

# Dept. of Military Affairs: Wisconsin Air National Guard inducts newest Hall of Fame members

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by Vaughn R. Larson

MADISON, Wis. — The Wisconsin Air National Guard inducted three outstanding members — retired Col. David Romuald, retired Chief Master Sgt. Gregory Cullen, and retired Col. Christopher Charney — into its Hall of Fame during a formal ceremony Sept. 16 at the 115th Fighter Wing.

The Wisconsin Air National Guard Hall of Fame recognizes those members who served above and beyond what is normally considered outstanding or exemplary. Inductees are recognized for continuous exceptional job performance, implementing innovative programs, enhancing the combat effectiveness of the Wisconsin Air National Guard, and enhancing public support. Being inducted confirms that their service brought great credit to the nation, the state of Wisconsin, and the Wisconsin Air National Guard.

Romuald joined the Air Force in 1981 and was commissioned as an officer in 1988 upon graduating from the Reserve Officer Training Corps program at San Diego State University. He flew the F-16 on active duty, and joined the Wisconsin Air National Guard in 1997 as an evaluator pilot with the 176th Fighter Squadron. He served as operations director for the Wisconsin Air National Guard, and commanded Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center during a time of historic

transformation.

Cullen joined the Air Force in 1989 as an air traffic controller. He joined the Wisconsin Air National Guard in 1996 and served in the same role at Volk Field before being assigned as the airfield manager there. In 2012 he became the Wisconsin Air National Guard's first full-time state command chief, where he also served in numerous national level roles and spearheaded a variety of national initiatives. He was specifically chosen to participate in the Air National Guard Enlisted Grades Review Process, helping to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of grades among Air Force occupations. He also developed programs in Wisconsin to professionally develop lower enlisted troops as well as first sergeants.

Charney enlisted in the Wisconsin Air National Guard in 1983, and became an intelligence officer in 1994. He was regularly involved in training events and operational readiness evaluations. Between 1993 and 2005 he deployed as chief of intelligence or intelligence flight commander in support of air refueling, airlift and combat search and rescue operations during 12 combat or contingency missions in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2005 he was the first Wisconsin Air National Guard officer to become the joint director of intelligence and security, simultaneously serving as the Wisconsin Air National Guard's director of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

Brig. Gen. David May, Wisconsin's deputy adjutant general for Air, spoke about all three inductees. Prior to becoming deputy adjutant general, May was Romuald's successor as Volk Field commander, and acknowledged the difficult task of keeping the base viable and its Airmen motivated during troop reductions.

"It all really came down to this," May said. "When the director of the Air National Guard decided to revitalize the [Combat Readiness Training Centers] shortly after your retirement, and we were back in business, Volk Field was ready because you held the line to keep Volk Field viable. And all that followed is to your credit."

Romuald said the business model for Volk Field was pulled out from underneath during his tenure.

“We went through some pretty tough times there,” he acknowledged, crediting three chief master sergeants with devising ways to keep Volk Field viable.

“We took on a lot of missions that we never did before,” Romuald explained. “We kept our people busy, we kept them engaged. We kept the Guard Bureau aware that Volk Field was willing to step up and do what it took. And as you can see now, it’s one of the most successful CRTCs. I think the Guard Bureau sees the value that it didn’t see before.”

Romuald also noted the work during his tenure to modernize the training airspace over Volk Field — “designed for the P-51s back when the Air National Guard first flew here,” he said — to incorporate fifth-generation fighters. That would eventually factor into the decision to field the F-35 at Truax Field in Madison.

May recalled that when he commanded the 54th Civil Support Team, made up with Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers and Airmen, Cullen was the first senior leader he invited to speak to the unit.

“I recall distinctly how he took interest in the challenge of managing our very few Airmen often overlooked in that nontraditional duty,” May said. “It was clear to me as I got to know him that he was an Airman’s Airman. Like all great chiefs, he focused on Airmen and he was willing to do whatever was necessary to support them.”

Command Chief Master Sgt Meredith Conn also lauded Cullen during the ceremony.

“As the first full-time state command chief for the state of Wisconsin, his list of accomplishments is long,” Conn said, “and became the benchmark for all of us command chiefs that followed him. He’s impacted the lives and careers of thousands of Airmen.”

“I did my small part as a spoke in the wheel,” Cullen said, “but it takes so many dedicated Airmen to get the jets in the air, the training to occur, and the people to get paid, no matter what base you’re located at. Any one of them could be Hall of Fame candidates, in my opinion.”

Trying to comprehend his Hall of Fame induction, Cullen recalled advice he gave other Airmen seeking to advance in rank or be selected for assignment or schools.

“You have to know your job and be good at it, you have to have good timing, and you have to have a little luck,” Cullen said. “The first one, you’re very much in control of. The other two, not so much.”

May credited Charney with helping him successfully transition from active duty in 2009.

“It was from him that I began to learn the Guard,” May said, “specifically how to balance duties on drill weekend in the Air Staff Joint Staff, how to coordinate becoming a part-time Joint Staff and full-time staff across the month between drills. And he was always critically engaged in the development of the Joint Staff. He played a central role in professionalizing all of us in preparation for some future devastating domestic event, even if we weren’t sure what that might be.”

For his part, Charney said he had the opportunity to serve with great people who made high-performance teams.

“I served with people who were creative and innovative and who taught me the importance of continuous process improvement,” Charney said. “Great organizations become greater when their members leave the organization in better shape than when they found it. I’m forever grateful for their example.”

“The Wisconsin Air National Guard is the greatest in the United States,” Charney continued. “It’s not a tagline — I truly believe that. The last two years, working on challenging missions like supporting national elections, supporting the COVID-19 pandemic response, civil unrest — just makes me so proud that I was part of this organization. And that’s because of the great individuals I served with.”

Romuald also reflected on his time in the Wisconsin Air National Guard.

“Once you retire from the Guard, it’s almost like you’ve lost a limb — you still feel part of the organization, but you know it’s not there anymore,” Romuald said. “It’s that phantom pain, and it takes a while to get over that.”

All three inductees said they were honored and humbled to be inducted into the Hall of Fame.

“Being inducted into the Wisconsin Air National Guard Hall of Fame wasn’t a goal of mine, but it’s sure an honor that I’m willing to accept,” Cullen said, “and I’ll be forever grateful.”