

# COMMAND

Christian perspectives on life in the military

SUMMER 2020 Vol. 69 No. 1



Building Christian military leaders, families, fellowships...**for a lifetime**

## FINAL THOUGHTS FROM GEN WARNER



*Editor's note: Brig Gen David Warner, USAF (Ret.), retired as executive director of OCF on 31 May, and Col Scott Fisher, USAF (Ret.), is the new executive director. Following are some of David's final thoughts and comments as OCF executive director.*

**BY KAREN FLIEDNER**  
CONTENT SPECIALIST

**We know that you enjoy putting your thoughts into three categories: COMMEMORATE, CELEBRATE, and COMMIT. With that in mind, as you and Lori look back after 10 years as the Executive Director couple, what things do you “COMMEMORATE?”**

First, those amazing OCF saints that went before us in this position—Buck and Louisa Buxton, Paul and Lorraine Pettijohn, Art and Misti Athens, and Bruce and Melissa Fister. It leaves me in awe on how the Lord used these amazing couples to forge, form, and further this amazing ministry.

The Buxtons put the bones of OCF together: brought OCF to Colorado, procured Spring Canyon, and gave OCF the heart for our young officers and leaders. The Pettijohns, OCF's longest-serving executive couple, ushered in our Field Staff philosophy, secured White Sulphur Springs, and added Spring Canyon to the OCF books. The Athenses “sounded the trumpet” and inspired a spirit of revival throughout OCF.

Our predecessors, the Fisters, figuratively and

literally led OCF into the 21st century: starting and fulfilling the Growing and Building capital campaign, instilling organizational discipline, and making OCF fiscally sound.

Within a year of our military retirement in 2010, Lori and I had no idea that this position was opening. John Hoyman called and asked us to submit an application. Like footprints in the sand God used that application to show us how He had used OCF to fulfill my prayer as young captain 20 years earlier, that He would enable me to finish my race in uniform with my integrity intact, my family by my side, and knowing that I had run that race with excellence.

Once we crossed that finish line of our military race, it was our destiny over the next 10 years to be able reach out to those still running their race and say, “We’ve got you!”

It’s fascinating to see once again, through Scott and Christie Fisher’s journey, how God’s plan was unfolding before them like what Lori and I experienced. The Fishers submitted their application after being asked, and within a year, are now in the seat. God is amazing!

**With your tenure now completed—right in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic—what do you find to “CELEBRATE?”**

As Jesus teaches us, there will always be troubles, but don’t fret, for He has overcome the world. Without fear and fretting, I saw the OCF family come together in powerful ways to ensure we could continue providing the hope,

love, and courage of Jesus Christ to others as OCF was called to over 75 years ago. As for COVID-19’s impact, I celebrate several things:

Our Field Staff’s resilience to continue ministry by adapting to virtual fellowship to do Bible studies, pray for each other, and encourage those in their charge.

That rallying around the cross of Christ continued on virtually: our service academies’ spiritual commissionings, OCF Council’s Pray, Discover, and Obey session and meetings, and others gathering for prayer and fellowship.

Our amazing supporters, through the Lord’s inspiration, blessed OCF beyond measure the first 3 quarters of FY20, which sustained us through famine we did not know was coming. Our members have signaled to see OCF come through their continuing sacrificial support.

Lastly, I celebrate the amazing OCF home office and field staff team who have shared this amazing journey with us.

**What would you like to see as a “COMMITMENT?”**

Lori and I are totally committed to OCF. As such, we pledge our unqualified support as we pass off this amazing baton to Scott and Christie, now the 6th Executive Director couple! We are excited about what the Lord has in store in and through them on their journey.

We are humbled that the Lord allowed us, especially me as such a flawed sinner, to play the role we did over the past decade. We’re excited to see what the Lord has for us now! 🙏

# WELCOME, COL SCOTT & CHRISTIE FISHER

BY KAREN FLIEDNER

CONTENT SPECIALIST

**What were the motivations for you and Christie to apply for the executive director couple role?**

We don't believe that God is moving us from the military into ministry, but rather from one form of ministry into another. We feel very strongly that serving in the military for 27 years was our ministry. It was an incredible platform that took us around the world, enabling us to engage with a widely diverse group of people. We are thankful for every moment of it!

As one wise friend told me, transition is not so much a journey of creation as a journey of discovery, discovering where He wants you to engage in ministry next. We prayed, searched His Word, searched our hearts, and constantly invited friends and wise counsel into our journey.

Christie and I really enjoy working side by side and truly hoped for an opportunity to serve together in ministry. We're excited by the opportunity to use the experiences and gifts God has given us to continue to spur service members and their families toward an informed, contagious passion for God.

Our oldest son became a Marine last year and there is no denying the military community he entered is different than when Christie and I started our journey together. God,

however, is the same yesterday, today and forever. Through God's grace we look forward to continuing to enable OCF to remain as relevant and vibrant for the next generation of Christian military leaders as it was for us.

**What kind of recalibrations have you had to do coming into the directorship of OCF because of COVID-19?**

This is undeniably a unique time in history. None of us knows exactly how it will affect us long term as a ministry, nation, or world. But what we do know is that it doesn't surprise God, and there is nothing outside of His control.

Christie and I would like to get out and visit as many of our staff and members as we can to listen to you and hear how we can come alongside you. While we will have to wait to physically be able to do so, we need to continue to find creative ways to meet the needs of our members. While our current trials definitely present challenges to us, they also afford us an opportunity to grow and mature as a ministry to a world that is seeking answers now more than ever.

