

459th Wing Association

BRINGING THE LATEST NEWS TO ALUMNI AND MEMBERS

Fall 2020 Newsletter

P.O. Box 748, Clinton, Maryland 20735

69th APS SNCO awarded Bronze Star, AF Commendation Medal

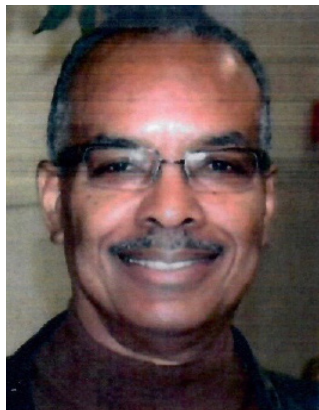
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President's Message

By Harold Countee
459th Wing Association President

The Covid-19 Coronavirus continues to ravage our day to day lives and I pray that all are staying safe by maintaining your mental health as well as your physical health.



Now that the General Election is behind us we're looking forward to celebrating the holidays so let's not let our guards down and continue to wear masks and social distance. I really missed seeing many of you in October at our annual reunion, but it just wasn't possible this year since many of our Association members are within the senior age group, which seems to be the most vulnerable to this Coronavirus.

I am very hopeful that we may be able to get back to some type of normalcy late next

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459TH WING ASSOCIATION

FALL 2020 NEWSLETTER

Staff and Board Members

Harold Countee - President

Tim McConnell - Vice President

Jim Lacey - Secretary

Charles Hawkins- Treasurer

Henry Hinnant - Assistant Treasurer

Patti Fitch- Membership

Charles Fitch

Nancy Oliver

Rodney Walker

Dr. Warren Johnson

Shirley Hawkins - Honorary Member

Kat Justen - Newsletter Editor

The 459th Wing Association consists of current and former members of 459th wings throughout history. The Association provides a means for members to maintain contact with those with whom they have served and to receive news about Wing events and member-news via annual reunions and quarterly newsletters.

Reunions are generally held in cities within a 300 mile radius of Washington DC. The 459th Wing Association began in 1989 and has consistently provided financial support for the 459th Annual awards program and the annual family day events. The Association also donates to the Fisher House.

Membership is continuously open to all wing personnel for an annual contribution of \$15. Look for the membership application included in this newsletter.

Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 748

Clinton, MD 20735

Pictures from the 459 ARW



SYDNOR BECOMES 459 MXS COMMANDER

U.S. Air Force Col. Christopher Hobbs, 459th Maintenance Group commander (left), passes a guidon to Maj. Benjamin Sydnor (right) as he assumes command of the 459th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland, Oct. 3, 2020. During the ceremony command of the 459 AMXS changed from Lt. Col. Danah Autry to Sydnor. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Kat Justen)



MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC TREATS PANDEMIC-RELATED EMOTIONAL PAIN

316th Operation Medical Readiness Squadron mental health technicians, work to schedule patients at Joint Base Andrews, Md., Sept. 18, 2020. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the clinic has continued to provide multiple services such as one-on-one therapy through psychology, psychiatry or social work to psych testing, couples counseling, virtual classes and group therapy. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Xiomara M. Martinez)

Continued from President's page 1

year, so I've tentatively made plans to have next year's reunion October 7-10, 2021.

I hated we were not able to have our 2020 reunion this year, but plans are continuing towards our next Reunion to happen in October 2021. Here's some preliminary information about the Reunion so you can make your plans accordingly.

I have reserved space for our 2021 reunion with the Embassy Suites Hotel by Hilton at BWI Airport, 1300 Concourse Drive, Linthicum, MD 21090. The dates for the 2021 Reunion will be October 7-10, 2021. Since it will be in the local area it is with hopes that more of our members will decide to join us. Once plans are finalized I will include more specific details of what to expect with a daily schedule of events in the 2021 Spring/Summer newsletter. Room rates are still \$119 for king bed or double bed. You will be able to make your room reservation online beginning after Jan. 1, 2021 using our dedicated online registration link by copying and pasting the following link:

<http://embassysuites.hilton.com/en/es/groups/personalized/B/BALIAES-4W2-20211007/index.jhtml>

or call the hotel reservations line direct on 410-850- 0747, press 1 then ask for the 459th Wing Association group rate. I cannot over emphasize enough that you should make your room reservation early to ensure you get your room before our cutoff date of August 30, 2021. Cost for the full (Thursday - Sunday) reunion event is \$175.00 per person, however if you can only attend the Banquet on Saturday evening, Oct. 9th your cost will be \$60 per person.

