Sacramento, California Welcomes USAWOA's Annual Meeting 14-18 October 2013

Life Member Helps Thousands with CAC Issues!

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ABOVE AND BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

In anticipation of the Army's decision to limit AKO access only to holders of military Common Access Cards (CACs), the USAWOA warns all retirees to log into the USAWOA portal site (www.usawoa.net) and change their email addresses to a different one, if they haven't already done so. No definitive date for the change has been announced, but all indications are that sometime summer of 2014 based on this article (http://www.army.mil/article/106692/) Users will no longer be able to connect with any AKO services (including email).

That being said, we know that the majority of our Members have a CAC. With the cessation of password access to AKO, many will be struggling with the task of setting up their home computers to facilitate CAC usage. As such, we thought it appropriate to introduce Lord Fairfax Silver Chapter Member CW3 Mike Danberry.

In November 2007, CW3 Danberry, an expert on "all things CAC," set up a self-funded website (MilitaryCAC.com) in his personal crusade to fill what he viewed as a force-wide deficit in CAC training. Since then, he has devoted thousands of hours of his personal time to helping CAC users with almost every conceivable problem they may have. We hope that our interview with him will be instructive, and that all readers will appreciate his dedication and personal commitment.

Q: How did your interest in CAC-related information start?

A: In 2005, the requirement for CAC logins started to increase. I knew this could present a problem for many Soldiers. Realizing that my knowledge on CAC could be helpful to others, I set up MilitaryCAC.com (https://militarycac.com/) in November 2007. It now provides more than 114 individual pages of CAC information, including how to set up a home computer for military business and other benefits afforded to military personnel, such as free antivirus software and the discounted Microsoft Office via the Home Use Program.

Q: Do you really answer emails (and call confused users) on your own personal time?

A: Yes. I answer emails as often as I can during the day. During my free time, I'm on my phone replying to people's questions for both MilitaryCAC.com and the AKO CAC Resource Center. I take calls mostly on weekends (unless I have Reserves). I help a few people during the week as well. But the majority of support is via email.

Q: How much time do you typically spend assisting people and managing both sites?

A: It is hard to say since I have integrated it into my life, but on average it's between two to six hours per day. I check email during lunch and before I leave work, and call people during my drive home. Some evenings I'm on the phone until I go to bed. Together with site-maintenance, it seems like a full-time job some days.

Q: What is your motivation for dedicating so much of your personal time and income to this project?

A: I grew up believing that some people like to create problems, so I've taken it upon myself to create solutions. When the government decided we would use CACs for everything, there was little information provided to users. For example, commanders require personnel to digitally sign evaluations, but many Soldiers don't know how – this is where the two websites I maintain come in. This education effort should be done by the government (which is mandating CAC usage). Even though it isn't, I want to be part of the solution and not just another Soldier complaining about why or how it "should" be done and taking no action. No one can accuse me of being part of the problem when it comes to CAC use.

Q: So users find your site through Google, but where do you find your information, and how did you learn so much about CACs?

A: I am a former mechanic, so I know how to troubleshoot problems. When CACs were initially issued to government personnel in the early 2000s, I used those same skills to start learning about CACs. I was a DA civilian for the Army Reserve and issuing ID cards for Soldiers was one of my additional duties. I now look at every email and every phone call as a learning opportunity. I guess you could say my experience comes from never taking the easy way out by saying "It can't be done." I do receive occasional emails from other IT personnel who have found some fixes, but the majority is from my time helping people individually.

Q: How do you manage to keep up with hardware and software changes?

A: I subscribe to different mailing lists, hear from the field, and have different vendors who supply me with information about individual products. Beyond that I am a true techie. I love computers and I love helping people with computer problems. I wear three mobile phones: an Android, an iPhone, and a BlackBerry. That's how I can talk intelligently about each platform. At home, I currently have 12 computers running six versions of Mac OS X and every version of Windows from XP to 8. I am trying to stay ahead of the crowd by testing new versions of Apple and Microsoft operating systems prior to release. Because I know that on day one, someone will ask me, "why doesn't it work?"