**What do you hope to achieve during your time as OCF's executive director?**

In John 5:19, Jesus said even He could do nothing by Himself, but only what He saw His Father doing. Rather than coming in with a list of what I want to accomplish,





*Photo by Scott Fisher*


I want my eyes to be open to where He is moving. I want to listen, first to the Father, then to our members. It's not really about me, or any of us. It is His ministry, not ours; for His purposes, not ours; in His timing, not ours; and for His glory, not ours. I know that through God's grace and all of us walking authentically together, He will accomplish far more than we can ask or imagine.

#### **How has the ministry of OCF impacted you?**

Christie and I first got involved with OCF over 25 years ago when I was going through pilot training. Since that time I've been blessed to lead local studies and serve as a base representative around the world, as well as serve on the OCF Council. All our children have benefitted from Camp Caleb and multiple family camps

at White Sulphur Springs. One summer God used a family camp at WSS to help reshape my priorities and rebalance my life after returning from being a 4-star's aide. More recently, God used Father Teen Adventure at Spring Canyon to speak truth into our youngest son, as well as giving us both the sheer adrenaline of Aussie rappelling down the cliffs of the Rockies.

#### **What would you like OCF members to know about you?**

It has been less than a year since we were serving on active duty, trying to balance the pressures (and joys) of military life with raising five kids. We are humbled and thrilled to be able to serve alongside you and look forward to learning how we can help you walk the incredible journey of faith He has planned for you! 

## ENS BRIGIT JOGAN

United States Coast Guard

### **Came to OCF:**

I found myself involved with OCF at USCGA early in my 4/c year through a series of (blessed) accidents. In the inevitably overwhelming tsunami of alphabet soup inherent to joining the military, OCF was another acronym I said I'd check out, without knowing at the time the impact it would have on my life.

### **Why OCF:**

I've stayed involved with OCF because it is massively important, temporally and eternally. Short term—Christians are called to live Gospel out loud together and to bear each other's burdens. The brothers and sisters that have met through OCF live out that calling every day and encourage me to do the same. Long term—I only get a few years here on Earth with those amazing people; but one day, we will spend eternity worshipping our King together, and we want as many included in that number as possible.

### **Why a military life:**

To be fair, my military career has hardly begun—I just passed the starting line that was

commencement. But, I initially joined the Coast Guard because 1) of the humanitarian missions, 2) I seek to be part of something significant, and 3) I don't want to waste the time I have been given. Since then, God has also shown me just how integral those desires are in living a Christian life, too.

### **What's on your bucket list:**

Learn to play guitar. But this aspiration is much to the grave misfortune of those who will be in close enough proximity to hear me sing along, however.

### **Best advice given you:**

Keep looking up.

### **Most memorable places visited:**

Cap Rouge, Haiti

### **Life Bible verse:**

"He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end" (Ecclesiastes 3:11, NIV).



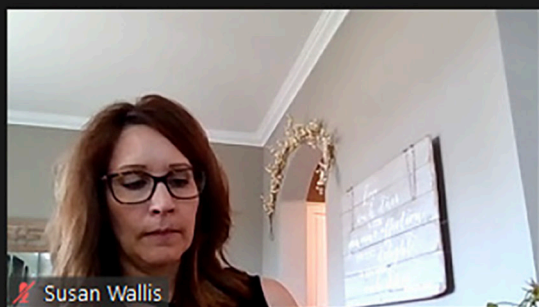
### **44. Brigit Jogan: Experiencing God on the mountaintop**

Brigit appeared on episode 44 of the OCF Crosspoint podcast. Be sure to check out her story by pointing your browser to [bit.ly/jogan44](https://bit.ly/jogan44)









Susan Wallis



Josh Jackson



Marci M



Dave Osborn



OCF Pensacola



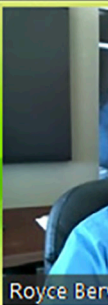
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Kim Hawthorne



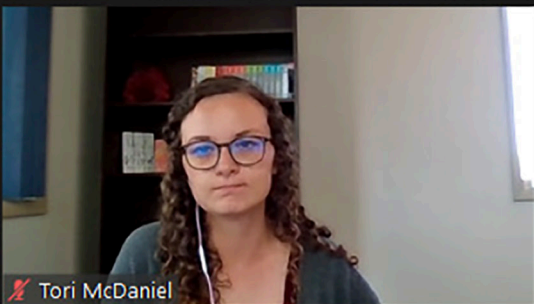
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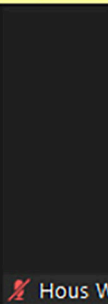
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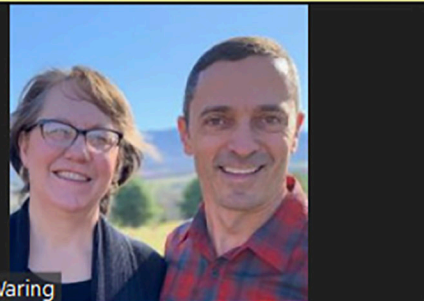
# DOING MINISTRY IN A BOX

Hollywood squares. Brady Bunch.

Tic-tac-toe. Whatever you call it, OCF largely is doing fellowship in a virtual box so far in 2020 because of COVID-19. This digital frontier has not been without its share of challenges and disappointments, but amid the uncertainty, there are stories of opportunities found and unexpected blessings received from among the membership.

