

Peterson AFB: 21st Space Wing Town Hall Transcript  
April 7, 2020

21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano  
21st Space Wing Command Chief Master Sergeant, CMSgt Jacob Simmons

**21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano:** A good afternoon Team Pete and when I say Team Pete I mean all of our airmen around the world. Team Peterson or Cheyenne Mountain, USAFA or at Schriever or 24 of our other locations on nearly every continent in the world. It's great to be talking with you again. We've had these virtual town halls for a few weeks now, I've done several of them with Colonel Vaughn on our medical team, and we'll continue to do that on Thursdays. But feedback was asking what was important to you and on Tuesdays, let's talk about airman issues and personnel issues or personal issues and things that you're dealing with in your everyday life. And so Chief and I got to have this town hall on Tuesdays so how 'bout we sit down and talk to airmen about things that right now related or COVID related, but that matters more to your current life every day.

So I'm here in my office and I've got to say by the way the SnoFest face masks make a great face covering so if you've got one, and I'm not afraid to look a little silly. So I know you know we don't have black and brown yet, we're trying to get that but you can do just wear whatever it takes to stay safe.

So a lot of things coming up! Right now this is the Month of Military Child so shortly here you're going to see online we're going to have some activities. I have children who love to color and make pictures and whatnot and maybe take some focus, or at least have some of our attention devoted on other things than COVID-19. On coronavirus we're still 100% focused but we need to take a look at some other things too and maybe some lighthearted moments like that.

High school graduation is coming up and Chief and I both have graduating seniors and maybe you do too or maybe you have family members that do and those of us that have graduated from high school and college remember those special moments. Yeah so we're taking a look at some options to see how we can go and safely celebrate all of our high school seniors on base here. Obviously physically separated and in a safe manner, but maybe we can do something special for all of our high school seniors so we're taking a look at that.

And I'm going to do bad news, good news. So first the bad news is that Chief Simmons is going to be departing on 01 June and taking over a new position: senior enlisted leader over at the Joint Task Force Space Defense so Chief congrats to you on that. He hates when he gets congratulatory emails by the way so no one sent him any notes saying congrats whatever you do! But he's gonna be heading over there and I think that that's a reminder to all of us right that you know we're still in charge of this Space domain and we're still conducting operations every single day successfully. It's been better than we ever have before, bringing on new capabilities like the Space Fence that we just declared initial operational capability on it. All that stuff is happening and Chief's going to go out and take the next step up in leadership to an important position and lead over there and so we're still moving along. I don't want everyone to lose sight

that we're still moving along in Space Force and all the important things that need to occur with that.

We also have Chief Towberman get his new stripes with the new Space stripes which is pretty cool. The only one in the world right now that's wearing those so that's incredible. Now that's the bad news. There's good news too.

Now for the really good news and I'm gonna hopefully talk a little bit about this on Thursday when I sit down with Colonel Vaughn. And I don't want to tell you that the numbers are looking perfect that it looks like we got coronavirus figured out, but I will tell you this from looking at our numbers here from testing on base, from looking at some of the statewide numbers, there are some positive signs in there. People had predicted a peak in this maybe in the Colorado area, in some other states a little bit further out and there's now a couple trends in there that maybe things may be improving a little bit. And so that's good news for all of us no matter where we're at in this thing. What I would caution everyone about though is that some of these trends are dependent upon us continuing to be vigilant, continuing to wear your mask, or wash your hands and do all those things right. Continue to do that now through the end of April and we'll see what happens after that. But I think there's a little bit of a ray of hope in there and I hope that continues. But it's only going to continue if we continue to be vigilant and that requires all of us to stay in this fight, focused. So with that... right that's all the news I got let me turn it over to Chief.

