Acting Secretary of the Air Force Eric Fanning

AFA - Air and Space Technology Exposition

"State of the Air Force"

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Acting Secretary Fanning: General Moeller, thank you for the introduction. Briefer is always better. And for your leadership as the Chairman of the Board of the AFA. To President McKinley and all the other leaders and members of the Air Force Association, thank you for putting together another wonderful conference. My first conference, so I guess I can't say another wonderful conference. It's been pretty great so far.

Year after year you bring together an amazing set of speakers and experts to inform us, challenge our views, and help us advocate for the central role of air, space and cyber power in securing this great nation. Thank you for helping our Airmen -- active, Guard, Reserve, civilian and retired -- to tell the Air Force story.

Thank you too, to all the honorees. That was an impressive morning. It feeds into what I want to talk about a little bit more today. Your true reward is having to sit now through my speech and be my captive audience, so I appreciate that.

In my time as Acting Secretary these last three months I could not ask for a better wingman than General Welsh. Those of you who know him know that he's incredibly generous, collaborative and collegial, which is an ideal environment. And he's made the transition for me as smooth as you could possibly ask for. I was only in the Under capacity for two months before Secretary Donley decided he was going to retire. He'd given me a lot of warning, but it wouldn't have been nearly as easy to work through yet a second transition only 60 days later were it not for the Chief, for the Vice Chief General Spencer and for Chief Master Sergeant Cody.

I'm hopeful, as much as I'm enjoying this job of Acting, actually, that we'll have a new Secretary pretty soon. I've known Deborah James, the nominee, I think most of you have probably met at some point in your life, for over 20 years. We've worked together in three different jobs. First at the House Armed Services Committee in my very first job out of college. We were on a small team working for the Chairman of the Committee, Les Aspin at the time. I was Doer B and she was Doer A. We moved together over to the Pentagon when Chairman Aspin became Secretary Aspin. She became an Assistant Secretary of Defense. I was too young to be anything other than an exec essentially. She was Assistant Secretary for Reserve Affairs, which will be very helpful for us in the Air Force. Those relationships based on what we need to do to further take

advantage of total force integration will be very helpful for us going forward.

In my 20-plus years of working in Washington, and this is my ninth year in the Pentagon now; I've met many Chiefs and many Secretaries, and I cannot think of a better team -- General Welsh and Secretary James -- to advocate for their service and to push for their service over other services in the fight for resources. So I look forward to working for her, being her Under Secretary, if confirmed. It's a long, grueling process. Mine took a year from nomination to confirmation. I see some other nominees in the room who went through the same experience. My first lesson learned, what I would tell people, is don't get nominated in an election year. The Senate has to be in Washington to work on confirmation, so at least she has that going for her. We don't know when she will arrive, but she will hit the ground running. All those years of experience on the Hill, 10 years plus in industry, six or seven years in the Pentagon, Think Tank world, you couldn't ask for a better background, I think. It will be a fantastic leadership team that we have at the top of the Air Force.

Annually the Secretary of the Air Force is asked to speak at AFA on the State of the Air Force. Considering I've been with the Air Force for just five months and Acting Secretary less than that, it seemed presumptuous for me to do that. Besides, you'll be hearing from all the MAJCOM Commanders as well as General Welsh. Collectively, they will give you a State of the Air Force briefing. You're also going to be hearing from three former Secretaries who will discuss managing the Air Force -- a course I wish I'd had just a few months ago.

Before coming to the Air Force I spent four years working in the Department of the Navy, sitting just one corridor over at the Pentagon from where I currently work. So I thought what I'd do is share some of my initial observations and lessons, having been someone in the Navy for four years, coming over to the Air Force.

During the transition many people said to me, they'll never accept someone from the Navy at the Air Force. I could not find an example of a political appointee who made an immediate switch from one service to the other. There are some who have done it over the course of a lifetime -- Chuck Blanchard who is our General Counsel, was the General Counsel of the Army in the '90s.

I would argue that it's beneficial for the services. It's beneficial for the Department of Defense, to cross-pollinate the political appointees, and it's been a tremendous experience for me to do that.

So first, the first lesson I've learned: Do whatever possible to avoid speaking immediately after General Welsh. There is a reason the Airmen love him so much.

Second: It's best not to tell the Commander of Air Force Special Operations Command that when you visit, you want to return home bruised, muddy and tired. They have different definitions for those words down there. General Fiel, great host last week. I look forward to visiting you again, after I'm rested up and recovered.

I've learned that the Air Force is the one service without which other services could not do what they do. You can't say that about any other services, but without the Air Force, the Army, the Navy and the Marine Corps couldn't fight the way they fight today.

