

# NOTES FROM THE:

## Air Force Accounting and Finance Office

by Col L.C. Williams

For my first article as the Director of the Air Force Accounting and Finance Office (AFAFO), I want to take you back to the Winter Olympics this past year in Salt Lake City. The theme for the 2002 Winter Olympics was **Light the Fire Within**. This theme was very appropriate because in terms of medals won, this was arguably the most successful Olympics for the US team by far since Americans began competing in the games. Simply stated, the American competitors lit their fires within and took their skills/talents to new heights, smashing the team goals set at the beginning of the games by a wide margin. Instead of just achieving the team goal of winning 20 medals, they won 34. This was an astronomical feat especially when considering the most medals won by a US team previously was 13! I firmly believe the *sleeping giant* that was awakened in America as a result of 9-11 had a lot to do with these amazing results. The renewed sense of patriotism and pride in this country made those fires within burn hotter than ever before. On a different battlefield, America's might was mobilized again—this time on the greatest sports stage in the world, the Olympics!

Now it's time for us, the financial management community, to go for the gold and make it to the medal stand in our daily operations. The challenges and opportunities for all financial management personnel are of Olympic proportions. We are more than ever challenged to find better and more efficient ways to get the job done. In other words, we have to transform now to keep pace with the changes and to become a strategic partner with many organizations to keep our Air Force the world's best! Many of the initiatives we are embarking upon today and tomorrow will culturally change the work environment. Consequently, each of us will need to change as well. In watching the Olympics for 17 days and nights, we witnessed some unbelievable performances by ordinary people. Many were just like you and I, working in regular jobs. Several had to overcome unbelievable situations and had beaten the odds to achieve their dreams. I believe there is an Olympian in each of us and now it's time for us to **Light the Fire Within** in order to achieve our objective for transformation. It doesn't matter what job you are doing, you have to be willing to do the very best you can—your reputation depends on it! Dr Martin Luther King once said *if you happen to be a garbage collector, be the very best*. Those fires burning deep down within

each of us can easily be brought to the forefront by developing a 100% positive attitude—very simple equation but sometimes difficult to achieve if you are not focused on positive results! We depend greatly on our systems, but it's our human capital that makes the difference—stay focused and stay positive as we ride the transformation train to the future! Here's the way ahead for a couple of the issues we are working in AFAFO:

**Accounting Division.** The second most commonly used word next to **Transformation** is **Metrics**. OSD has developed performance metrics that measures services mostly provided by DFAS, however, these metrics are by Service and does not allow breakout to a MAJCOM or base level office. Additionally, SAF/FM has established performance metrics to measure data internal to SAF/FM. Now and after gaining feedback from our last FSO conference, we feel it is time to standardize Air Force-wide metrics that measure the performance by MAJCOM and base within the MAJCOM in several key areas. This will provide MAJCOMs a quick snapshot to compare themselves with other MAJCOMs, foster the exchange of ideas on what works and what does not work, and maybe create some of that Olympic competitive spirit to push us toward excellence and benchmarking!

The proposed metrics were staffed to the MAJCOM/FMs and FMFs in August 2002. The majority of responses approved of the metrics and also asked for several more. The metrics we are implementing include: Interest Penalties (with five top reason codes); Invoices not Scheduled for Payment (TQ79); Travel Pay Timeliness; Separation Accuracy; Outstanding Orders and Advances; Lost Discounts; MAFR Accuracy; SG Timeliness; NULOs; RA/Contingency Training; and two more added at the request of several MAJCOMs include Dormant Obligations and Military Pay Problem Cases. Most of the metrics will be obtained centrally here in the AFAFO, but several will require manual submissions (example: Travel Pay Timeliness; SG Timeliness; RA/Contingency Training) by the FSOs to their MAJCOMs. Early next year, we plan to develop a web-based program where bases and MAJCOMs can input their manual submissions. The central data will allow MAJCOMs to review the performance of their bases.

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The web-based program will also allow MAJCOMs to see other MAJCOMs summary level performance for comparison purposes.

Additionally, the web-based FM Self-Inspection Program (SIP) is now functioning properly. The program was moved to an Oracle program and has drastically increased the access speed. Your folks should now be able to use the SIP without the long delay experienced over the past couple of months—feedback has been extremely positive. Over the next several months, we will put together a task force to review certain disciplines within the SIP to update and/or delete questions as well as review the regulation references. We have received feedback that there is duplication of questions and some questions are no longer applicable.

As you may be aware, the FM Self-Inspection Program (SIP) is a tool provided to the network to standardize the Quality Assurance (QA) program. It consists of Tier 1 tasks that if not done properly could lead to fraud or an internal control failure and Tier 2 tasks that represent a critical work process but not an internal control issue. MAJCOMs can add Tier 3 tasks for those unique tasks for their network. Each *yes* or *no* response to a task requires the user to provide a written explanation of what was reviewed which will reduce the possibility of “pencil whipping”. The web-based FM SIP provides a discrepancy tracking form to highlight action taken on “no” answers. The program also allows the quality assurance manager (QAM) and Comptroller to create reports revealing the percentage of completion by the different sections and the percentage of questions answered “no”. Finally, a MAJCOM QAM can track the completion and performance of each of the bases within their command. We recommend that each MAJCOM coordinate and work with their MAJCOM/IG to use the SIP tasks during their reviews. This will ensure that everyone is singing from the same sheet of music and cut down on paperwork and confusion.

**Finance Division.** The majority of significant issues on the finance side continue to fall in the military pay arena. While we have made great strides over the past several months in addressing pay problems and their root causes, especially with the high level of visibility and support provided by the Personnel/Pay Council, we still have a way to go. Unfortunately, there are no quick and easy fixes for some things, such as MilPDS and DJMS system problems. However, we have made progress in the realms of teamwork, customer service, and training. The biggest step we have taken is getting the FM and DP communities working together as a team at all levels—Secretariat, Air Staff, MAJCOM, and wing. At the wing level, this has taken shape in the form of the One-Stop Customer Service Plan and use of the Case Management System (CMS). Feedback from personnel who performed Staff Assistance Visits (SAVs) at the wings clearly showed that installations with effective communication between the FSO and MPF had fewer military pay problems. Full implementation of the One-Stop Customer Service Plan and CMS will help fuel the communication, cooperation, and teamwork among the FSO and MPF to work pay problems together. This will provide benefit to the member rather than pointing fingers and running the member all over the base in search of a solution. As a reminder, the One-Stop Customer Service Plan calls for weekly meetings between the FSO and MPF chiefs to review cases and recommends FM and MSS commanders, jointly brief their wing commander once a month on the status of pay cases. It is critical that all bases use CMS as their management tool to work pay problems. CMS is an exceptional system developed by our strategic partners at AFPC. It was developed as a tool for the FSO and MPF to manage and track pay problems, providing the ability to transfer cases to the applicable agency (FSO, MPF, AFPC, or DFAS) to work. In addition, CMS: 1) provides extensive visibility and oversight of individual pay problems at all levels, especially aged cases, 2) provides the ability for MAJCOMs, AFPC, AFAFO, and DFAS to perform trend analysis and identify significant problem areas, and 3) serves as a tool to identify the scope of pay problems AF-wide, allowing senior leaders to make decisions and apply resources as necessary to take corrective action. This is a first ever product and is transformational!

In closing, as with the athletes in the Olympics, we need the whole FM team on board to be successful. We can't do it with just a few faithful comptroller personnel—we need all of you doing whatever it takes to make FM of the future, the best it can be. So ***light those fires within*** and take your performance to the Olympic level.