**21st Space Wing Command Chief Master Sergeant, CMSgt Jacob Simmons:** Hey good afternoon Knights and to all the Team Peterson, Team Cheyenne Mountain, Team Schriever, Thule, Beale and Cod and Dahlgren and all of the other GSUs for the 21st Space Wing as well as everybody that's here on the computer system. You know today I received a word of encouragement from one of our Knights, Mr. Michael Curtis. He said "I hope you are finding unexpected things to be thankful for in this unexpected situation" and it got me thinking that attitudes are more infectious than the coronavirus. The words of encouragement change our entire environment. While Service Before Self has always been and will always be our normal. Colonel Falzarano and I have certainly seen a meteoric rise in selflessness. Everyone is doing what's best for everyone else right now- that means a little more personal space and a little more time spent at home, but we thank you for that sacrifice. It is certainly making a difference. We hope that these Tuesday talks helps each of you do more than just survive through this pandemic we want you to thrive through this new world that we find ourselves in. As this week continues on I would like to bring you up to speed on a few things such as our face mask coverings policies, military grooming standards, PT testing, as well as which one of our parks are still open for you to go and enjoy. So recently you released a new policy for our installation regarding the wear of masks like the one you're wearing right now. Can you talk to us about that?

**21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano:** Yeah absolutely so you know that some folks have been wearing the face masks for a while and that's all good, but it hasn't been a directive until just recently. This is a national level guidance recommendation on wearing a mask and our Secretary of Defense put out some directives that if we can't go and be physically distant, or socially distant- physically distance now is that the appropriate term- that we should

wear a face covering. And it's just an added detective and so that guidance came out this week and I've subsequently put out following guidance to that which reiterates to everyone to follow that guidance. It's not too complicated. I know for some folks they may not have access to a professional looking face mask and that's why the way I'm wearing the one that I do now by the way right just to show folks that "hey it's OK we're more concerned about the coronavirus". And we'll be in this phase for a significant period of time, eventually we will get matching ones that go with all uniforms or whatnot. We are working on some masks for those folks who were customer facing part of the organization in the installation and obviously that includes our defenders and our Visitor Control Center, but it includes some places that you may not think about right? That includes some of our communicators that may have to respond to a mission essential building and fix some critical communication cyber capabilities. Our civil engineers who do the same thing, they may have to be responsible for getting it into an area and making sure the building is safe. From mission essential operations continue on and it's, there are folks that are in child development centers, in our commissaries right, in our Exchanges who are on the front lines. And so we are going to work to include them hopefully we'll have some of those shipments in. I've been over at all those places and see that most folks 95% already have something on and then by tomorrow morning on Wednesday is when I'm mandated that if you're in those large groups certainly the commissary and similar areas with folks who are in close contact that you have to have protection. So I ask that everyone abides by that. And if you're behind the scenes I've given specific guidance. Have some fun right and whatever kind of mask you got as long as it's appropriate and tasteful- if you have a Batman mask or Superman or whatever it is you have in your house then hey it's coronavirus. That's more important than making sure you get a matching mask with your uniform and all that. We'll eventually get to that point. Alright hopefully that answers the question there Chief.

**21st Space Wing Command Chief Master Sergeant, CMSgt Jacob Simmons:** Hey sir I appreciate that. The one thing that I'll add as a public service announcement: as motorists are approaching our gates please make sure that you are bringing your mask back down so that our defenders can identify you. They're also asking that the windows in your vehicles remain up. And what you will do is you would just take your credential and put it up against your glass so that they can actually use their laser and verify your identification and they may ask you to flip it back over. If you have tinted windows they may ask you then to pull your windows back down. This rule applies to all passengers in your vehicle. If they're wearing masks they need to remove those while approaching or before getting to the defender at the gate- that's a good addition, they appreciate it.

**21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano:** It's an excellent point on the gate and here's something we started off really early on: no touching of the IDs. But people grew accustomed at first. I was outside of the gate and I heard a comment "you don't even let us touch the IDs anymore" and that was unique right? Folks had to get accustomed to that and as these measures have changed I think all of us have become accustomed to them and hey it's what we do we're adaptive, we're flexible and we adjust. It's good to see folks that are following that guidance and I appreciate that.

And now Chief one thing that's near and dear to your heart are grooming standards. We've had a lot of questions on grooming standards and we've got some interesting haircuts and hairstyles but maybe you can touch on some of that.