I will provide an update in the Spring/Summer newsletter as to whether we need to make changes. Please be blessed, enjoy the holidays and stay safe so we can have fellowship in 2021.

Annual Dues:

Annual dues can be paid by going to our website at www.459thwingassociation.com and pay by credit card/PayPal or mail to 459th Wing Association, PO Box 748, Clinton, MD 20735.



2021 Reunion Registration Form

Member Name: _____ **Phone:** _____

Guest Name: _____ **Phone:** _____

Full weekend program Oct. 7-10, 2021: \$175 per person

Number attending: ____ x \$175 = **Total enclosed:** \$ _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Banquet Only on Oct. 9, 2021:

Name: _____ **Phone:** _____

Guest Name: _____ **Phone:** _____

Number attending: ____ x \$60 **Total Enclosed =** \$ _____

Please send registration form and check payable to:

459th Wing Association

P.O. Box 748

Clinton, MD 20735

Hotel check-in time is 4 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 7, 2021 and
check-out is 12 noon on Sunday, Oct. 10, 2021.

For questions please call or email Harold Countee

Phone: 301-785-0225

Email: hmcountee@verizon.net

69th APS SNCO awarded Bronze Star, AF Commendation Medal

By Staff Sgt. Cierra Presentado

459th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

JOINT BASE ANDREWS, Md. – Senior Master Sgt. Rick Johnson is awarded the Bronze Star and an Air Force Commendation Medal for his heroic actions and meritorious achievement during his deployment to Iraq in support of Operation Inherent Resolve.

SMSGt. Johnson is the Operations Flight Chief for the 69th Aerial Port Squadron here. October 2019, he was notified he would deploy to Camp Taji, Iraq, where he would take over as the 442nd Air Expeditionary Squadron Superintendent. Since this would be his third deployment to a combat zone, he was fearless and ready for the road ahead.

Things were going well for Johnson. He was getting the job done, staying in contact with his family and keeping out of harm's way. That is until March 11th, when his deployment went into a downward spiral that would affect the rest of his time there.

"It was night time, I was lying in bed getting ready to go to sleep when I heard a loud explosion; it was so close you almost felt the rattle in your teeth," he said. "Our housing unit had been hit with a rocket. I knew for a fact that there was no way I was going to survive if I stayed in my room. I ran for my life to get to the bunker. This was the most terrified I had ever been in my life."

Johnson bolted from his room and headed for the nearest bunker. While running for cover, three more rockets hit. He knew his life could be over at any moment. Despite fearing for his life, he remained calm on the outside in order to calm others who were just as terrified.

"I never experienced this type of fear; all around me people were screaming. No one knew what to do," he said. "You go through all this training, but when it actually happens, you're frozen in fear. I knew I couldn't just stay in the bunker. There were people trapped in the rooms. I knew I needed to do something."

Once the explosions ceased, Johnson left the bunker, went back to his room, and grabbed his gear. He knew he had a small window of time to attempt to save lives before more rockets hit the housing unit. Without regard for his own life, he immediately set out to do everything he could to save his wingmen.

Johnson risked his personal safety to clear rooms in an area fraught with unexploded ordinance to provide critical care. When he arrived at the struck housing unit, he immediately entered the unit that was in danger of

structural collapse at any second, clearing deadly debris and the remnants of the room while maneuvering to assess two wounded Airmen.

"I went in that room and saw the injured Airmen, I began to perform lifesaving procedures until the medics arrived," he said. "Everyone was scared, but we don't leave each other behind, I did all I could do."

Throughout the duration of the night, the camp was hit with a total of 26 rockets. Three days later, March 14th, an additional 30 rockets hit, leaving three service members dead.

"In a matter of a few hours, all of our lives changed," he said. "This is an event we train for but we are never really prepared for that moment. No one is. It was devastating."

Despite the dreadful incident, Johnson knew he had to remain strong and calm for his Airmen.

"These Airmen are young, a lot of 18, 19, 20 year olds," he said. "I felt their pain. We were all traumatized by this, but as their first sergeant it was important that I supported them the best way possible."

