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SINCE 1829

## New officers prepare for their futures

By Jenn Rowell  
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They came as individuals. They left as a team. They are the newest second lieutenants in the Air Force.

This class of 66 men and women received their commissions Wednesday after three grueling months of classroom and field training at Maxwell Air Force Base.

They crawled on their bellies, they memorized inspirational quotes, they climbed ropes, they raced against each other and against the clock, they learned to shoot and clean their weapons, they strategized — and always they led.

During the more trying times, the officer trainees — OTs — kept up their spirits by remembering their goal — graduation. Reminders were the second lieutenant bars tacked up on the ropes course and second lieutenant coins tucked in their ID holders.

"You've worked hard for this commission and we are proud," Col. Hans Palaoro told the new officers last week. "You've earned our respect. You've excelled."

### All for one, one for all

Tiger Flight 3-13 epitomizes teamwork, but it wasn't easy coming together so totally. It

### Command Decisions

Becoming an Air Force officer  
LAST IN AN OCCASIONAL SERIES

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took patience and determination by all 11 of the flight members to get through late nights of studying and early morning workouts.

Classmates and instructors alike noticed 3-13's unity, a unity perhaps even envied by the other five flights.

"I sure hope people can look across the room and say, 'I taught you something and learned something from you,'" Capt. David Finlay, the flight commander, told his new officers last week. "Not everyone can become an officer, and look at the team you formed here."

Every day, nearly 24 hours

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## Young Baptist preachers take different paths

By Eric Gorski  
The Associated Press

J.D. Greear persuaded his church to drop the word "Baptist" from its name, sell its historic building in Durham, N.C., and move into a local high school. Greear preaches in an untucked collared shirt, sport-coat and jeans. He generally avoids politics but signed a statement urging action on global warming.

Eric Hankins preaches in a suit and tie at First Baptist Church in Oxford, Miss., where hymns like "Brethren, We Have Met to Worship" are the norm. Change for Hankins means adopting a new discipleship curriculum. He questions whether humans cause climate change.

Both men are Southern Baptist pastors in their 30s and lead growing congregations. Both are theologically conservative and engaged in their denomination enough to travel to Indianapolis recently for its annual meeting and pastors' conference.

Yet their different approaches are part of an ongoing debate about the future of the 16.2 million-member Southern Baptist Convention: Is there room for the guy in the suit and the guy in the jeans? Should pastors shun politics or hand out voters' guides? Is saving the environment an issue to champion or a dangerous detour?

The nation's largest Protestant denomination is at a crossroads. After five decades of growth, membership fell last year and baptisms are dropping at an even faster clip. A growing number of Baptists see the apparent lack of relevancy, and are blaming not secular America and liberals but themselves for the problem.

The convention's new president, the Rev. Johnny Hunt of Woodstock, Ga., already has pledged to bring younger leaders to the table. A member of

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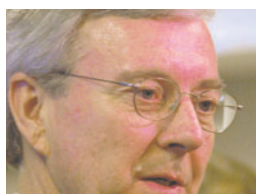
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**Kay Ivey**  
Treasurer  
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## Several department heads earn more than the governor does

By Markeshia Ricks and Sebastian Kitchen  
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► Alabama has some of the highest paid officials in the nation **Editorial, 2C**

Captains of the state's retirement, health care and education systems round out the top 10 highest paid employees in the 2008 Journal of Salaries, an annual list of all positions created by state statute.

Each makes more money than Gov. Bob Riley, whose salary is \$112,894 a year.

At the top is David Bronner, who oversees the Retirement Systems of Alabama. Bronner earns \$517,592.88, more than four times what Riley is paid, and is far out in front of the second-place finisher, Bradley

tary.

Twelve Cabinet members, for example, earn a yearly salary of \$87,936, including tourism chief Lee Sentell.

Page Walley and Neal Wade are among the Cabinet members who earn more — and more than their boss, Riley.

Walley, director of the Department of Human Resources, makes \$160,478.88, and Wade, director of the Alabama Development Office, earns \$159,499.20, according to the Journal of Salaries.

Cabinet members, who serve at the pleasure of the governor, aren't in public service for the money, Hutchinson said.

"They came here because they want to give back to the state and because they wanted to build a successful administration," she said. "None of them have ever asked the governor for a pay raise, and he sincerely appreciates all they do."

The journal, released to the Montgomery Advertiser by the state Comptroller's Office, also includes salaries for more than 140 positions created by statute.