BY JOSH JACKSON

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS





ON DECEMBER 31, 1943,  
THE OFFICERS' CHRISTIAN UNION PENNED  
THESE TWO ITEMS IN THE CERTIFICATE  
OF INCORPORATION: THE UNION WOULD  
BIND TOGETHER OFFICERS SERVING IN THE  
ARMED FORCES WHO OWN ALLEGIANCE TO  
JESUS CHRIST, AND IT WOULD ENCOURAGE  
MEMBERS IN REGULAR PRAYER, BIBLE  
STUDY, AND CHRISTIAN WITNESS.

When the authors of that document signed it, there's no way they could have foreseen the challenges facing the ministry some 76 years later. And yet, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, those two items haven't changed. Instead, they just look different...for now.

In the absence of face-to-face fellowship, the primary alternative has been virtual fellowship, with everyone typically using Zoom and taking one's place among the on-screen squares. For a ministry that has prided itself almost exclusively on in-person fellowship since its inception, the virtual space lacks a human element that cannot be reproduced in a digital environment.

It's a sentiment echoed by many people, such as Col Chet Arnold, USMC (Ret.), who is the OCF Field Staff Rep in Pensacola, along with his wife, Michelle. He sums it up best when he says OCF has been forced to conduct business from a distance.

“The intimacy of the coffee shop is gone and replaced with the less-than-intimate realm of online communication. There is no touch, no handshakes, no hugs, no pats on the back.”

Arnold says the loss of the togetherness of serving alongside one another is one example of the challenges associated with virtual ministry. “For instance, in the context of hospitality this includes helping prepare, set up, serve, and clean up. No need for any of that over Zoom!”

The loss of togetherness in the context of hospitality, as Arnold describes it, is something especially evident to small group leaders CDR Wendell and Mary Holmes, USN.

“I greatly miss cooking for our study and filling our home with tables to accommodate the small crowd that comes for dinner,” said Mary. “There is a special experience that is shared when we are able to gather together to eat and fellowship around a common table, and that just can’t be replicated online.”

Their group is made up mostly of families with small children, but unlike some small groups, there is no childcare. The children who attend participate in the whole evening—sharing a meal together, singing, Bible study, prayer, and of course, dessert afterward.

“We’ve found that it’s much more difficult to hold the attention of the kids during an online meeting time, and we really miss hearing more of their contributions to the evenings. You never know what you’ll hear when you call on a child during Bible study!”

For example, there’s this prayer from Eli, 5, who was the volunteer to close

prayer time at the end of a recent online OCF study.

“He began his prayer by saying, ‘Dear God, thank you that we get to have OCF and we get to study the Bible and learn more about the Bible.’ Group prayer—even over Zoom—has been one of the most refreshing and encouraging parts of our week during this time!” Wendell said.

However, Wendell says the lack of face-to-face fellowship is impacting the children in a different way.

“These kids are also really missing relationship with each other. Much of their friendship is formed over play, as opposed to the conversation-based relationships that many of the adults have built. While many of our conversations have continued, the play time hasn’t been able to.”

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USMC (RET.)

**DESPITE** the limitations that online communication places on fellowship, some have chosen to look for ways to be intentional about staying in touch despite the physical separation, and in some cases, the quarantine has afforded chances to connect that might not have been so easily available before COVID-19.

At Travis AFB, TSgt Ryan Padgett, USAF, said virtual meetings have become a way of life for many, but it has also opened up a unique capability to meet up with old connections. “We have rarely stayed in close touch with many of the folks that have come through our ministry and PCSed, but now, via Zoom, we’ve been able to connect back with them! Maybe when we’re all able to meet traditionally again, we might have someone put their phone up and activate Zoom for anyone that’s TDY, deployed, or has since left, but still wants to stay connected.”

LTC Jim Harbridge, USA (Ret.), and his wife, Christina, are the OCF Field Staff reps at Leavenworth. For Harbridge and his team of volunteers, learning how to maximize technology to connect people and provide resources has been essential during the pandemic. Harbridge has hosted Discipleship Training Breakfasts and Neighborhood Bible Studies on Zoom, collaborated with other ministry leaders (Youth for Christ, Men of the Chapel, Awana) to learn and

## **We all need a Paul, Barnabas, and Timothy**

Being isolated has shown the need for connection and fellowship. One of the key pillars Christ taught, which we often took for granted in pre-COVID times, has now come to the forefront of our minds.

Folks have risen to the challenge and we are experiencing a mini revolution. Cadets and our few ministry team members are calling two people each week, particularly those that they have not spoken to since COVID started and are asking/ sharing these three questions:

1. How are you doing?
2. What are you reading, what is God showing you?
3. What can I pray for you?  
(And ask them to do the same)

This is what good prayer partners do. This is what good mentors do. We all need mentors, mentees, and prayer partners. Or a Paul, Barnabas, and Timothy.

*—CDR Carl Crabtree, USN (Ret.)  
OCF Field Staff Rep at USCGA*

## **Calling All Prayer Warriors**

COVID-19 has forced OCF to look at new ways to meet and gather for prayer. We host a weekly Virtual Prayer Meeting Monday nights on Zoom. Contact Karen Fliedner for details: [karen.fliedner@ocfusa.org](mailto:karen.fliedner@ocfusa.org)



Photo by Christina Harbridge

### Driveway Devotionals

Sidewalk chalk became a tool for sharing Scripture with neighbors near Leavenworth, KS.

understand the technology for use with their ministries, and developed Leavenworth OCF's social media to encourage and connect people.

