

CSAF FOCUS AREA

THE BEATING HEART OF THE AIR FORCE...SQUADRONS!



AUGUST 2016



**CHIEF OF STAFF
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON**

The Beating Heart of the Air Force ... Squadrons!

On 1 July, Secretary James swore me in as your 21st Chief of Staff. This is the privilege of a lifetime. Standing on the shoulders of the 20 giants who paved the way ahead of me, I take on this sacred duty of leading our 660,000 active, guard, reserve, and civilian Airmen absolutely committed to servant leadership. I am honored to be your Chief.

Over the next several weeks leading up to the Air Force Association convention in September, I will publish a series of short papers laying out my thinking on key focus areas. This is the first in the series.

Under the leadership of Secretary James, General Welsh, and Chief Cody, we completed a number of strategic planning documents that provide a useful framework and planning process to shape our future force. I fully support the strategy articulated in the Strategic Master Plan (SMP) and Air Force Future Operating Concept (AFFOC) and we will continue to align our strategy with this vision. I also look forward to championing the priorities that Secretary James has established for us and has so consistently and tirelessly advocated throughout her tenure: Taking Care of People, Balancing Today's Readiness with Tomorrow's Modernization, and Making Every Dollar Count.

If we are to achieve the aspirations laid out in the SMP and AFFOC, I believe we must have a solid foundation organizationally. Our own AFIs state that "squadrons are the basic, building block organizations in the Air Force, providing a specific operational or support capability." I have always believed this to be true and so I am convinced it's where we need to start. This applies equally to our support organizations that may not align under a squadron construct, but actively support squadrons in the execution of their mission.

The squadron is the beating heart of the United States Air Force; our most essential team. We succeed or fail in our missions at the squadron-level because that is where we develop, train, and build Airmen. Our service culture and traditions manifest themselves in the squadron because our Airmen most readily identify with this core fighting unit. Squadrons are the engines of innovation and esprit de corps. Squadrons possess the greatest potential for operational agility. Squadron commanders, civilian leaders, superintendents, and first sergeants have the most profound and lasting impact on Airmen and families. They set and enforce standards, create the environment where the right things are fostered (warfighting excellence, esprit de corps, thriving Airmen and families)... and are the first line of defense against

behaviors we find unacceptable (a toxic work environment, sexual assault, suicide, domestic violence).

It is time to revitalize the squadron as the warfighting core of our Air Force. Our vision demands that "squadrons be highly capable, expeditionary teams who can successfully defend our Nation's interests in both today's and tomorrow's complex operating environments." We will succeed only when our squadrons are "the cohesive, ready, and agile fighting forces that the Air Force, Combatant Commanders, and the Nation requires".

The past fifteen years have wrought an almost singular focus on countering violent extremism in the Middle East. That necessity has resulted in considerable trades across the portfolios of Global Vigilance, Reach, and Power. Even under difficult budget conditions, we delivered when the Nation called on us to increase investment in ISR, Space, Cyber, and to revitalize the Nuclear Enterprise. In the ISR portfolio alone, we grew an RPA industry from scratch that has become the oxygen the joint force breathes.

However, our success has come at a price. We were compelled to find operational efficiencies to balance our budgets, with manpower and conventional airpower accounts suffering most. Squadrons have been asked to bear the brunt of an incredible deployment tempo and manpower shortages which have had a direct impact on readiness in our warfighting missions. In my experience, readiness and morale are inextricably linked. Walk the line at Bagram AB or Al Udeid AB where units are fully manned and readiness is high and you'll find morale is equally high. Visit one of our CONUS main operating bases and you'll often find manning hovering between 60-70% with many key supervisors and leaders deployed or dual-hatted, remaining Airmen working overtime, and units managing parts and equipment shortages. On top of this, our squadron commanders, civilian leaders, superintendents, first sergeants, and Airmen feel first-hand the challenges associated with increased mandatory recurring training, a growing list of additional duties, and the challenge of a "do-it-yourself" world in place of Airmen who previously provided services for them.

The resultant effect of these challenges is we have degraded the core fighting unit of our Air Force. The place where Airmen live, breathe, and grow, where we generate combat capability, and where our culture resides ... the squadron.

Over the next several weeks leading up to our 69th birthday celebration and the AFA convention in September, I look forward to a robust discussion across the Air Force to sharpen this dialogue and fill in the "how" behind the "why".

Bottom line -- if we are going to sustain warfighting excellence and build the Air Force outlined in the SMP and AFFOC, it must begin in our squadrons. Therefore, revitalizing squadrons as the core fighting unit in our Air Force will be the primary focus in my first year as your Chief.

I look forward to working closely with our Secretary, MAJCOM Commanders, and Air Force leadership team across our total force to get after this in the months ahead.

Fight's on!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dave Goldfein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small star or dot above the "i" in "fein".

DAVE GOLDFEIN
General, USAF
Chief of Staff