**21st Space Wing Command Chief Master Sergeant, CMSgt Jacob Simmons** Yes. Here's the bottom line we are a professional fighting force and were a part of a profession of arms. Our professionalism and our pride come through in many ways but it starts with we must be mentally and physically disciplined to look the part. Grooming standards are part of the bedrock of our professionalism and not only important internally to our force but conveys a sense of trusted to the American observers. As challenges progress we are increasingly called upon for civil authorities and do our part in the national response. As we do so it's important that we continue to maintain completely the sense of trusted comfort to the public. Even so we realize our current situation requires us to all practice that social distance and adopt certain practices that may limit access to barber shops and beauty salons. As such in these circumstances that are very rare, commanders have been given the authority to deviate from the hair grooming standards as needed to ensure the health and safety of our service members and their families. These deviations should be done within reason there is no reason to inhibit our ability to perform our duties or wear protective and proper PE and headgear to keep us looking professional and prevent the use protective safety equipment from interfering with whatever hair length in bulk that's had to take place because of limited access to barbers and hair salons.

Shaving is another standard and associated adjusted appearance still remain in place. If you have a shaving waiver, you need to be carrying that and you still have that medical authority to manage yourself around your face but with regards to bulk and length of hair some of those are relaxed and to commander's discretion. We are counting on the commanders to find that appropriate balance of professional arms so I hope that gives a little more perspective and a little bit of a latitude explanation as to why those grooming standards are just a little bit more relaxed in these times.

**21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano:** Yeah Chief no great answer and let me just throw out a real practical example for you. I know one that hits home for many of our families because there are some 4,000 plus of our 25,000 or more families in our Medical Group who fit into the high risk category right? They've got something in their medical history and we have made special care to call those folks in notified right and let them know to take extra precaution. I live in one of those houses right, and I also don't like policy letters because I firmly believe that our commanders and our chiefs need to lead and if everyone is waiting for me to write a policy letter then everyone's probably not leading. Now if I get the feedback that we need that, I'm like OK I may write a policy letter I'm fine with that, but let me give you once again we go back to that practical example. Even if there's an open seat at the barbershop and you live in a high risk household, it may be a family member of yours is as in a compromised immune system undergoing some treatment. My expectation is that is that we would prioritize the health and the lives with that family member over grooming standards over a haircut and so all of our commanders should have the same exact perspective. And that right now there are far more important things. All of us need to make that decision right? Some of us maybe live alone and this risk is acceptable but in some households almost zero risk is acceptable and you

know who you are. And I trust you to make that decision that's appropriate for you and let me tell you, if you run into problems with anyone or an issue on this then I'm the person to come to. If you send me a note, send Chief a note, we'll go straighten things out. So yes that's plain spoken as I can be Chief on that. I appreciate your answer on that.

Speaking of standards that have changed around the Air Force in the Department of Defense in large these standards are fitness tests. Something that a lot of people have questions about. Could you give us your perspective on that? You have a perspective Chief and I got one too so so let me let me start. You know these are unique and interesting times and so you know a month ago we had we started having these discussions about fitness standards subsequently to suspend changes to the fitness policy and delayed fitness testing six months starting in the month of April. I was one of the people either way affected by that change I was supposed to test in April but I was ready to go but I had no issues...but I go back to the Chief's answer. Chief your answer on haircuts right there is: still the standards still apply. And so we find alternative ways to get to that end goal right? To get to our finish line wherever we're trying to get to. And I know yeah we have airmen in small dorm rooms, we have people in small apartments houses and all sorts of living accommodations, and sometimes it's difficult.

I'm taking a hard look again at the gym and how we can safely open that but in the mean time there are a lot of ways that we can go in and stay healthy and stay fit. I'm reminded of when I was in Iraq for a year and there's two options right you can either eat all the chocolate chip cookies and all the free ice cream 'cause they had a lot of that stuff or you could go to the healthy side right get all the steamed vegetables and some fish and some other good food and find ways even when you know rockets mortars are coming then you could find ways to exercise and stay fit and that's what most people did. So I'd encourage everyone to get out there and do that and go. And I don't want to endorse any program but you know I do one of those programs that starts with a P and it has a 90 in the middle and others X at the end and so most of those don't even need weights for right you can get out there and just exercise.