"We have been more deliberate in connecting with people. Reaching out via email and phone to people in our book of ministry to whom we had not had the chance to reach out yet. We have taken blessing bags of candy and encouraging Scripture and delivered it to our regular partners and supporters."

Harbridge says this is just a way to show them that "in the midst of uncertainty, we love them and are praying for them."

"We have tried to point people in our own neighborhood to God by leveraging

neighborhood driveway chalk events to share Scripture. This developed into 'Driveway Devotionals' on social media after we had overwhelming positive feedback from neighbors."

He's quick to point out another item of praise, too: "Also, my daughter accepted Christ this week."

Harbridge's deliberation to connect with people and stay in touch with them is something others have underscored as well.

"The importance of more frequent interaction becomes apparent. More texts, calls, emails, and snail mail help fill the void along with online video calls," said Arnold of OCF Pensacola.

PK Carlton, Associate Field Staff at

USAFA OCF, highlighted the “passion of our ministry team to invest in the cadets, check on them, invest in them, love on them, and work with them to disciple them. It has been neat to watch and see their hearts for their cadets.”

Maj Rob Crespo, USAF, leads an OCF group in the Hampton Roads Region that is a mix of military, former military, officer and enlisted, and civilians. He says the greatest challenge has been keeping tabs on people to see how they are “really” doing.

“There are so many non-verbal cues that are easily missed. I believe we must ask tough, pointed, and challenging questions with our Christian brothers and sisters. This will help expose hidden sins, depression, and anxieties. Then we can begin godly accountability, encouragement, and support.”

Capt Kaitlyn Sprague, USAF, says not only has she been blessed to have a job and job security during a time when many people are in a much more precarious situation, but she also has been blessed with all the time at home to spend with her husband, Matt, also an Air Force captain.

“We both just got back from a deployment right before everything locked down, so this has been a great time to reconnect and enjoy spending a lot of time together. It’s also provided a lot of time to call friends and family and check

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SPRAGUE, USAF

up on people that I don’t get to talk to on a regular basis.”

That’s not to say this season hasn’t been fraught with challenges for Sprague, especially during the stay-home restrictions.

“There is so much uncertainty; it feels like a state of in-between. I should be working, but I can’t. I want to enjoy the rest, but sometimes I feel bored. I feel pulled by a lot of different emotions and no one knows how long it’s going to go on,” she said. “I think when life is rolling along smoothly it can be easy to forget our utter dependency on God, but disaster, hardship, struggle, suffering, and lockdown are a break from the routine and wake us up to the reality that in hardship and in blessing, we deeply need Him. And the beauty is that He’s here in the hardship, and therefore, there are little bits of good and gratitude when things are hard, if we’re willing to look for them.”





*U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Josiah D. Pearce/Released*

### **Socially distanced swearing-in**

The United States Naval Academy holds the third swearing-in event for the Class of 2020. The Class of 2020 graduated approximately 1,000 midshipmen during five swearing-in events and one virtual ceremony. Such was the scene at other academy graduations.

**WITHOUT QUESTION,** this has been a season of anxiety and uncertainty for many, particularly those graduating the academies and ROTC. Graduation and commissioning for our nation's newest officers looked a lot different this year.

In Oxford, Miss., MIDN Isaiah Walker never put on a cap and gown, never walked across a stage, and never stood in front of a crowd in his dress blues—mameluke sword at his side—to swear an oath with his brothers in arms.

“Instead, I received an email from the university in early May stating my

graduation requirements had been reached and I had attained my degree. I was then able to put on my woodland MARPATs, stand in front of close relatives in my living room, look into a laptop camera, and swear the oath—soon after signing my commissioning warrant in that same room,” says Walker, now a 2ndLt. “In the Marine Corps we are proud of our heritage, we thrive on knowing our history and what it represents. COVID-19 has shown that even when we cannot exercise our traditions as Marines, we are still Marines, and there is still a mission to be accomplished.

Whether on a stage or in a living room, I had the privilege of commissioning into the best fighting force this nation has ever seen, and that is all that matters.”

USAFA cadet Chipu Chu and his classmates learned in early April that the Superintendent would graduate the class of 2020 much earlier than planned. Under gray skies, surrounded by the silence of an open pavilion devoid of family and spectators, the cadets spread across the open field in appropriately socially distanced chairs as U.S. Vice President Mike Pence delivered the commencement address.

“While we don’t quite look like the usual graduation at the Air Force Academy, let me tell you this is an awesome sight, and I wouldn’t be anywhere else,” said Pence. “The American people are doing their duty. Now comes your turn to do yours—to defend the people of this nation, and this we know you will do. For long after the coronavirus is defeated, your mission will go on.”

Chu, now a second lieutenant working on his Master’s degree at the University of Hawaii-Manoa, said he and the majority of his classmates were prepared to accept the new reality that this was not going to be a traditional commencement experience.

“Not having the expected Falcon Stadium graduation did not bother me at all. I was more than content to be able



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WALKER, USMC

to graduate and earn my ‘butter bars.’ I know for some this was a very big deal, because they were planning on inviting dozens of family and friends to graduation. In the end, I can say that the majority of my class was happy to have this unique graduation experience, knowing that the bond that we felt as a class during the last month was unforgettable.”

ENS Jeremy Douglass, USN, was among those expecting a large turnout of family and friends when he graduated from the Naval Academy.

