircraft and interactions with the Airmen operating and maintaining them were made available to the public as mission allows.



# WEST VIRGINIA ANG JOINS TEAM HICKAM FOR TF OPS

Story by **Senior Airman John Linzmeier**

**M**embers of the West Virginia Air National Guard worked alongside Sailors and Airmen at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam as part of a total-force-integration training opportunity, held May 13-24.

The team of 69 guardsmen, based out of the 167th Air Wing, in Martinsburg, focused on improving their ability to function in a total-force environment by working alongside active duty members from the 15th Wing and the Hawaii Air National Guard's 154th Wing.

"From the minute we met with the force support squadron from the 15th Wing and Hawaii Air National Guard, they were immediately welcoming," said 2nd Lt. Margaret Mayberry, 167th Force Support Squadron acting commander and services flight chief. "We could get a sense of the 'aloha spirit' and family. They immediately wanted to show us around and learn from us as much as we wanted to learn from them."

For active duty service members, it's normal to have a wide exposure to other bases, as members are constantly moving from station to station every few years. But for members of the Air National Guard, the majority of staff will remain at their home station for long periods of time. It's through annual training opportunities, such as this, that help diversify and influence daily operations.

Mayberry and other mission planners crafted a diverse schedule for their time on island, which enabled the West Virginia Airmen to spend half of their work-days with active-duty units and the other half with local guardsmen — an opportunity which is not available at their home station.

"Seeing active duty and guard units and how they work with each other is really valuable for us," said Mayberry, "because when you're within your own bubble and not actively training with other joint forces, you're not going to be able to see and understand the



Photo by **Staff Sgt. Timothy Sencindiver**

benefits of other practices."

Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam hosts partnered units on a regular basis in order to combine their capabilities with joint and bilateral forces and other military components.

Due to an ongoing flow of deployment taskings, some departments on-island are left understaffed. Tech. Sgt. Matthew Pyne, 154th Logistics Readiness Squadron Individual Protective Equipment and Individual Equipment Element NCO in charge, said his team is always excited to work with visiting units because it helps them to take on large projects and learn new organizational skills.

"They were very knowledgeable in the inventory section," said Pyne. "We are doing a full-scale inventory right now for our 'chem gear' and now we're pulling back about 2,000 M-50 masks. They showed us different ways to consolidate our equipment, so now we have more space to do our inventory and work more effectively."

The West Virginia Airmen

also integrated with several other squadrons and sections from both air wings, to include Force Support, Logistics Readiness, Contracting, Communications, and Public Affairs.

At the end of each duty day, Airmen gathered to discuss the lessons learned and review their experiences, such as refueling an F-22 Raptor for the first time or helping administer a routine physical fitness test.

"It's been highly rewarding to create new partnerships here," said Mayberry. "As a leader, some of the wonderful pieces I've seen is how my Airmen have been able to collaborate with new teams and see how quickly they can apply new concepts. Not only with other guard units, but active duty as well. It helps us to understand the importance of the total-force mission. So when there's a need for us to work at a deployed location, I'm confident that we can all work together."



# Couples learn relationship resiliency at Strong Bonds event

by Senior Airman Orlando Corpuz

*Take care of your relationships so that you can take care of the mission.*

That was the underlying theme of a weekend retreat held March 22-24, where 25 Hawaii Air National Guard [HIANG] married couples gathered at a Waikiki hotel for a weekend of learning, bonding, and re-energizing.

The weekend workshop was part of the Strong Bonds initiative, a National Guard funded, Chaplain-led program whose core mission of increasing readiness through relationship education has been helping service members develop important relationship skills for close to two decades.

HIANG Chaplains, chaplain assistants and a cadre of volunteers led the couples through exercises, mentoring sessions, and hands-on activities - all with the singular goal of imparting relationship enhancing skills.

"Strong Bonds is important to the mission because what we're teaching couples and the airmen is to build resiliency...to build skills, and to have better, healthy marriages," said Lt. Col. Leah Boling, Chaplain, 154th Wing. "If our airmen and our families are

healthy and they're happy, they'll be fit to fight."

Although a wide range of ranks were represented amongst the participants, from Senior Airman to Brigadier General, rank was generally invisible as all participants were encouraged to be open and honest with their partners and encourage each other.

"It's important that the participants feel comfortable and at ease," Boling said. "We want them to be able to open up and really focus on their partners and to support the other couples as needed. Part of that is to forget about rank for this weekend."

While a wide range of ranks were represented, so too was the range of years that couples had been married. One couple had been married close to 40 years while another had just recently tied the knot.

Senior Airman Benjamin Suiso, 154th Medical Group medic and his wife Pomaika'i, were wed just a month prior and have a nine-month old baby together. They took the time to recharge their batteries.

"This is the first time in a while that we've had quality

time together as a couple," Suiso said. "We've been together for a while, but we still learned a lot about each other and how we can communicate better."

HIANG Strong Bonds events are held two to three times per year. This iteration involved married couples; other events can focus on the family or single airmen.

According to Boling, the Strong Bonds of today began as a relationship enhancing program at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. With high deployment tempos, officials there saw the need for a formal program to help deploying troops and their families increase their relationship resiliency. The program was accepted Army wide and has since been adopted by both the Army and Air National Guard.

"To spend one weekend from Friday evening to Sunday noon with the couples and they open up their lives to you, that's just a joy to me and a blessing," Boling said.

The HIANG's first Strong Bonds event was held in 2005.

