



Greetings from the Heart of Army Aviation Fort Rucker, Alabama

By Ululani Packett

At the time of this writing, it is Valentine's week. Over the weekend, my husband presided over a funeral for a Soldier who died in Operation Iraqi Freedom and was buried in Franklinton, La. It is a policy set forth by the Chief of Staff of the Army that for every Soldier killed in the War on Terror, a general officer will preside over each funeral.

Then I attended a funeral service along with my husband here at Fort Rucker for CW4 Keith Yoakum, who died Feb. 2 in Iraq. However, this Soldier was an aviator which made the whole occasion personal and much closer to home. This Soldier was indeed a hero, but even more than that, he died fighting for his comrades in arms.

Keith Yoakum didn't have to be there, but chose to be because he wanted to make a difference. He represented the very best in the U.S. Army, and in an Army aviator. I was proud to see the show of support from the community and from the extended community as a whole. The outpouring and show of respect for this Soldier was remarkable, but this aviation community is unique.

Aviators are a close knit group, the best trained, the brightest and the very best the Army has. It is this special status that has been mentored by an organization we know as the Army Aviation Association of America for the last 50 years.

AAAA was built out of the vision from those aviators who fought in WWII and the Korean War. It has been behind the aviator throughout Vietnam, Grenada, Desert Shield and Storm, Somalia, the Balkans, and presently in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Just know that I am so very proud of our aviators and their families. They continue to perform beyond anyone's imagination.

I am equally as proud of those who support our aviation community and Soldiers here on the home front. You are a large part and the reason for which our Soldiers are fighting. You are the integral part of the strength and spirit behind the Aviation Branch. Thank you for all that you do and continue to do.

My husband Virgil and I are grateful for each of you knowing that we are better together and please know that each and everyone of you is "Above the Best!"

Best Wishes to All,
Ululani



Ululani Packett is the first lady of the Aviation Branch and the spouse of MG Virgil L. Packett II, commanding general of the U.S. Army Aviation Warfighting Center and Fort Rucker, Ala.

Editor's note: *We are grateful to Judy Konitzer for her outstanding commitment to provide timely updates to you the reader. This is Judy's final column as First Lady of the AAAA, but she'll be back as a contributing editor for the Spouses' Corner. Thank you Judy for your leadership and your great job on the spouse programs.*

So Long, But Not Good Bye

By Judy Konitzer

Tom's two year tenure as the president of the AAAA will be coming to an end at the close of the convention. I have tried to be an active participant during this time, and it has been an experience that I'll forever treasure.

I'm so proud to be associated with the aviation community and AAAA! Our organization, now celebrating its Golden Anniversary, exemplifies what the Aviation Branch and being "Above the Best" truly means. The legacy will live on with all of us doing our part to support the Army Aviation Soldier and family.

While the war in Iraq and Afghanistan continues, our fine and courageous Soldiers and their families are asked on a daily basis to make continuous sacrifices. We as an organization are mindful of their contributions, and we as a nation are truly blessed knowing that they are making a difference for future generations.

It is comforting to me to know that AAAA not only supports our Soldiers, but it also cares about our families.

This past year \$239,000 in scholarship aid was given to 148 recipients.

Our AAAA chapters requesting financial assistance for their pre-deployment ceremonies, organizational days, *Welcome Home* ceremonies and balls received over \$58,000 to help defray expenses; and financial assistance was provided to the families of fallen Soldiers. And the AAAA *Our Lady of Loreto* award was presented to 75 well-deserving spouses. Other monies spent in support of the Aviation community are covered in the president's column.

On another note, we were truly saddened by the loss of life and the devastation in Enterprise, Ala. due to the tornado on March 1. Tom and I had two daughters attend

Enterprise High School, and the death of eight students there brings it very close to home for us. I know from living in the Wiregrass how very supportive the community is, and I know that it has rallied around those who have been affected by this tragedy. Please recognize that our most sincere sympathy, loving thoughts and prayers are with all who are trying to rebuild their lives and their community.

The AAAA magazine for years has focused on updates from the Aviation Branch, units and industry.

This past year I felt that we needed to start a Spouses' Corner.

It has been well received and I'm so excited about the willingness of our spouses to contribute.

I have been asked to continue as a contributing editor for the column, and I'm honored to do so, but I will need your help to be able to continue bringing interesting family related articles to the attention of our membership. Please send me requests for articles dealing with particular topics and I will do my best to deliver them to you.

Another innovation begun last year was the "Family" panel during the convention. It too was well received, and we will be sponsoring one again this year. The theme is "Supporting the U.S. Army Aviation Soldier and Family."

Some of the issues being addressed are Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other related mental health challenges, stressors facing our children, updates on legislation, family readiness groups and funding them, and contract programs to assist families during deployment and reintegration.

Please join us on Saturday, May 12 from 9 to 10:30 a.m. for this informative session.

I'm looking forward to the celebration in Atlanta as we celebrate "50 Years Above the Best" for the Army Aviation Association of America.

Fondly,
Judy
Chairwoman
Spouses' Committee



AAAA President BG (Ret.) Tom and Judy Konitzer join Becky Pillsbury, center, for a congratulations photo. Pillsbury, spouse of MG James H. Pillsbury, was recognized for her efforts and contributions in supporting aviation Soldiers and their families with an induction into the Honorable Order of Our Lady of Loreto during the Tennessee Valley Chapter's first annual Army Aviation Ball held March 23.