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NEWS FOR DCMA PROFESSIONALS

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News[<< Express Home](#)**Climb high, fly low**By Matthew Montgomery
DCMA Public Affairs
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FORT WORTH, Texas – When Air Force Maj. Robert Marshall joined the military, the Air Force motto was “Aim High” – something Marshall took literally.

Marshall is currently a member of a five-man team participating in an international program known as the U.S. Air Force Seven Summits Challenge. The purpose of the unofficial program is to take Air Force and American flags to the top of each continent’s highest peak.

“If successful, America will be the first country to have a team of military members reach the top of all the famous seven summits,” said Marshall.

The love for extreme altitudes also carries over into Marshall’s professional career with the Defense Contract Management Agency in Texas. “There’s just something about being above the daily fray of life,” said Marshall. “Whether it’s standing atop a massive peak or nimbly flying military aircraft, I can truly appreciate what’s around me and smile at just being alive.”

Marshall said switching from combat operations to his role at DCMA was an enormous change, but one he finds very rewarding. “When I realized how important DCMA’s role is in providing combat-ready weapons to the warfighter, many of which would soon be flown by my friends, I was excited to ensure they got the best quality possible,” said Marshall. “Getting the chance to work with the production, quality and contracting teams of both the contractor and DCMA has been a great learning experience I never thought I would have as a pilot.”

In October, Marshall took a break from flying and joined the team to conquer Mount Kosciuszko in Australia. This marked the sixth summit the group has conquered. “Once at the top, we proudly displayed the American and Air Force flag,” said Marshall. “The red, white and blue colors were a stark contrast to the snow-covered mountains surrounding us.”

“After the flags were planted, a few of us did 50 pushups on the summit to highlight our commitment to good personal fitness and to honor service members who have made the ultimate sacrifice since the beginning of the war on terror,” continued Marshall. “On each of the past summits, team members have done pushups, setting what is thought to be a record number of high-altitude pushups on three of the mountaintops.”

Members from the Royal Australian Air Force accompanied them on the climb. “In today’s world of multinational forces, we thought it would be great to climb with counterparts from our host nation,” said Marshall. “Seeing the Australians carry their flag next to ours as we went up was a reminder of the great history our two nations share and the benefits of working with militaries around the world.”

While the ascent was rewarding, Marshall said descending from Mount Kosciuszko was the highlight of the trip. “Another member on the team and I took our skis to the summit. Once the rest of the team had begun their trek downhill with snowshoes, we set off on skis for a beautiful descent through fresh spring snow,” said Marshall. “It always makes me smile to see the stars and stripes flying strongly in the wind and on this day I was grinning from ear to ear.”

To physically prepare for the hike in Australia, Marshall said the group mainly focused on basic fitness. “I found going to the gym three times a week, doing a mixture of cardio and weights was more than adequate,” said Marshall. “We didn’t have to worry about technical skills because there were no crevasses, fall hazards or vertical climbing.”

The last summit will not prove as easy for the group. The culminating climb will be the ascent to the highest peak of all, Mount Everest, at 29,029 feet.



Air Force Capt. Graydon Muller (right) and Air Force Maj. Robert Marshall, members of the Air Force Seven Summits Challenge team, proudly display the Air Force flag from the summit of Mount Vinson. The group made the climb to Antarctica’s highest peak in December 2010. (Photo courtesy of Air Force Maj. Robert Marshall)



Air Force Maj. Robert Marshall, Defense Contract Management Agency functional test pilot, and Phil Ershler, well-known American mountaineer, do pushups on the 16,067-foot summit of Mount Vinson in Antarctica. Marshall achieved a personal goal atop the mountain - 70 pushups in 52 seconds. (Photo courtesy of Air Force Maj. Robert Marshall)

"My colleagues at DCMA are often fascinated with the photos hanging in my office of the Air Force and American flags atop Antarctica's highest peak. When they learn I started a project to climb the seven summits and we are just one peak from making history, they get excited and ask when we're going to take on Everest," said Marshall. "Their support has been real uplifting."

To prepare for Everest, the team is planning at least one more major climb to hone their skills and solidify their teamwork. "If we can make the time, a climb in the Himalaya or in Alaska would work best. However, we have shorter climbs available if necessary," said Marshall. "In addition to mountaineering, our team members will continue to maintain their excellent physical fitness at Air Force gyms and through weekend hiking, rock-climbing and running events."

The group is expected to tackle Everest in May 2013. "The past six climbs were 100 percent successful – proof we are experienced and prepared for our final summit," said Marshall. "While it may be a demanding challenge, the combination of our Air Force training and personal drive means the sky is the limit. We are ready and excited to take American and Air Force flags to the top of the world." .



Members of the Air Force Seven Summits team climb Antarctica's highest peak, Mount Vinson. (Photo courtesy of Air Force Maj. Robert Marshall)



The Air Force Seven Summits team and members from the Royal Australian Air Force proudly display their flags atop Australia's highest peak, Mount Kosciuszko, following their climb in October 2011. (Photo courtesy of Air Force Maj. Robert Marshall)