“There is a certain amount of disappointment I have felt over not being able to have a graduation ceremony, especially since I was planning on having about 20 guests. However, the satisfaction in knowing I am doing my part in protecting others outweighs that disappointment. That is why I applied to the academy in the first place, and that’s why I am willing to sacrifice something that holds only sentimental value, to protect others.”

**BUT THE WEEKS** leading up to graduation, as the COVID-19 crisis was just getting under way, uncovered personal and spiritual challenges for some that previously might have gone unnoticed. The disruption of daily routines revealed one thing in particular to 2ndLt Walker—just how consumed he was with being busy.

“I do not say this in a negative light, as in the military if you aren’t busy with something, there is almost certainly something you should be doing. However, my busy life was starting to consume

me—it was beginning to pull me deceitfully away from the path God has set me on. I just never noticed until our world came to a screeching halt.”

When USCGA Cadet Brigit Jogan was living in Chase Hall with some 1,000 other cadets, there was no shortage of interactions. “I saw everyone at meals, formation, between classes, during classes, studying, on watch, working out... it was actually a struggle to ever be alone. Now, we are scattered around the country. Fellowship isn’t built in anymore.”

Jogan, who is now an ensign, went on to describe how the no-move orders revealed a lack of quality interactions she had before the pandemic, despite frequently being around others. “Now, when I get to talk to a Christian friend on the phone, we can’t talk fast enough about what we are learning and what God is doing—a far cry from wasting precious conversations by complaining about morning drill practice or assignments.”

Such revelations are lessons Jogan says will come in handy as she transitions to ensign life and isn’t surrounded by fellowship anymore. “I get to practice choosing God, spending time with God, and spending time in fellowship before I’m on my own,” says Jogan. “I get to learn how to live as a Christian without my academy support system right at hand, but still with support. I get to see the importance of staying in contact with other Christians.”

Throughout the ministry, God has been revealing Himself to members in variety of ways, such as bringing a fresh perspective to certain passages of Scripture that come to mind. As 2d Lt Chu

put it, he has “experienced God and His Scripture intimately in so many ways. Verses that have never struck a chord in me now reverberate loudly.”

And the chord that seems to ring loudest is summed up in one resounding word: *trust*. 2d Lt Chu said the COVID-19 period has been a time to refine his faith and trust in God, and doing so starts with understanding that even before COVID, we were never in control— “it was only a mirage.”

“Now, when that mirage has been stripped away, we can really learn to rest in God’s peace, one that is starkly different than that of the world’s,” said Chu. “I know this is a tough period for many, but I also know that God wants us to grow more intimate with Him, so if we remain steadfast onto God, then I know this period will not be wasted.”

ENS Douglass echoed that sentiment as he recounted the USNA OCF mission trip to Belize, just before the COVID shutdowns, in which Matthew 6:25-34 was impressed on the group through their interactions with some of the local people.

“Many of these people lived in extreme poverty, but when asked what we could pray for, they asked only for the health of their families. They relied on God for everything, trusting that he would take care of them. This was a bit of a paradigm shift from the head knowledge that God

takes care of us to the heart knowledge of that,” he said. “I know that everything will be alright. God is in control, even if my plans are having holes poked in them. If there is anything that I am learning in this crazy time, it’s to trust God more.”

2ndLt Walker says he has also learned to appreciate this season for what it is—a time of adversity and the showing of God’s sovereignty.

“Just as James 1:1-4 tells us, trials are inevitable, and the attitude we decided to take during those trials determines whether the goal of endurance attainment is reached. Over the last few months, we have had little to no control over the virus, our incomes, our travel plans, or even the adequate education of the younger generation. Yet in all of it, if we as a nation—as Christian military leaders—can see it for what it is, we can grow stronger and better equipped for future trials.”

**THERE ARE OTHER** blessings the lessons of virtual fellowship are teaching, too. For one, it is forcing the ministry and its members to embrace technology as a means of communication where adoption of such technology might not have been quick to catch on before the start of the pandemic.

LCDR Matt Peden, USN, who leads OCF at NAS Meridian, Miss., with his wife, Anna, says the online meeting format does have value that he plans to offer even after things return to “normal.”

“When we get back to normal ops, we plan to offer a virtual option for those

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**TSGT RYAN PADGETT, USAF**


who are not feeling well or whose children need an early bedtime, and the active duty can still participate while on det," says Peden. "Two of our members have joined remote ministry teams that began because of this pandemic. One is reaching out to those who are ill and facing death, and the other one is involved with a call center that answers questions people have about Christ."

Arnold of OCF Pensacola said they sometimes used online video calls, texts, and emails before the pandemic to maintain relationships with those they have mentored, and they are likely to expand the use of online video calls to maintain those relationships and also with those who have identified a willingness to serve as local leaders, POCs, and hospitality home hosts.

"Due to flight schedules, there are frequently last-minute adjustments or cancellations of coffee shop meetings," he said. "Once a relationship is established, the online video call option now seems like a great way of maintaining a weekly rhythm in the face of those unpredictable flight schedules."

With some of the restrictions for gathering and travel likely to remain in place for the foreseeable future, how effectively OCF can augment traditional studies with online or video sessions and can adapt to whatever the world's "new normal" may look like could go a long way in helping OCF in its mission over the next 75 years.

TSgt Padgett said he believes the key is to make sure we make the most of every opportunity as the Apostle Paul exhorts believers to do in Ephesians 5:15-17.