I've learned that our Airmen are really, really smart. I've had 23 unique base visits since I came over to the Air Force; have met with in All Calls, breakfasts, lunch, dinners, on the flight line over 10,000 Airmen, and they continually impress me. How skilled they are, how smart they are, how proud they are of what they do.

I went to Space Command, some of you have heard the story already but it still amazes me. I'm getting this briefing from this young Airman on how she flies satellites. She's got four screens in front of her, a bunch of keyboards, she's giving me her briefing. And as they always do at the end of a briefing she asks if I have any questions. I simply said no, because I was too embarrassed to tell her I didn't understand half of what she told me. And I expected to see things all up and down her sleeve, and she had three stripes. We've got her flying satellites, and I had every bit of confidence in her that she was doing that as well as anyone could. Certainly better than I could do.

I've learned that the Air Force does more things in more places than people realize. The Navy has ships. That's an obvious form of forward presence. The Army and the Marine Corps have boots on the ground. That's digestible and visible to the American public. The Air Force is everywhere and in a lot of places that the public doesn't see. The Air Force has a more complicated story to tell, and what I know is we need to do a better job of telling it. So that's what I want to use the remainder of my remarks today to do, is to tell a little bit of the Air Force story. I know I'm preaching to the choir, and you know it all better than I do, but we need to do that better and we need to do it more often.

This is more than just communicating our core missions. This is talking very specifically about what these missions provide to the Commander-in-Chief and what they do to the adversary. We have to talk about the end kinetic effect of all that the Air Force brings to the fight.

We give the President unique, long-range tailored and persistent options around the globe to meet his strategic needs. We call this global vigilance, global reach, and global power. To me that means if you hide, we will find you. If you move, we will follow you. If you deserve it, we will punish you. And we do this anywhere in the world.

This is what we have done since the Air Force's inception 66 years ago this week.

The final observation I'll mention and where I'd like to spend the remainder of my time this morning is that the Air Force is truly our nation's innovative service. Airmen characteristically view our nation's security challenges differently -- globally and without boundaries. Our successes are based on Airmen adapting, innovating and pioneering new solutions to intractable problems. If we make the right choices today, building on the innovation, we will be "the" dominant service in the foreseeable future.

I'm optimistic we can succeed because U.S. air power has a long history of innovation that predates even the creation of the Department of the Air Force. As all of you know, it started 110 years ago in the back of a Dayton bike shop. And just like Airmen today, the air power advocates of the last century had to combat skepticism, pessimism and outright hostility towards the idea that we could exploit the third dimension.

Over and over we were told that the dream of flight was just that. A dream.

In an October 9, 1903 article titled "Flying Machines Which Do Not Fly", the New York Times declared that a workable flying machine would take, and these are their words, "combined and continuous efforts of mathematicians and mechanisions from one million to ten million years." That exact day, October 9, 1903, Orville Wright jotted down in his notebook that they had started assembly on their new machine in North Carolina. Only three months later on the sands of Kitty Hawk, a flight of 120 feet lasting 12 seconds changed the world.

Before Kitty Hawk, warriors relied on breaking through fortified lines on the ground, but now Airmen would seek to go over, not through, to achieve victory.

The earliest rationale for creating an Air Force was the need to provide strategic effects for the President. As Billy Mitchell said, we needed the ability to do something in the air. In the summer of 1921, General Mitchell along with the Army Air Services and aviators from the Navy and Marine Corps got the first big chance to demonstrate the superiority of air power by test bombing ex-German warships. Even the idea that tactical, let alone strategic effects, were possible from the air was broadly criticized, and many attempts were made to cancel the test.

Former Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels famously declared in front of Congress that he would stand bare-headed on the bridge of any battleship during any bombardment by any plane and by God, expect to remain safe.

Thankfully for us, General Mitchell didn't take him up on that offer, and it's worth noting we are still 100 percent in our average of not losing a Secretary of the Navy as we demonstrate combat air power.

What happens when we tell a bunch of Airmen it can't be done? One U-Boat, one destroyer, one cruiser, and the unsinkable German battleship attacked and dispatched to the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

Both the Navy and the Army realized that they needed to solve the problem of getting a large bomb load over a long distance. For the Navy, the solution was to create aircraft carriers that could launch multiple fighter bombers. Less than a year later the Navy launched its first fighter plane off the newly commissioned USS Langley.

The Army spent the next decade searching for the innovation that would allow it to carry heavy loads over strategic ranges. The result was a battleship of the air, an aircraft that could operate far from its base, deliver significant payload, and fend off any enemy attack. We now know this aircraft as the B-17 Flying Fortress.