Not listed, though, are the salaries of thousands of merit system employees, said Gina

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Photos by Mickey Welsh Advertiser

As part of the Prop and Wings race, the officer trainees run sprints at the Wright Flyer sculpture, above left, and touch the Prop and Wings statue, above right. The race highlights Air Force history and heritage, especially that of Maxwell. The course covers most of the historical sites on base, like static aircraft displays and buildings older than the Air Force. At each stop, flight commanders read a snippet of information about the site or the plane and its significance to the Air Force. Officer trainees do exercises at each stop that relate to the site, like 52 pushups under the wing of the B-52 bomber parked in front of the Air Force Research Institute. At bottom right, the new 2nd lieutenants toss their caps in the air after their graduation parade at Maxwell Air Force Base. Below, 2nd Lt. Kelsi Seckinger has her lieutenant bars pinned on by her parents, Denny and UnChu Seckinger, and her brother, Kyle, at the commissioning ceremony last week.



## Prepare: The former trainees receive their officer commissions

From Page 1A

a day, the Tigers were together. Not only did they hit the books and exercise together, they ate together and shared dorm rooms.

And like others who are together so much, they argued with each other, supported each other and found it hard to go their separate ways after graduation.

"It's bittersweet, because you're leaving a family behind," said 2nd Lt. Kelsi Seckinger, an Alabama native. "You have to learn to love each other or you won't make it."

### Extreme makeover

From Training Day One to Commissioning Day, the OTs were literally transformed. Even those with prior service acknowledged their growth.

"I was excited about learning how to be a pilot, and this has me excited to learn to be a leader," said 2nd Lt. Ransom Spurlock, who has four years experience as an enlisted airman.

"If you're going to grow as a person," he said, "this is a good place to do it."

But the growth didn't always just happen. The OTs often had to dig deep within themselves to accomplish the

mission at hand.

"You get to a place where you're not going to grow anymore unless you challenge yourself," said 2nd Lt. Bryan Allebone. "There were times when I'd wake up and say, 'I can run and not run fast. I could study just enough to pass.' But you don't want to hurt your teammates, you really want to try."

With the gold bars dangled in front of them like carrots, the OTs knew what they wanted. They just needed to figure out how to get it and stay in one piece.

"The end goal was clear, but the challenge was keeping our eye on the big picture and not getting bogged down in everyday details," said 2nd Lt. David Hornsby.

The new officers now can look back and reflect on the changes they've made.

"I've learned so much here," 2nd Lt. Erik Easterling said. "I know I've grown from the day I started here, it's an incredible difference."

### Family reunion

Being away from home and away from loved ones was tough for the OTs.

"Whether you know it or not, it

was often your support that got them through here," Palaoro told the families gathered for an awards ceremony the day before commissioning.

Many OTs — Hornsby, for one — had military relatives administer the oath of office and pin on their bars.

Hornsby stood before his father, an Air Force Reserve officer, for the oath of office. His stepmother pinned on his bars.

Finlay, the flight commander, encouraged the families to take as many pictures as they could.

"Commissioning as a second lieutenant is a once-in-a-lifetime thing," he said.

And most reached for a spouse, child or parent to hug and kiss when they were finished with the ceremonies.

2nd Lt. Armando Rodriguez grabbed his wife's hand and watched his two children play on the parade field. His son wore his blue dress hat.

With prior experience, Rodriguez knew what he was getting into — being away from everyday life for so long. He was more than ready to sleep in his own bed again.

The close friendships Rodriguez developed in OTS made all the sacrifice worth it — well, almost. Earlier in

the day, he joked with another OT: "I'm going to ask for one more week just so I can hang out with you guys."

Finlay gave the oath to several of his OTs and had gold lieutenant bars engraved with the squadron and flight names. Seckinger had planned on having someone else administer the oath for her, but that plan fell through at the last minute. She asked Finlay to step in. He didn't have time to get a set of engraved bars for her, though.

"One of the greatest honors was Capt. Finlay giving me his original gold bars," Seckinger said.

### Moving on

The OTs knew their commissioning wasn't the end. It was just the beginning.

Many will go directly to school for more training, primarily those who want to be pilots or navigators.

But they will all build on what they learned at OTS.

"It's amazing to say you got through it," Seckinger said. "When you think it's hard, you can look back at this and say, 'If I can survive that, I can do anything.'"

One of her biggest challenges was waking up at 4 a.m. each morning — she never imagined she could be so

tired.

"It's been an experience, one I'm never going to forget," Seckinger said. "I'm going to carry this one with me."

Seckinger grinned all morning on Commissioning Day, but she couldn't hide the tears after the final graduation ceremony.

The Air Force is a small community by military standards, and odds are high they'll see each other again.

"I think a lot of people realize we're forming relationships for a career," Allebone said.

After early mornings in cold spring weather and searing heat during field exercises, the members of Flight 3-13 finally got perfect weather for their last day at Maxwell.

It was the end of three months of hard work, stress and sleep deprivation. The OTs of Flight 3-13 were no more. They were the officers they'd always hoped they'd be. They'd earned respect — from each other and from Finlay.

At the end of the commissioning ceremony, as Finlay and others in the official party walked away, he turned to give one final order.

"Carry on, Tigers," Finlay shouted. Their response was quick and ferocious.

"Carry on, sir!"