So we kept our tracks open, our hiking trails, physically distance our golf course and all those opportunities and it's an opportunity right? I mean you could take this opportunity to get even better. I know Chief we were talking about some of the things people are doing- it is kind of along with physical fitness to where they can get maybe even better. You go out there and do some things to improve themselves and I had some good examples of that kind to share and the main thing that we always hear is "If I just had more time if I just had more time I would really get into good shape. If I just had more time I would get out there and do my PME, if I just had more time I would go back to college I just had more time I would do some things differently with my family" and guess what we've got more time! And so now is it a chance for us to take advantage of the situation. Now back to the beginning you know being thankful for those unexpected thing in the situation right now. We have time to get into shape and it's a much better shape. Really focus on our wellness both physical and internal. And so I would challenge everybody to use this not just for yourself but your entire family to create a new lifestyle, a better lifestyle of wellness and healthy living. Think that we've got an opportunity here to seize once it becomes a habit I think you'll stick with it too.

**21st Space Wing Command Chief Master Sergeant, CMSgt Jacob Simmons:** Hey sir you know you started to touch a little bit on what's still open out there and there's been questions about

what's closed and what things are open. We've got parks out there and playgrounds that people are asking questions about. You maybe noticed some of those playgrounds in base housing in those neighborhoods that are closed, but those are closed to prevent potentially counterproductive gatherings, like with parents and even pets.

One of the discussions I had with a close friend of mine was that even though the medical professionals having said that pets are carrying or it could get COVID-19, they can carry the germs and in the park and just like us where we can touch something and move it from one place to another like animals. And so one of these parks is our dog parks, and our playgrounds, all of these areas where people gather in larger numbers. The other areas that have been closed temporarily. However, we have purposely kept our larger recreational spaces open like our outdoor track and the apparatus is that our fitness center we've kept open areas like Lion Park, Patriot Park...so the big parks all around the base are available for use. The aircraft museum is still available for people to come in and the wander through and walkthrough for par three at the golf course is still available to go out there and sharp enough to golf. And then we've got an abundance of walking trails all over the installation where you and your family can get out and do some healthy exercise. Peterson Air Force Base is still open for business we just asked you to use responsible social distance to enjoy it.

Our Force Support Squadron is also creatively introducing other opportunities to get out like tonight's family friendly drive in movie night at the Peterson Air Force Base Youth Center parking lot. That movie starts with the parking lot opening at 7:00 o'clock tonight, movie starts at 7:30. It's going to be a great time. What we'll ask is that you stay in your cars with your families and enjoy a good drive in movie. The sound will be piped into your radio sound systems and you'll be able to have a unique experience shared with your family that otherwise we might not have had a chance to do. Come on out will see you tonight. That's all I've got turn it over to you for closing points.

**21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano:** Hey thanks Chief that reminds me too on Wednesday we still got the pizza special and I come up and a lot of families out there last time that was just great seeing folks get out there a little bit of normalcy. They got beverages to enjoy with their family- at least the adults- and that was that was just a really great thing to do and thanks that you are Force Support Squadron behind the scenes right is going in and taking these amazing strides something creatively. Yeah I have never been more impressed by a team, of the entire team's ability to go and it includes all of our bases right from the things you're trying to do. Up to California and Florida and all across the country Europe and Asia in the things people trying to do to keep a sense of normalcy and stay engaged and connected and hopefully out of this.

I think you're exactly right Chief. Know what, maybe we will learn a few things. We didn't have it so we didn't have it right before this other things we need to do to connect and stay connected maybe that'll make us more resilient going forward. I think it will if we stay on this track and we stay together. Please I ask everyone to take care of your body, take care of your mind, take care of your family, find ways to get better through this situation and don't let it get the best of you, the best of us. And I think if we do that all of us are going to end up in a much better place we were before. Connect with others. And I ask everyone if you have, and I give you a challenge, if you haven't sent a text message to someone or maybe there's someone you

haven't sent a note to in a long time send a note. Go hey you know smiley face emoji are for just thinking about you and just that little thing may be enough to start a conversation and to get you connected to make you brighten someone's day. Someone's at least thinking about me. Please continue to say thank you to the healthcare workers that are out there. If you have an opportunity to do that they're working for us every day on the front lines and it's stressful front lines and as I keep being a broken record, don't forget to thank the other people that are on the front lines out there taking care of our children. That are making sure we have food either in our shopping carts or they're putting that take out in the back of your trunk. All those people are on the front lines out there keeping us safe, keeping us fed, keeping us healthy. Every single day so it's a privilege to serve alongside each and everyone of you. We have an amazing team. As always, Chief and I, our goal is to make sure that each and everyone of you and us is built to last.