Along with the aircraft carrier, the long range strategic bomber was one of the great innovations of the period between World War I and World War II.

But there was still widespread skepticism that Airmen could have any effect in a real shooting war. This view was summed up by a former Assistant Secretary of the Navy who said, "It is highly unlikely that an airplane or a fleet of them could ever sink a fleet of Navy vessels under battle conditions."

During the darkest days of World War II when wolf packs of German U-Boats threatened to cut off supplies to the European theater of operations, it was air power such as B-17s flying out of Langley Field and fighters launching off of escort carriers that turned the tide in the battle for the Atlantic -- the longest, largest and most complex battle in naval history.

By this point that former Navy Assistant Secretary had come to recognize the decisive options that air power gave him in his new position as Commander-in-Chief. As President Roosevelt said, “Hitler built a fortress around Europe, but he forgot to put a roof on it.”

Air power innovations continue to build on the concept of over, not through. Whether through B-2s and B-1 bombers flying non-stop missions from home station direct to combat operations, or our tactical fighters that maintain a rotational presence in Afghanistan and the Pacific, your Air Force exploits this third dimension for strategic effects better than anyone else in the world.

Just as important as what we can do from the air is our ability to rapidly project power. In the months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor it appeared there was little the allies could do to turn the tide against axis powers. In rapid succession Japan took Malaya, Singapore, Java, Guam, and Wake Island. When America needed to strike back it turned to its two major power projection forces and asked them to innovate.

In January 1942 Admiral King with General Arnold, authorized an audacious joint project to launch air corps bombers off a Navy carrier and to take the war to the Japanese homeland. Lieutenant Colonel Jimmy Doolittle was given what seemed to be an impossible task and one you’ve heard many times. Take a bomber which has never seen combat, launch it off a U.S. Navy carrier deck that is one-third as long as the minimum takeoff distance for those bombers, attack the heavily defended main island of Japan on a one-way trip to land at airfields they had never seen in a nation that was occupied by enemy troops, and to do so without ever having taken off from a carrier before. Three months after the initial idea, bombs were hitting Japan.

This year is the final reunion for the Doolittle Raiders and their families. General Welsh and I will be there for that. We owe these 80 men as well as their Army and Navy teammates a debt of gratitude.

The ability to rapidly get anywhere on the face of the earth has been the dream of air power theorists from the start. The idea for how to make this a reality sprang from the innovation of a

couple of company grade officers. When flying a search and rescue mission over heavy ground fog Lieutenant Pete Quesada and Captain Ira Eaker thought it would be great to have a gas station in the sky, just in case that fog never cleared out. The next year, 1929, they flew into history books using air refueling to stay up for a 150 hour flight in their aircraft, the Question Mark. I saw this picture when I visited General Selva. All these stories are stories that the MAJCOM Commanders and others have told me in the four or five months that I've been traveling through the Air Force.

Over those six days of flying they connected to their tanker 43 times to take on 5,700 gallons of fuel.

We've come a long way since this picture. Today our tanker fleet offloads more than 400,000 gallons of fuel every single day.

The ability to rapidly get anywhere on the globe is part and parcel of what the Air Force does. A recent example of the Air Force's global reach is March Madness from two years ago. In March of 2011 we were still engaged in intense combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Without changing those commitments the Air Force simultaneously flexed forces to impose a no-fly zone over Libya and provide the bulk of the initial relief in the wake of the tsunami in Japan.

Our global reach is a part of what makes the Air Force special. We are the service that can get immediately to fight, sustain the joint team in the most remote valleys of Afghanistan, and then bring everybody home.

Even before there were airplanes, military leaders understood that exploiting the third dimension allowed them to see clearly. From lighter than air reconnaissance balloons to World War I observation aircraft to today's sophisticated ISR platforms, air power has always provided the ability to see further and act faster than our enemies. Finding and communicating the correct target has always been a key role for air power and a constant source of innovation as our adversaries learn the best way to hide.

In general, the more time an observer had to eyeball the target, the better the targeting data they supplied. However, a standard mantra in the fighting community is that in combat, speed is life.

This was driven home in the Vietnam War to the Forward Air Controllers or FACs that found and marked the targets for fighter packages. Although they pioneered many of the weapons we use today such as night vision scopes and laser designators, the FACs

were taking unacceptable losses. Their slow propeller-driven observation aircraft were extremely vulnerable to the North Vietnamese artillery and missiles defending the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In response, a 42-year-old major serving in his third war was asked if he could find a way to use fast jets to fly these missions over the most heavily defended areas. Not one to back down from a challenge, Bud Day took charge of four twin-seat F-100s and 16 pilots and formed them into the first Fast FACs. Quickly developing new tactics for reconnaissance, forward air control, search and rescue, this elite group of pilots were pioneers in using modern fighter jets to control airstrikes.