"I don't think any of us should maintain the attitude of 'hunkering down' until this crisis is over so that ministry can go back to the way it was. People are in need of the fellowship of Christ and our small groups more than ever," Padgett said. "This is a unique and big opportunity to meet people's needs when it's a BIG need! It doesn't require extra money, or extraordinary effort—only that we adapt as a ministry and make ourselves findable now, before the crisis is over. If we build those relationships in crisis, I'm hopeful that many of them will continue after it's over." 









MY STORY

Christian athlete and Marine aviator are two things 1LT Aaron Zimmerman wanted to be known for, but a Multiple Sclerosis diagnosis would forever change the way he sees himself.

# Crushing the Idols of Identity

BY 1LT AARON ZIMMERMAN  
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS



# If

my family had its own crest, it would include a lacrosse stick. My father, who played at Cornell and coached my brothers and me in youth hockey and lacrosse, put a piece of plywood on our barn for us to throw a ball against.

Every spring when the snow began melting, the three of us would leave our basement knee hockey arena to see who could rip a hole in the lacrosse net first. From age five, my dream was to play Division I lacrosse, so when I was recruited to play at the U.S. Naval Academy, I thought that dream had come true.

But during my four years there, I battled hard for playing time and saw little. I worked hard to move up the roster, but always fell short, which was frustrating. Was it those one or two bad plays, my size, my playing style—or that I simply did not have what it took?

Dad had always encouraged us to “remember who you are and where you come from” by staying focused on our true identity in God and not getting distracted by the ups and downs of sports or life. He modeled that standard of character, always reminding us of the

value he saw in us as his sons.

Playing lacrosse at Navy, however, became an obsession that both consumed me and sapped my joy of playing it as I slid into it becoming my identity. Comparing myself to others, I saw myself either as the scorned hero who could save the game if only given the chance or dejectedly as the team charity case.

Only when I chose to draw closer to God and willingly surrendered the idol of my definition of success did my joy in playing lacrosse return. Through prayer and Bible study, I remembered who I was and where I came from: a sinner saved by grace, the Holy Spirit dwelling within me, with a heavenly Father who loves me and has a plan for my life. Relationships with other Christian athletes (including my brothers, who were Division I lacrosse players, and my varsity athlete roommates) inspired me as a Christian athlete and helped me focus on my true identity. God led me to view lacrosse—and life—from a more God-centered perspective.

Now I’m tempted to define myself and my worth through my success as a husband or as a Marine Corps officer. During the grind of Naval flight training in Pensacola and studying hard for each day’s flight, I fought worry and doubt, and once again began placing my identity in success or failure rather than in Christ.

Remembering my lessons from lacrosse, I was quicker to reorient my identity and to seek community, this time in Officers’ Christian Fellowship. Col Chet Arnold, a retired Marine jet pilot, continually reminded us of our identity in Christ and how personal and professional excellence is built on that foundation. Prayer re-centered me in Christ. My inflight prayers after a bad landing or maneuver in the aircraft mirrored those after a bad shot or dropped pass in lacrosse. When I

chose to lay aside my worries, I regained my joy in flying, just as I had regained my joy in lacrosse.

I'm still learning the deep truths of James 1:2-4, "Consider it pure joy... when you face trials of many kinds, because you know the testing of your faith produces perseverance... that you may be mature and complete." My dream of becoming a Marine aviator came to an abrupt end when I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. I had been in a car accident a few months earlier and was given a precautionary CT scan on which a radiologist saw possible signs of MS.

Though the doctors thought it unlikely at my age and condition, they did an MRI to be safe. The day after my first flight in helicopter advanced training, a neurologist diagnosed me with MS from that MRI and told me my Marine Corps flying career was over. He explained that MS could cause episodes of numbness in the extremities and temporary or permanent blindness—all with no warning—which is unacceptable for a military aviator.

My wife and I were surprisingly at peace when the neurologist delivered the diagnosis. We realized that the car accident and CT scan had allowed this important early diagnosis and treatment, which, fortunately, decreases the likelihood of episodes and lowers the impact if they do occur.

However, my peace began to chip away and a sense of injustice emerged as I attended a close friend's winging ceremony. Disappointment and jealousy surfaced as the guest speaker commended the wingers' great accomplishments, and I was once again on the sideline.

Even though I know who I am in Christ, waves of disappointment and loss hit me when I turned in my flight suits, boots, and

unworn leather bomber jacket. A sense of longing wells up in me when I hear military aircraft fly overhead. It is then I choose to remember my incredible inheritance and identity as a son of God (Psalm 27:13-14; Revelation 21:7).

There was a time when I believed and expected that if I placed God above lacrosse or Marine aviation on my list of priorities, I would get my dreams. Then I thought about going back to the sideline after a senior year scrimmage, when the Holy Spirit brought Job's words to my mind: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). I don't pretend to have suffered as Job, but the shift in my outlook was similar to his.

As I think and pray about my current situation, I know that God works for good in life's struggles as we seek and trust Him (Romans 8:28). My experiences in lacrosse and flight school have brought me closer to God. These life experiences have shown me my immense need for God—and for Him to define my identity—for the things we desire are not the reward. Intimacy with God is the reward.

We can know pure joy in our struggles when we allow God to do His work in us. He gives and takes away as He works in and through us and this broken world that we may know and trust Him.

I know He is trustworthy regardless of circumstances. 

