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**FILE TITLE: Background Paper on Significant Contributions to the Enlisted Force by the Chief Master Sergeants of the Air Force (CMSAFs)**

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**BACKGROUND PAPER**  
**ON**  
**SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ENLISTED FORCE BY**  
**THE CHIEF MASTER SERGEANTS OF THE AIR FORCE**

In today's Air Force, we as enlisted personnel have a tendency to take for granted the pay and benefits we receive. Sometimes we even put these issues in our blind spot, where we do not even think about them. When the first hint of Congressional efforts to reduce the Department of Defense (DOD) budget (or at least our benefits) arises, we immediately contact our members of Congress or Senior Enlisted Advisors (SEA). Do you know who it is that goes "toe to toe" with Congress, fighting for the enlisted corps of the Air Force every time? Our friend, in Washington DC, is the top enlisted person, the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (CMSAF). Every CMSAF has not only fought these battles, but left a legacy of their own. Something that extends beyond the pay and benefits; something that has made the enlisted corps better. This paper recounts significant contributions some of the CMSAFs have left as their legacy. When you finish this paper, I hope you will have a better appreciation for the CMSAF, and the battle they fight for us every day. Although there have been twelve CMSAFs, including the current CMSAF, Eric W. Benken, my exhaustive research found documented history for only six CMSAF. These include: CMSAFs Donald L. Harlow, Richard D. Kisling, Thomas N. Barnes, Robert D. Gaylor, James M. McCoy, and Sam E. Parish. Let's take a look at CMSAF Harlow first.

CMSAF Donald L. Harlow served as the second CMSAF from Aug 1969 until his retirement in September 1971. His concern for the enlisted corps led him to blaze unheard of trails, and

earned him the respect of officers and airmen alike. He helped change the Weighted Airman Promotion System (WAPS), downplaying off-duty education as a factor for promotion boards. This leveled the playing field for personnel in Air Force specialties whose duties did not allow for the pursuit of off-duty education. Subsequently, a more equitable distribution of promotions to E-8 and E-9 occurred throughout all career fields. (1:235, 236) CMSAF Harlow also spearheaded a campaign that resulted in changing the directive that governed personnel on flight status. This change allowed enlisted personnel on flight status to continue receiving flight pay while attending in-residence Professional Military Education (PME) courses. Previously, attending PME kept them away from their duties long enough to disqualify their special flight pay. (1:236) CMSAF Harlow took on everyone who threatened the enlisted corps, which led to his greatest accomplishment.

CMSAF Harlow broke a coalition of retired officer groups that lobbied Congress in an effort to eliminate the enlisted voice on Capitol Hill. CMSAF Harlow's hard work assured us a voice in Congress that continues today. (1:273-274) As a member of the Noncommissioned Officers Association (NCOA) and the Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA), I personally know his lobbying efforts in this arena continued long after his retirement. Numerous times, his efforts were instrumental in helping increase the percentages of pay raise we received, as well as assuring other benefits did not decrease. The enlisted corps recognized CMSAF Harlow for his unique and ceaseless efforts on their behalf by inducting him, as the only enlisted member, into the Order of the Sword. He was succeeded as CMSAF by CMSAF Richard D. Kisling.

CMSAF Richard D. Kisling served as the third CMSAF from October 1971 until his retirement in September 1973. His efforts for the enlisted corps covered all areas, but one of his

most noted accomplishments is also what CMSAF Kisling called, "The worst thing that happened to him while CMSAF." (2:293) While on his way for a 4-week visit to the Far East, CMSAF Kisling stopped over at Norton Air Force Base (AFB), California. During his layover, Air Force Public Affairs personnel asked him to appear in an Air Force Now production with a group of young airmen. In that production, the airmen asked a question about pay, and CMSAF Kisling's answer was, "What can you do? After Air Force and DOD gets their position ready and goes to Congress, then you can write your congressman to support that position." (2:293) Everyone, up to and including the Vice Chief of Staff General Meyer, heard only 'write your congressmen,' missing the context of the entire statement. This statement created such controversy that, on his way back from the Far East trip, CMSAF Kisling was contacted while still on the plane and told to call his office. It put him in hot water and brought to light the sensitive issue of people writing to their members of Congress because they did not like something in the Air Force. This was something the brass at the Pentagon did not care to hear. (2:294-295) This incident marked CMSAF Kisling as a 'gets down to business' individual -- just what the office of CMSAF needed.