Twenty-five years later at the beginning of Desert Storm another group of aviators found that they were bedeviled by many of the same problems as Bud Day's Fast FACs. During the battle for Kuwait, Air Force F-16 wings were primarily responsible for the destruction of the Iraqi Republican Guard. Seventeen days into the air campaign things were not going well. The weather was obscuring target areas causing them to misidentify or just plain miss targets. Also by the time the smoke had cleared over a target they were back above the weather and never really knew if it had been destroyed.

Building on the legacy of the Fast FACs a select group of Viper pilots from the 4th Fighter Squadron were designated Killer Scouts. Their mission -- search the kill box, find targets for other fighters, and report back the results of those attacks. According to the architect of the Gulf Air War, General Glosson, they ended up increasing the effectiveness of the F-16 forces by 300-400 percent. And if you don't believe how good they are, look at this picture of the first commander of Killer Scouts, then Lieutenant Colonel Mark Welsh.

He actually didn't look much different than that 13 months ago when we brought him back from Europe to take over the Air Force as Chief of Staff. It's been a rough year for him. [Laughter].

Taking a concept or a piece of equipment and finding new and better ways to operate is a core competency of Airmen. Over the past decade of war one of the signature manifestations of air power has been the remotely piloted aircraft. Beginning in the mid-1990s these were developed to help us see farther, especially on missions that were too dangerous or lengthy for manned reconnaissance. The RQ-1 Predator proved its worth over Bosnia and Kosovo, allowing us to get eyes on target well before fighters arrived to prosecute and attack.

But the Airmen working on the Predator knew that it could do more. With the direction and a little bit of funding from General John Jumper, then at Air Combat Command, in less than

three months the Predator would be armed and shortly thereafter prove its worth in Afghanistan. Because of the ability to find, track and strike targets, the combatant commanders' requirement for Predators and Reapers has expanded exponentially. In 2001 we were manning a single Combat Air Patrol or CAP of MQ-1s over Afghanistan. Today we have 62 Predator and Reaper CAPs that have flown over 1.5 million combat hours, shadowing targets, watching over friendly forces, and when necessary striking our enemies.

In conclusion, as I come to the end a great quote from Churchill that I want to sink in for a little bit. "Gentlemen, we have run out of money. Now we have to think."

The Air Force has become the service that all others rely upon, and as I look at the strategic environment I see a future with a speed of information sharing that increases exponentially and the global community that becomes more international and interconnected.

This is a future that will increasingly reward the attributes that Airmen and air power provide -- speed, range, flexibility, innovation, precision and resilience. In a time of drastically shrinking resources we must capitalize on a future that, in my view, increasingly has an air power bias.

While we are today the best Air Force the world has ever known, to stay that way we must begin asking ourselves the right questions. Are we spending more and more money to gain only marginal capability in tomorrow's battlespace? Put another way, because we have been so successful, have we allowed ourselves to only work around the margins of our current structure rather than seeking the innovations that will change the very DNA of air power? Are we buying equipment and training our operators in ways that take advantage of the inherent strengths of our Airmen, their ability to make decisions and be adaptable, flexible and resilient in the face of challenges? Are we organized and structured properly to do all this in today's rapidly changing environment?

Where is the next game changer in air, space and cyberspace? And if we can't name it off the top of our heads, is that a red flag that we are not paying enough attention to strategic innovation?

We need to take a long, hard look in the mirror and ask ourselves how are we going to shape an Air Force that is affordable and sustainable over the long term? Historically inter-war eras have rewarded services that pushed innovation and punished those that stagnated. And make no mistake about it; we are in a classic inter-war defense budget drawdown even before the war ends.

But we have the ability to own the future. The Air Force is naturally suited to solve problems and provide flexible options for the President. We can be the nation's first and best option for deterrence, rapid action, and for an increasingly enduring presence as well. This latter, in my view, could be the most significant change for the Air Force. I believe there is no better place to be right now than the Air Force because no other service in our military has as bright a future. That's why I asked last year for the opportunity to move from the Department of the Navy to the Department of the Air Force. I knew the Air Force was the place to be.

To realize this vision of air power we must sustain and innovate our force so that when the President chooses to exercise America's power he calls on the Air Force first, and when he does, I know our Airmen will be ready to answer the call and the Air Force will provide decisive effects anywhere, anytime.

On behalf of the 690,000 Total Force Airmen, thank you for all you do to support air power, our Airmen, and the U.S. Air Force. Thank you for being here today and I look forward to seeing you all over the next couple of days.

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