### About Aaron

Aaron, a 2016 Naval Academy graduate, is now a Senior Project Manager at Lockheed Martin. After departing flight training, he was redesignated and spent a year stationed at Cherry Point, NC, before being medically retired for MS. Aaron is currently experiencing no MS symptoms and is praying for God's continued provision over his health.





*Spring Canyon photos*

### **Aspentime 2019 at Spring Canyon**

*(above)* Impactful fellowship, great worship, and teaching sessions—and even a talent show. Those are some of the activities enjoyed by guests of the annual Aspentime Retreat at OCF's Spring Canyon Conference Center last fall. COL Steve and Miriam Shambach, USA (Ret.), serve as the retreat's guest ambassadors. Details on this year's retreat can be found on page 31, or by going to [bit.ly/aspentime](http://bit.ly/aspentime).

### **Work Days at Spring Canyon**

*(opposite, top)* OCF's Spring Break Service and Adventure weeks at the conference centers, geared specifically for cadets and midshipmen, were cut short by the impact of COVID-19, but not before some great work was accomplished. At White Sulphur Springs, hard-working crews helped build bunk beds for Camp Caleb, repair and extend pasture fencing, and clear downed trees from hiking trails. At Spring Canyon, cadets helped gut the upstairs of the Harvard chalet in preparation for renovations.





## Kitchen Renovation at Spring Canyon

*(left)* The cancellation of spring retreats at the conference centers gave Spring Canyon the opportunity for unencumbered work on kitchen renovations in Hartley Holmes Lodge. Rory Gillett (left), director of food services at Spring Canyon, gave Brig Gen David Warner, USAF (Ret.), former OCF Executive Director, a tour showcasing the improvements, such as the new cooler and a walk-through freezer.

### Joint Base Langley-Fort Eustis

(top)

Sam Tate, (back right), along with his wife, Dianne, sponsor and host 4 officers in each of the twice-yearly classes for the International Maritime Officers Course that take place at the USCG Training Station. The Tates, who have sponsored officers in the last nine classes, are also a part of the Joint Base Langley-Fort Eustis OCF group in the Hampton Roads Region. Maj Rob Crespo, USAF, (front center) is the current leader.



Photo by Sam Tate

### Fort Carson OCF

(bottom)

Over time, as members live life together, OCF small group gatherings become a deeply rooted fellowship of family. This Fort Carson OCF group in Colorado enjoys potlucks, celebrations, and other activities together, such as this send-off dinner for 1LT Aspen Doran, USA, (second from right) who was about to deploy.



Fort Carson OCF photo





*Spring Canyon photo*



*Ohio State OCF photo*

## Ohio State OCF

This virtual meeting of the Ohio State OCF group illustrates one aspect of COVID-19's impact upon small group meetings. In previous years, OCF local leaders Gwynn and Kit Vaughan would give personalized military Bibles to the newly commissioned officer candidates and pray over them.

## Rocky Mountain ROTC retreat

One of the ROTC retreats that was able to take place earlier this year was this Rocky Mountain ROTC retreat at Spring Canyon. Knowing who you are in Jesus was a key discussion point of the weekend retreat, where speaker MAJ Dean Rizzo, USAR, “did a wonderful job” encouraging the 19 “hungry to hear” mids and cadets who attended, said retreat organizer Lt Col Tom Falconer, USAF (Ret.). MAJ Rizzo taught on “Walking with Jesus in the Military.”



*White Sulphur Springs photo*

### **Eastern OCF ROTC retreat**

LTC Kwenton Kuhlman, USA, was the main speaker for the Eastern OCF ROTC retreat that took place earlier this year at OCF's White Sulphur Springs Conference Center. He spoke to more than 50 cadets and midshipmen from nine schools on the topic of the Christian officer as a leader in today's military. The weekend also included music by the USNA praise team, a senior officer panel from the Army War College, and a junior officer panel.

### **Send us your Ministry In Action photo**

For consideration in COMMAND magazine or other OCF communications, send your high-resolution photo to Karen Fliedner:  
**karen.fliedner@ocfusa.org**



## **Council approves Col Scott and Christie Fisher, USAF (Ret.), OCF's 6th Executive Director Couple**

Earlier this year, the OCF Council unanimously approved Col Scott and Christie Fisher, USAF (Ret.), as the ministry's next Executive Director Couple. They began their term on 1 June, after their predecessors, Brig Gen David and Lori Warner, USAF (Ret.), retired on 31 May. The Warners had served for 10 years.

Involved in OCF for 25 years, including as local leaders and on OCF Council, Scott retired after more than 27 years of service in the Air Force, where his duties ranged from the tactical to the strategic. Scott was also selected for key strategic positions, including Legislative Affairs in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Office of Security Cooperation in Baghdad, and Air Attaché to the U.S. Embassy in the Netherlands.

"Scott's successful career, ministry involvement at multiple levels and many organizations, supportive family, solid foundation in OCF, and dynamic personality are a testimony to a life well-lived at the intersection of faith, family, and the military profession," said Brig Gen Warner of his successor.

Of the Warners, CAPT Chris Blake, JAGC, USN (Ret.), OCF's Chief Operating Officer, said, "David and Lori's sacrificial service to the OCF has transformed this ministry in countless wonderful ways. Their gentle and very effective leadership will be much missed by the staff and members alike.

"We wish them fair winds and following seas as they chart a course of continued service to the Lord."

## **Other OCF retirements, new appointments**

In addition to the Warners' retirement on 31 May, were the 1 June retirements of Col Larry and Bobbie Simpson, USAF (Ret.), and Lt Col Steve and Rita Wade USAF (Ret.), respectively, as Family Outreach/Puget Sound OCF Field staff rep couple and USAFA OCF Field staff rep couple.