CMSAF Kisling's most significant achievement was as a driving force in helping to develop, obtain funding for, and get off the ground what is now the Air Force Senior Noncommissioned Officer Academy (AFSNCOA). Previously, PME attendance was lackluster; some NCOs attended and some did not. CMSAF Kisling fought long and hard to assure appropriate PME was available for all NCOs at defining points in their careers. The establishment of the AFSNCOA would become his crowning achievement. (2:179-181) CMSAF Kisling's tenure was marked by fights for the enlisted corps' right to PME, as well as the right to speak to their representative in Washington DC. The former marked CMSAF Kisling as a great individual, the latter an

outspoken individual, one who was not afraid to fight the good fight on behalf of the enlisted corps. He was succeeded as CMSAF by CMSAF Thomas N. Barnes.

CMSAF Thomas N. Barnes was the fourth individual, and the first African-American, to be CMSAF. He served from October 1973 until his retirement in July 1977. The respect he earned as the first black to hold the position of CMSAF far outweighed every other accomplishment during his tenure. He was the first CMSAF invited to attend and participate in the Air Force Chief of Staff's weekly meeting with all division chiefs. This reaped unlimited dividends when CMSAF Barnes went out and visited the troops around the world. He not only had firsthand information to give the troops and discuss with them, he could answer questions and give the Chief of Staff's perspective on issues. CMSAF Barnes said "I was not void of information. I knew what was going on. I just think that was a crowning point for the enlisted man." (6:45) CMSAF Barnes was the first person extended beyond 2 years as CMSAF, a true testament to his service, ability, and dedication to the enlisted corps. During this extended period of service, CMSAF Barnes continued to press for more changes to make the enlisted corps better.

CMSAF Barnes became involved in and fought to bring forth two major changes that had an impact on all career airmen. The first was a five-tier approach for PME that included NCO Leadership School, Command NCO Academy in residence and correspondence, and the AFSNCOA in residence and correspondence. (6:78) The basic tenets of this program still apply today. The second change he helped bring about was the Total Objective Plan for Career Airmen Progression (TOP CAP). This program limited the time in service NCOs could stay in the Air Force. It was based on the individual's rank and prevented grade stagnation. If an individual did not make Technical Sergeant by 20 years, they had to retire; if they not make Master Sergeant by

23 years, they had to retire; if they did not make Senior Master Sergeant by 26 years, they had to retire; and if they did not make Chief Master Sergeant by 28 years, they had to retire. (6:5) These high years of tenure were further reduced in the early 1990s, a firm indication the program is still working today, over 20 years later. CMSAF Barnes brought a great deal of integrity to the position of CMSAF, and it showed in his achievements and actions. He was succeeded as CMSAF by CMSAF Robert D. Gaylor.

CMSAF Robert D. Gaylor was the fifth CMSAF and served from August 1977 until his retirement in July 1979. His accomplishments were great and varied, but there are a couple that was significant to the enlisted corps. First, he was able to convince the DOD to fund moving family members, regardless of the military member's rank, with the military member on an accompanied overseas tour. (4:152-153) Another milestone in his achievements was tuition assistance for enlisted personnel. Tuition Assistance (TA) allowed all enlisted personnel to take college classes, and the government would pay from 75-90% of the course cost for the troops. Even those who had the G.I. Bill could use TA to pay for their courses, and save their G.I. Bill for when they separated or retired. (4:162-163) In my opinion, this was the biggest single accomplishment any CMSAF brought on board for the enlisted force. CMSAF Gaylor continued to use his influence to obtain educational benefits for the enlisted corps.

