Dr. Jeffrey Cropsey: This is Jeff Cropsey. I’m the Director of the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support, and I’m very pleased this afternoon to be speaking with Colonel Tom Klincar, the Commandant of the Community College of the Air Force. Now, for those of you who are not familiar with military terms, in this case the Commandant is essentially the President of the Community College of the Air Force. And he’ll be talking to us today about this truly unique military college. First of all, Colonel Klincar, welcome, and I’d like to ask you, can you explain to our listeners what the Community College of the Air Force is?

Colonel Tom Klincar: I’d be delighted because the Community College of the Air Force today is the largest regionally accredited college, (community college) granting a two-year Associate in Applied Science degree, in the world. We have enrolled 352,000 students at this time, and of those numbers, in 2005, we awarded 16,968 Associate in Applied Science degrees. I think you’ll find that we award two to three times the number of degrees as the second largest college in the United States. So, we’re doing this, not because of the numbers, but because we produce a more highly skilled, knowledgeable leader in our enlisted ranks and that’s why the Air Force is doing this. We’ve been doing this for nearly 35 years. Founded in 1972. In fact, 2007 will be our 35th anniversary and we believe that that’s going to be a year that we see our 250,000th graduate and we will be awarding our 300,000th degree. So, it’s going to be an exciting time!

Dr. Jeffrey Cropsey: Oh! That’s quite something! Well, Colonel is there one campus, I mean, where does one go, to go to the Community College of the Air Force?

Colonel Tom Klincar: Well, the first thing you need to do is raise your right hand and swear allegiance (laughter) to Uncle Sam. No, it’s a great process. We have 102 campuses. 102 technical training and education centers in the Air Force that are fully affiliated with the administrative center, with the college. Every one of them has a fully credentialed faculty instructing our students. And the process begins when that high school graduate talks to an Air Force recruiter, and I like to think of that Air Force recruiter as our admissions officer. And if they pass the ASVAB, the Air Force Vocational Aptitude Battery, and score high enough, gain entry into the Air Force, they will show up at Basic Military Training (Boot Camp). That’s our physical fitness program and it’s quite a rigorous one. You ought to try it!
Dr. Jeffrey Cropsey: No thanks. So, really from the first day, someone who is in the Air Force, they are actually a student at the Community College of the Air Force?

Colonel Tom Klinicar: That’s right. We have streamlined the process. When they arrive at Basic Military Training, we explain to them how they’re going to proceed through their degree program. We immerse them immediately in a quite rigorous educational process, and as they leave Basic Military Training, they’re going to go off to a vocational school, typically technical school, where they will gain additional college credit for the Air Force education that they are receiving. In fact, simply by attending Air Force technical schools, the typical CCAF student will have attained all of the resident courses that they need for graduation within about eight years. Now, we find our average graduate will take 10 years to complete the degree. We are going to work to push that down and make it, the degree attainable earlier because we find that when these young folks, who did not choose or could not go to college right after high school, when they get that taste of success, when they’ve got that first college degree from a regionally accredited college, and we are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, they want to do more. And that’s why I am so happy that you invited me here today because we want to, we’d like to help our students find the information about other colleges; some would call this an articulation agreement; that’s not necessarily what I want. I would like for our students to get information, as a matter of fact, we’re online that we have a portal. Our students at any time can go to the Air Force Virtual Education Center as well as to one of our 82 Education Service Centers and see where they stand in their degree program.

Dr. Jeffrey Cropsey: And can I just explain to our listeners, it sounds like an Air Force member who is a student of Community College of the Air Force is getting his or her technical credits with the degree through Air Force training. Now, how would they get social science, humanities type credit to fill out your Associate in Applied Science degree.

Colonel Tom Klinicar: Oh, that’s a great question and for those listeners who are associated with higher education, they know that typically a college must offer its own general education courses. We have a waiver for that from the Southern Association; I think, one of the only schools that does, and what we have done is we partnered with higher education colleges who will conduct courses on our military installations or just outside the gates or through distance education programs and confer those 15 credit hours, a general ed component of our degree. We thought about doing that ourselves. In this day and age, quite frankly we could. We have the expertise in the Air Force, whether it be the Air Force Academy or the Air Force Institute of Technology to offer our own general ed component, we’d probably do it through distance learning, but we have such a robust great relationship with these institutions that have partnered with us since the end of World War II that we’re not going to put that relationship at risk.

Dr. Jeffrey Cropsey: Well, besides taking residence courses or online courses with other colleges and universities, is there is any other way that they could get these credits, can they test for them, or...

Colonel Tom Klinicar: Funny you should ask! Absolutely. You know 10%
of the course credit applied to our degree completion comes through your great organization, DANTES, and of course CLEP testing organizations. That's been relatively constant; two years ago we saw 13% of the course credit applied came through testing and I believe that the numbers might be going down now because distance education has come so far along in just the last few years and we're going to find that that happy medium where we have that balance between distance education, our resident programs and testing.

**Dr. Jeffrey Cropsey:** Well, certainly it sounds like a young American that joins the Air Force these days could get an Associate's degree between Air Force training and online courses or residence courses on the Air Force base or through testing, in a fairly short time. It's possible, perhaps even as soon as one of their colleagues that didn't join the Air Force was going full-time to a community college?

**Colonel Tom Klincar:** You are exactly right! In fact, we just have Chief Master Sergeant of Air Force here, our Chief Master Sergeant McKinley, and what he'd like to see and what we can do is within one enlistment bring a young man or woman serving in the Air Force so far long during their enlistment period that they can complete their CCAF degree as they are separating and we are very much in favor of career transitions because when we show our students and our Airmen that success, they're going to leave the Air Force very positive about their experience and very much able to succeed in whatever area they choose. So, we're going to do that.

**Dr. Jeffrey Cropsey:** Well, certainly it sounds like you've had a rich history and up to this point hundreds of thousands of graduates, but I know you must have a crystal ball out there, or you're looking to the future. What do you see happening in the future for the Community College of the Air Force?

**Colonel Tom Klincar:** We're going to keep on doing exactly what we're doing now and quite frankly we're a bit selfish about it because when we create an educated Airmen that is a capable Airmen, who is an independent thinker, who is innovative, who will get the job done, we are a better Air Force for having these remarkable men and women as a part of our force. So, we're going to keep doing what we're doing. Now, maybe in the future these young people will want to pursue a Bachelor's degree and there are plans in the works, within the Air Force - I'm not plugged into all of those, but the same institutions, accredited institutions in the United States, what I'd like to do is make our students aware of the transfer opportunities from our college to theirs. And what I am hoping, and perhaps as a result of this podcast, I can have some of these academic officers send me an email saying “We're very interested in looking at your 67 degree programs (our Associate in Applied Science) and perhaps pulling them as a core to a Bachelor of Applied Science or BS degree or BA.” In which case we can plug them into our Virtual Education Center, not through a partnership or articulation, but simply disseminating information. If we can steer our students in the right direction to an accredited institution, they save time, they're even more successful and they don't waste their money answering some sort of newspaper ad that may steer them in the wrong direction.

**Dr. Jeffrey Cropsey:** Well, sounds like a wonderful opportunity for everyone involved because, obviously, the servicemember, the member of the Air Force, would gain by having an easy
highway, so to speak, to following on with a bachelors degree. I would think many colleges, universities that might be listening to this podcast would be interested in having such a wonderful cadre of well-educated student to follow into their programs and certainly the country benefits by having a much higher educated member of society at the end.

**Colonel Tom Klincar:** I couldn't agree more. In fact, if I were in the administration of another four year accredited college, unless I was further than a 100 miles away or I have no veterans in my local area, or I don't have any distance learning programs, I can't imagine why you wouldn't want to try to attract and enroll these great young people that come out of our program.

**Dr. Jeffrey Cropsey:** Well, Colonel Klincar, it’s certainly been a pleasure speaking with you today. It’s obvious that the Community College of the Air Force is a truly unique organization and a great asset not only to the Air Force, but to American higher education and to American society in general. I certainly want to thank you and all the members of CCAF and certainly on behalf of thousands of Airmen and indeed many people in the Department of Defense. Thank you so much for all of your efforts.

**Colonel Tom Klincar:** Dr. Cropsey, you’ve been helping us since the very beginning. DANTES is a tremendous organization, helping our folks attain their degrees even quicker than we can do it through our resident programs. Thank you. And thanks for giving me the chance to be part of this podcast.

**Dr. Jeffrey Cropsey:** You are most welcome.