

All in the family

By Capt. Dave Thurston
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What do a postal worker in Tennessee, a federal manager in Colorado, and a maintenance supervisor in Ohio have in common with an electronics expert and a training specialist in Florida? They are all former AFTACers and fathers of current members of the command.

The current Air Force Technical Applications Center family includes at least six people with direct ties to the command's history, including one direct descendent of its first leader.

Capt. James D. Molleson, program manager for Airborne Optical Systems in the Directorate for Acquisition, is the grandson of Maj. Gen. A. F. Hegenberger, the center's first commander.

General Hegenberger was chief of the Air Force Special Weapons Group, AFTAC's predecessor, from December 1947 to September 1949. The general, now deceased, was inducted into the Air Force Hall of Fame in 1981, in part due to his work at AFTAC.

The Operations Directorate claims not less than five father-son teams.

Beginning in 1954, SMSgt. Benjamin Vlassick served the command in a variety of roles. He was superintendent of Detachment 57 at Lowry AFB, Colo., when he retired in 1980. Today, he works for the Federal Emergency Management Agency in Denver.

His son, SSgt. Randall R. Vlassick, is a quality assurance technician at Detachment 313 in Sonseca, Spain. According to Randy, AFTAC was so classified when he was growing up he didn't even know his father worked here. He first learned of the association in 1977, only two years before he became the second generation serving the command.

TSgt. Curtis R. Miller, a satellite systems specialist at Detachment 46, Falcon AFB, Colo., literally followed in his father's footsteps when he came to the center in 1976.

TSgt. Jack Miller, an airborne special equipment operator, retired in 1975 and now supervises maintenance for a chain of banks in Ohio.

for more than 26 years.

A similar story is told by TSgt. Curtis W. Stephens, noncommissioned officer in charge of the Seismic Field Operations Section.

His father, SMSgt. Royce Stephens, was also a member of the 991XX career field who worked on a variety of systems. After retiring, he joined the postal service in Knoxville, Tenn.

Building on his father's legacy, Curt has more than 14 years service with the command.

The last two stories are unique because the senior members still maintain close ties to AFTAC.

SMSgt. Frank S. Calenda came to the center in 1965 and stayed 12 years as a satellite operations supervisor. He retired in 1978 but stays in touch with the command through the Alumni Association.

His son, SSgt. Anthony B. Calenda, a special electronics maintenance technician, is a recent promotee under the Stripes for Exceptional Performers program.

Tony says his father's influence was a major factor in his joining the Air Force and coming to AFTAC in 1982.

The senior Calenda recently retired a second time from a local hospital where he practiced his skills on their high-tech X-ray equipment.

According to Tony, his father isn't ready to retire just yet and will continue to work in the field of linear accelerators.

AIC Mark C. Smith became the latest addition to this unique group when he joined AFTAC in August 1988. As an Atomic Energy Detection Center specialist, he works in the same area where his father was superintendent of the Seismic Data Terminal.

Mark's father, MSgt. Curt Smith retired in September 1982 after nearly 26 years service to the command. He was a member of the TRW team that recently completed installation of the new Global Subsurface System. "Smitty" will continue to work for TRW on the GSS training program.

As these stories illustrate, AFTAC is not only a unique and challenging place to work. For some, it's a family tradition.