Another significant educational area CMSAF Gaylor had great influence in was the Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) board. His hard work enabled many enlisted personnel to become more skilled at their specialty through CCAF. After enrolling in CCAF, personnel could receive college credit for completing their technical schools, Career Development Courses, DANTES tests, and college classes they took, earning credit towards an Associate's

Degree from CCAF. (4:164) The entire enlisted force benefited from this initiative. The CCAF and TA programs were the crowning elements of a career that marked CMSAF Gaylor as an enlisted man's Chief, the ideal individual for CMSAF. His contributions to the enlisted corps will be remembered for a long time. He was succeeded as CMSAF by CMSAF James M. McCoy.

CMSAF James M. McCoy was the sixth CMSAF and served from August 1979 until his retirement in August 1981. His dynamic personality and straight forwardness earned him the respect of generals and members of Congress alike. (3:134-136) He was instrumental in persuading a key senator to change his stance and support transferability of G.I. Bill benefits to spouses and children after a certain period of service. While this never became law, it highlights CMSAF McCoy's dedication to the enlisted corps. (3:137-138) His superb style enabled him to convince all the Air Staff and Major Command Generals to support the Stripes for Exceptional Performers (STEP) program. His hard work paid off when General Allen, the Air Force Chief of Staff, kept the program. (3:152-153) Another area CMSAF McCoy had an impact in was defeating the call to bring back the Warrant Officer ranks. He also authored a proposal to get the other Armed Services to do away with their Warrant Officers. Then the funds used for those ranks could be used for the enlisted force to significantly enhance the quality of life for the young troops. This proposal received a lot of support from the Vice Chief of Staff, General Mathis. Although this never happened, it certainly brought attention to the office of CMSAF. (3:161-164) But CMSAF McCoy's most significant impact was the respect he earned from the Air Staff. He attended Air Staff weekly meetings when he was in town, and the staff was very supportive of him and his position; seeking his opinion on all matters, not just enlisted. (3:134) Even members of Congress sought audiences with CMSAF McCoy, desiring to hear his opinion on congressional

funding bills for the military. (3:136-137) The accomplishments of CMSAF McCoy had a lasting impact and positive influence on the enlisted force. The next CMSAF I have history for is CMSAF Sam E. Parish.

CMSAF Sam E. Parish was the eighth CMSAF and he served from August 1983 until his retirement in June 1986. However, CMSAF Parish originally was not a volunteer for the job of CMSAF. When General Bennie Davis, Commander of Strategic Air Command, asked why, CMSAF Parish said "I haven't raised my hand like a kid on school in a long time, and I don't intend to do it now." (5:56) General Davis thought so highly of CMSAF Parish that he volunteered Parish for the job. Even though he made many contributions, in my opinion his greatest one during his tenure changed the Air Force forever. He convinced General Gabriel, AF Chief of Staff, to reduce the time-in-service requirement for Senior Airman (SrA) promotions to 36 months (30 months for SrA Below-the-Zone). This had the added effect of promoting the individual to sergeant at the time of their reenlistment. It was a reenlistment incentive because the individual got a private dormitory room when they became an NCO, and they were exempt from certain details as well. (5:127-128) This contribution revolutionized the enlisted force and earned CMSAF Parish the respect of all enlisted personnel.

As enlisted personnel, we tend to take our pay and benefits in the Air Force for granted. By reading this paper, you now know who it is that goes "toe to toe" with Congress, fighting for the enlisted corps of the Air Force. Our friend in Washington DC is the top enlisted person, the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (CMSAF). Every CMSAF has fought these battles and left a legacy of their own, something that extends beyond the pay and benefits, something that has made the enlisted corps better. This paper recounted the contributions of CMSAFs Donald L. Harlow,

Richard D. Kisling, Thomas N. Barnes, Robert D. Gaylor, James M. McCoy, and Sam E. Parish.

You can see that as each successive CMSAF took office, the hard work of his predecessor(s) left him less and less to accomplish for the enlisted corps. You should now have a better appreciation for the CMSAF, and the fight they fight for us each and every day. It is not a job that can satisfy everyone all the time, but when you see the overall improvements in the enlisted corps since the creation of the CMSAF, you should certainly appreciate all the hard work they do on our behalf. Because of their efforts, the enlisted corps has made great advances in the Air Force.

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