Q: Obviously not every Soldier is as tech-savvy as you are, but why is it that so many users have issues accessing AKO with a CAC from home?

A: Many Soldiers don't know where to start, so they plug in their CAC reader and expect it to work – without reading any of the instructions. They want it to be that easy, but there are far too many variables for that to be the case. I take the time to educate them about the multiple factors involved, as well as how to identify – and work around – the settings and issues unique to their computers. I see a lot of access problems related to browsers or certificates. Not having the DoD certificates and not having Internet Explorer (IE) at factory default can create problems. My Making AKO Work with Internet Explorer (IE) (https://militarycac.com/makeyourcacwork) presentation walks people through the fixes for most IE/certificate problems. Other problems arise when users assume all Web browsers are created equal. Unfortunately, that's not the case. For example, Firefox needs special treatment because it does not use the Windows "internet options" like Internet Explorer and Google Chrome do.

Q: Speaking of CAC readers, there is a passionate debate on whether the DoD should provide them to Soldiers. Do you have any thoughts on the topic?

A: I personally feel a CAC reader "should be" standard issue to every Soldier, just like our uniforms and TA-50 (which is not the case).

Q: So if people have a question, how do they get in touch with you?

A: I ask that users take time to look at either of the websites I maintain: MilitaryCAC.com (https://militarycac.com); or the AKO CAC Resource Center (https://www.us.army.mil/suite/page/241504). In the vast majority of cases, the answer will be there already. The search function on MilitaryCAC.com searches the entire site via Google. If the answer is not there, or they're still stumped, they can fill out the online contact form to reach me. The form gives me details I need to troubleshoot the problem. This is very important, because there are currently four different versions of

Windows (XP, Vista, 7, and 8) and five versions of Mac OS X (10.4.11, 10.5.8, 10.6.8, 10.7.5, and 10.8.4). There used to be roughly five or six different model CACs issued (now down to two, unless people ignored the requirement last year to update to the Oberthur 5.5 or Gemalto 144 CACs) and more than 50 different types/models of CAC readers on the market. This equates to between 1,200-1,800 possible combinations, and each one can send me down a different path, depending on what they tell me.

Q: When you're not managing two sites, answering emails, or calling people -- what do you like to do with your free time?

A: Free time? What is that [smiles]? When I do get away from the computers, I enjoy hiking and spending time with my wife of more than 20 years (who is very supportive of me helping people).

Q: Can retirees get a CAC?

A: The Army ran a pilot program in 2012, conducted at five different military bases which ended on 30 September 2012. The results were mediocre, with far fewer requests than expected, and there are no plans to issue CACs to retirees at this time. The cost would have been astronomical and the cards would expire every three years (the maximum time the certificate is valid). So, current retirees with indefinite ID cards would need to get a new ID card every three years, and many do not live near an ID card office.

Q: Why are more sites like https://wonet.army.mil going CAC-only?

A: The Department of Defense – specifically the CIO-G6 (Chief Information Officer) – is requiring it based on a Joint Task Force change task order (CTO) that states: "All DoD private web servers that host Sensitive Information will be configured to utilize only certificate-based client authentication, using DoD PKI approved certificates." You can read the entire CTO at: https://www.jtfgno.mil/J3/orders/CTOs/CTO_PKI_Phase2v17%20(11Dec07).rtf (CAC required to access).

Q: How long have you been a USAWOA member?

A: I started with USAWOA in the Iowa Hawkeye Chapter in Des Moines, IA, in 2001 after graduating from WOCS. I used my free one year trial, and then became a lifetime member. I've since been a member of the Star of the North Chapter in Minnesota, and am currently in the Lord Fairfax Silver Chapter based in Alexandria/Fort Belvoir, VA. I am the Webeditor for all 3 of the Chapter's websites, which are actually run from the same server as MilitaryCAC.com

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to share with readers?

A: Thank you for the opportunity to share my story. I think of myself as a humble person, and I believe every one of us has strengths and weakness. I'm happy to share my strengths with others and help them. I don't ask for money, just a simple "thank you."