NAWCAD Lakehurst honors African American service members

Guest speaker retired Capt. Sean P. Hoggs, I, Senior Aerospace instructor at Northern Burlington County Regional High School, discusses the history of African Americans in Times of War during the Black History Month event at NAWCAD Lakehurst Feb. 8. (U.S. Navy Photo)

JOINT BASE MCGUIRE-DIX-LAKEHURST, N.J. – More than 100 Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division (NAWCAD) Lakehurst personnel came together to recognize current and former African American service members during the 2018 Black History Month event Feb. 8.

The event, hosted by the NAWCAD Lakehurst African-American Pipelines Advisory Team (APAT) and Equal Employment Opportunity/Diversity Office, followed the national theme of honoring “African Americans in Times of War.”

Guest speaker retired Capt. Sean P. Hoggs, I, Senior Aerospace instructor at Northern Burlington County Regional High School, shared examples of the contributions African Americans have made during times of war for the United States, starting with the American Revolution to present day.

“We owe it to ourselves and those that follow in our footsteps, to learn about those African Americans who made history, who served against the odds all too often in positions far below their skill level and who laid the foundation for the diverse military we have today,” said Hoggs.

Hoggs touched on his personal experience in the Air Force and the opportunities joining the military brought him as a homeless 16-year-old.

“That young man would go on to become an Airman Basic, which he sees as the most significant rank for him, because he made it in, then a non-commissioned officer then eventually a commissioned second lieutenant,” said Hoggs. “That young man stands before you today on the shoulders of those who came before him as a testament to the opportunities afforded to him by the Armed Forces and the United States. I’m a proud combat veteran and most importantly, I’m a proud American.”
Hoggs reiterated the importance of participating in order to have a voice, tying that to the sacrifices African Americans have made through military service.

“We want to thank you for coming out to talk to us, sharing your thoughts and sharing the history,” said Mauricio Borrero, NAWCAD Lakehurst site integrator and head of Program Management while presenting Hoggs with a Letter of Appreciation. “It’s always good to understand where we come from and how we got here, and we’ll remember to participate to have a voice."

In line with the theme, the event included a special presentation honoring five members of the Lakehurst base community who are Active Duty, Reservists, National Guardsmen or Veterans.

“As we reflect on the sacrifices and contributions that African Americans have made in serving this great country in our military, let us remember that they do not stand alone, but beside their comrades and their brethren who are fighting and defending our country together for our protection,” said Wanda Staton-Riggins, APAT site lead.


“Looking out to the crowd, it’s always great to see such a diverse community gathering because that’s really what this is all about,” said Chris Reymann, APAT Executive Leadership Council champion and Logistics Department site lead, during his closing remarks. “How we’re going to continue to move forward is to bring different people together and continue working together. Diversity is what gives us strength and helps us overcome challenges and work through difficult problems.”

The APAT is looking into how to increase diversity in the workplace, both through hiring and promotions, but also through inspiring future generations’ interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), said Staton-Riggins.

They’ve partnered with Lakewood Middle School to provide tutoring to students in math and science. Since January, they’ve met with students once a week to help them move forward in the STEM disciplines.

They are also planning a base tour to show students the opportunities available working as a civilian in STEM for the U.S. Navy.

“I think that it’s important to reach these students at that age because if we can spark their interest in science, technology, engineering and math then they’re going to be our future scientists and engineers,” said Staton-Riggins. “They’re right here in our backyard, so what better way than if they can have careers here? That’s why it’s really important and I am fortunate that I have the team that I have. This is a team effort and I’m just really appreciative of that.”
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Employees view displays honoring five members of the Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst community who are Active Duty, Reservists, National Guardsmen or Veterans during the Black History Month event at NAWCAD Lakehurst Feb. 8. (U.S. Navy Photo)

The NAWCAD Lakehurst African-American Pipelines Advisory Team (APAT) poses with leadership and honored guests during the Black History Month event at NAWCAD Lakehurst Feb. 8. (U.S. Navy Photo)