

A Profile: Col. David Mietzner By Wanda Laukkanen

Making a difference in other people's lives is what drew David Mietzner, O.D. '84, to study optometry at Pacific University. But that desire to aid others has taken him further than he ever realized while in school in Forest Grove. He not only is involved in eye care in the Air Force, but is currently the commander of a surgical unit of a hospital and responsible for the health care of thousands of military personnel and their dependents.

Promoted to a full colonel in 2004, Mietzner's official title is Commander of the 99th Medical Group's Surgical Operation Squadron at Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas, Nevada.



"My current surgical operations commander job is very unusual for an optometrist – it's kind of a rare bird," he notes.

In his Nellis Air Force Base position, Mietzner oversees some 200 people, including 40 surgeons in various specialties, plus an 80-member women's health and birthing section that delivers more than 700 babies annually. He's also in charge of six operating rooms and three endoscopies suites with OR nurses and scrub technician staff who sterilize and maintain state-of-the-art instruments. A 20-member anesthesia staff and a 15-member post-anesthesia care unit, which deliver more than 4,000 procedures per year, are also under his command.

"I've been successful in dealing with some strong provider personalities as they know I'm not a surgeon," he says, *"But, they do know I'm a credentialed provider who understands military medical provider burdens."*

Mietzner notes that everyone under his command *"deploys once every 18 months for six months,"* he says. *"I facilitate training and keep them current in trauma care...I try to challenge them daily so when deployed, our best will be taking care of our nation's best."*

"The outcome has been successful.... if we can get our injured to our deployed medical facilities within an hour, they have a 98 percent chance of survival, whereas in Vietnam, it was less than 70 percent," he notes,

Mietzner says that he feels blessed and lucky to have the career that he has.

"The Air Force turned out to be a means for me to attain a higher calling and make a health care difference for others and our nation's defense," he says. *"The ability to make aviators and other service members see better ...by giving them a combat and survival edge gave me a sense*

of purpose...So, I marvel that myself, as an optometrist, can be a part of facilitating this successful medical outcome for our nation's defense."

Mietzner is scheduled to leave the Las Vegas post in August to serve at Wilford Hall Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas. This facility is the Air Force's largest medical center and Mietzner will be the chief optometrist in a five-optometrist clinic that oversees all new Air Force inductees.

Mietzner arrived at Pacific's College of Optometry in 1980, after graduating with a bachelor of liberal arts degree from Concordia College (now University) in Portland. In addition to his optometry degree at Pacific, he also earned a bachelor's degree in vision science in 1983.

"I went to Pacific from Concordia because I wanted to be involved in health care and optometry was a primary care health profession that I felt would be a vocation where I could make a difference in others' lives," he says "I never dreamed that optometry would lead me to being a surgical squadron commander in the Air Force."

"Pacific University gave me an outstanding optometry education," he adds.

"The entire faculty was firm, but fair and with today's advent of on-line learning, nothing beats the quality education from a dedicated staff and oversight that Pacific provided me....Producing good health providers requires preceptors and dedicated educators that gives Pacific the edge over other competing health care programs."

Mietzner joined the Air Force partly, he says with a laugh, because he wanted to go overseas but adds, *"It took me 15 years to do that."* His first assignment was at Fairchild Air Force base near Spokane, Wash. While there, he earned a master's degree in organizational leadership from Gonzaga University. He later served at bases in Texas, California and finally, overseas in England for three years. He also was deployed on a military medical mission to Mozambique in 2001.



Mietzner is married to Joanne Heins and has two children, Aaron, 15, and Laura, 13. A native of Rupert, Idaho, he is a dedicated sports buff. He skied on the Air Force Ski Team for a number of years, and enjoys many recreational activities, including outdoor activities such as rafting, camping and attending his children's activities.

Left to right: The Meitzner family: David, Joanne, Laura and Aaron.