### **Appointments to new roles in OCF**

- (2019)—LTC Jim and Christina Harbridge, USA (Ret.), OCF Field Staff, Fort Leavenworth
- (2019)—Josh Jackson, Director of Communications, OCF home office
- 1 June—LTC Colin Wooten, USA (Ret.), Director of Field Operations, OCF home office
- 1 June—Col Hous Waring, USAF (Ret.), Director of Field Engagement, OCF home office
- 15 June—LTC Steve and Angela Kreh, USMA, OCF Field Staff, West Point

## **Col Mike Moyles, USAF (Ret.), loses battle with brain cancer**

Courageous to the end, OCF Council member Col Michael Moyles, USAF (Ret.), surrounded by the family he loved so well, left behind his long battle with brain cancer on 27 March to run into welcoming arms of his Heavenly Father.

Born in Germany, Mike traveled through Europe and later Korea with his family.

He graduated and was commissioned from the University of Portland with a degree



in electrical engineering and a minor in computer science. Mike held many titles during his 23-year Air Force career including Chief, IT and Mission Services Division, U.S. Northern Command, Peterson, AFB, CO.

His wife, Angela, wrote, “His passion for faith, family, and fitness is what he lived for. Mike was most comfortable speaking and teaching. His favorite places to speak were Officers’ Christian Fellowship, Young Life, hosting Bible studies, and the many churches that hosted him.

“If he wasn’t speaking, he was reading, learning and writing Bible studies,” said Angela. “He could captivate an audience within seconds. He was compassionate, articulate and animated. He always left the audience wanting more.”

Michael is survived by his wife, Angela; their daughter, Elizabeth; his mother; and a sister. Among the hundreds of tributes received from friends and co-workers, a favorite was from an airman colleague: “climb to glory, sir!”

A memorial service is planned for a later date. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the American Brain Tumor Association, Officers’ Christian Fellowship, or Woodmen Valley Chapel.

### **Council election results**

Earlier this year during the Council elections for the Class of 2023, these OCF members were selected: Maj Robert Crespo, USAF; COL Jeffrey Ginther, MC, USA (Ret.); and CDR Wendell Holmes, USN.

Council members elected to extend their terms, who are now in the Class of 2023, are

LT James Rader, USCG; LTC Steve Schmidt, USA; COL Ric Schumacher, USA (Ret.); and COL Rob Jassey, USA (Ret.).

Those now serving as Council Executive Committee are: COL Paul (Ric) Schumacher, USA (Ret.)—President; LTC Stephen Schmidt, USA—Vice President; LT James Rader, USCG—Secretary; and COL Rob Jassey, USA (Ret.)—Treasurer.

### **PEAK program for 18-24 year-olds**

Under the leadership of Andy Truitt, the team at OCF’s Spring Canyon Conference Center has been building the foundation for the ministry’s “PEAK” discipleship intern program. PEAK—“P” (define your Purpose), “E” (strive for Excellence), “A” (become Authentic), and “K” (experience Koinonia)—will begin at the end of August.

The PEAK program is open to young adults ages 18-24. The 6-8 interns selected for the first PEAK class will serve at Spring Canyon from 30 August to mid-May and then integrate into various summer staff positions. Contact Andy Truitt, [andy.truitt@springcanyon.org](mailto:andy.truitt@springcanyon.org), for more information or visit <https://bit.ly/peakintern>.

### **Open hearts, open homes, changed lives**

Chuck and Shirley Woodhead, who host and lead the OCF Bible study in south Pensacola, are seriously considering a relocation to a larger home to be able to host more effectively. The Woodheads love this group of flight students and retirees, who in turn speak of being blessed by the Woodheads and by being a part of the group. Jamie

and Jody Vandiver, who are tabbed as “dynamite hosts and leaders” by area leadership, have had several flight students from difficult family situations “adopted” into their family—really opening hearts by opening their home. At one young lady’s last meeting, after she had just received her wings, the connection between her and the Vandivers was palpable, as if they were sending off their own daughter.

### Local leaders equipped for ministry

The turnout at the third consecutive Eastern Leaders Conference at OCF’s White Sulphur Springs Conference earlier this year was “encouraging” to both the hosts and the leaders who organized the event. Leaders from up and down the East Coast and Colorado attended, as well as first-time leaders from Fort Drum, NY, and Fort Bragg, NC. The Fort Drum attendance was “direct fruit” of WSS’s Operations Director John Hoyman’s visit to build relationships there. It is felt that leaders are just starting to scratch the surface of the potential of what this weekend can do to encourage and equip ministry at the local level.

### Join us for Aspentime at Spring Canyon

#### Aspentime Retreat at Spring Canyon Conference Center, 25-27 September, Friday-Sunday

Enjoy Christian fellowship, fun, and vibrant teaching. The retreat is limited this fall to 50 people, based on late-July COVID-19 group restrictions in Colorado. Refunds would be issued if either SC or guests should have to cancel. For more information, contact COL Steve Shambach, USA (Ret.), at shambachsm@msn.com, or sign up for the retreat at <https://bit.ly/aspentime>.

# COMMAND

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COMMAND strives to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ in the U.S. Armed Forces by informing readers about His work through OCF to fulfill its mission “to engage military leaders in biblical fellowship and growth to equip them for Christlike service at the intersection of faith, family, and profession.”





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