Johnson said that after the attack, many Airmen were fearful of sleeping in the housing unit and chose to sleep in the passenger terminal instead.

"We understood their pain and their fear," he said.

"The passenger terminal was a safe hardened facility; they felt safe there. Despite what was happening, we were still in a deployed environment and the mission still had to get done, so whatever I had to do to ensure the safety and security of the Airmen, I did."

Johnson continued the mission, but once his six-month mark came, he was ready to come home. However, due to the pandemic, his deployment was extended for another two and a half months.

Johnson finally made it home after eight and a half months in Iraq. He was recognized for his accomplishments during a ceremony with his friends and family in attendance.

"SMSGt. Johnson's heroic actions are reflective of his ability to provide assertive and decisive leadership when it matters most," said Chief MSgt. Israel Nunez, 69th APS squadron superintendent. "He was tasked with the role, tasked knowing the risks that he would encounter. When that danger presented itself, Senior MSgt. Johnson put his own safety on the line to provide Airmen with critical care and guidance during the aftermath of an extremely treacherous attack."

**Tech Sgt. Temesgen
Tessema**

459th Logistics Readiness Squadron
Material Management Technician

"I like working in a support squadron. We have contact with everyone in the Wing. From maintainers to force support, they have to come to our office at some point. I get to meet different people, and it gives me the opportunity to start a conversation and learn about their jobs. It has broadened my horizons."

WARRIOR SPOTLIGHT
459TH AIR REFUELING WING

Newsletter Delivery

Our newsletter cost to mail copies to all members has increased as we still have too many newsletters being returned as undeliverable so beginning with this newsletter it is going out via email only.



We now have the ability to pay dues online through PayPal!

Log onto:

www.459thwingassociation.com,
scroll to the bottom and click,
“pay dues online.”

Annual membership is \$15.00 per year due March 31st. You may also pay dues for multiple years. Your newsletter will have the year you are paid through printed in the upper right hand corner of the address label.

Note: For your information, according to the IRS we are not an organization described in Internal Revenue Code Section 170 (c) so donors cannot deduct contributions.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION AND ANNUAL DUES

Dear Fellow 459th Members and Former Members;

The general purpose of this association is to promote and encourage current and former members of the 459th Wing to remain in touch with those with whom they served, and to support morale programs for active 459th reservists and their families. Activities of the Association include:

- Publishing a quarterly newsletter containing articles regarding Association members, Association events, and 459th Air Refueling Wing activities.
- Providing financial support for the 459th ARW Annual Awards program.
- Providing financial support for the Family Day Picnic.
- Donating to the Fischer House.
- Holding annual reunions in cities within an approximate 300 mile radius from Washington, D.C.

459th Troop Carrier Wing

459th Airlift Wing

459th Tactical Airlift Wing

459th Air Refueling Wing

Please cut here and return completed form with check

Membership Application and Renewal of Annual Dues, 2018.

Please complete this form and return with check for \$15.00 payable to:

459th Wing Association
P.O. Box 748
Clinton, MD 20735

I am/was assigned to 459th Wing or
associate unit.

From _____ to _____

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip Code _____

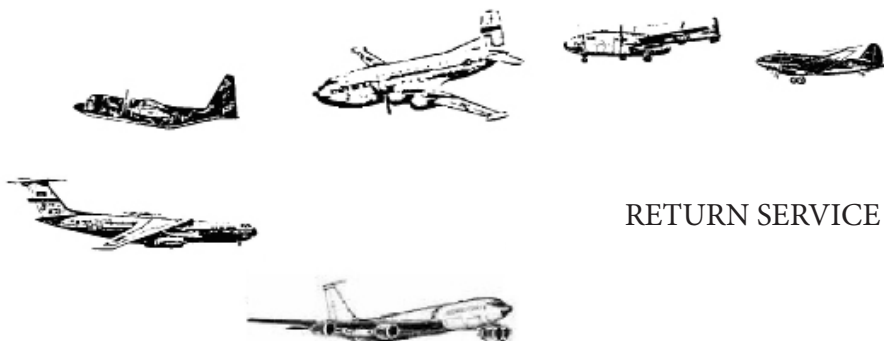
Phone – home _____

Email _____

Current or last position in the 459th _____

459th Wing Association

P.O. BOX 748, clinton, maryland 20735-0748



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED