

DCMA Brigadier General reflects from the shoulders of giants at promotion ceremony

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Defense Contract Management Agency military personnel serve as exemplars for their peers and provide the nation with unparalleled service. On Feb. 16, the Air Force honored then Air Force Col. David O'Brien at the Pentagon's Hall of Heroes during a ceremony formally recognizing his promotion to brigadier general, which became effective Dec. 22, 2010. Since October 2009, O'Brien has served as the mobilization assistant to the director. He advises the director on employment of Total Force capabilities and provides specialized technical and management advice to the director and senior staff.



Charlie E. Williams, Jr., Defense Contract Management Agency director, administers the oath of office to Air Force Brig. Gen. David O'Brien, DCMA mobilization assistant to the director. Williams recalled O'Brien's love for acquisition and praised him for his service for the U.S. Air Force, the Department of Defense and the American taxpayer. (Photo by Carolyn Baum)

Air Force Col. Kurt Stonerock, DCMA chief of staff for military personnel, narrated the ceremony, introducing O'Brien's family. Air Force Staff Sgt. Clinton Newell sang the National Anthem. Army Lt. Col. Kitt Jones led the invocation. After the invocation, Stonerock introduced Charlie E. Williams, Jr., DCMA director.

"O'Brien has done very significant things for the U.S. Air Force, the Department of Defense and the American taxpayer," Williams said. "While at Kirtland Air Force Base, he learned the business of acquisition. He became entrenched in space," going on to work as an Air Force officer, Reservist and civilian to improve the nation's space capabilities. Williams again praised O'Brien before the publication of orders, stating: "We at DCMA are very pleased to have O'Brien on our staff. ... He has a great set of experiences wrapped in a good education."

His family pinned his new rank insignia onto his uniform. In addition to his family, Air Force Maj. Gen. William McCasland, principal staff assistant and advisor to the deputy under secretary of defense and under secretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics; Air Force Maj. Gen. Edward L. Bolton, Jr., director, Cyber and Space Operations Directorate of Operations, deputy chief of staff for operations, plans and requirements, Headquarters U.S. Air Force; Jim Russell, DCMA deputy director; and other SES personnel attended. Equipped with his new rank, O'Brien turned to face Williams, who administered the oath of office, reaffirming his oath of service to the U.S. Air Force and the nation. After the oath of office, O'Brien was presented with an official flag.

"I look up to all of you," he said to his family and other guests. He admired their support and said that there was one other organization he had to thank for getting him where he is today.

"Thank you, Navy," he said. He credits the Navy for making him the Air Force officer he is today. When he was finishing high school, his father suggested that he join the Navy. O'Brien agreed and took the SATs, applying to the United States Naval Academy. "Combined, my scores don't even make a good credit score," he said.

"The lieutenant commander (at the Naval Academy) put his arm on my



The O'Brien family stands in the Hall of Heroes at the Pentagon during the promotion ceremony for Air Force Brig. Gen. David O'Brien, Defense Contract Management Agency mobilization assistant to the director. O'Brien, second from left, expressed his gratitude for his family's support. (Photo by Carolyn Baum)

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forearm, looked me in the eyes and said, 'Dave, school is not for you.'" O'Brien said that the advice was "frank and honest," and, while difficult to hear, it set him on an exciting new path.

"After that experience, I was fortunate to meet a parade of giants in my life," O'Brien said. One of those giants, Mr. Bornstein, was a World War II Air Force veteran. After mentioning his experience with the Navy, Bornstein responded, "So?"

"That was it. But, there was a lot in that one word — 'So?'"

O'Brien joined the Air Force and tenaciously pursued his education. He acknowledged facing several challenges, but he met each one with the support of his mentors, family and friends. In 2003, he earned his doctorate in business and organizational leadership. Now teaching at the university level, he hopes to inspire a new generation as the giants in his life inspired him.

"While in the Air Force, I developed a love for contract administration that I never knew I would have," O'Brien said. Contract administration led many places, and as he was preparing to leave the Air Force, another giant stepped into his life — his father-in-law, whom he affectionately calls dad. "I thought my Air Force days were over, when dad came to me and convinced me to stay in as a Reservist." His father-in-law has since passed away, but O'Brien remembers him fondly and remains thankful that his father-in-law convinced him to remain with the Air Force Reserves.

Remaining in the Air Force Reserves required sacrifice and dedication from his family, and he again expressed his gratitude for their support during his service. "You've probably heard it before, but the message I want to get out is that it doesn't matter how many times you get knocked down; it is how many times you get back up. Thank you all — you have all helped to pick me back up." His service and love of contract administration ultimately led him to DCMA.

He closed his remarks by saying, "My commitment is to earn your faith in me and to serve and provide for the betterment of our nation, our service and our family." Then, without missing a beat, he added, "And to someday get those SAT scores up." 