



**Air Force Association
29th Annual Air Warfare Symposium
and Technology Exposition**

Thursday, 21 Feb 13



General Mark A. Welsh III

As Delivered

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Good morning everybody. This is a beautiful place, isn't it? For some reason, it's harder to get psyched out about going to work here than it is in the Pentagon where you know pain awaits. And so you get dressed up for it for some crazy reason.

Thank you so much for having us. AFA, thank you for putting on another fantastic event. Mr. Secretary, thank you for taking your time to be here. The Secretary's been a little under the weather, so he's fighting through it to be with us this week. Chief Cody, it's good to have you here.

In fact why don't you get that first slide, please.

Let me start with a picture that Chief Cody might recognize. There you go. [Laughter]. A little over 20 years ago, 1990, there he is—Staff Sergeant Jim Cody and his wife, Senior Airman Athena Cody. Pretty amazing. I'm betting when this picture was taken he had no idea he'd be sitting in the front row of the Rosen Resort at the AFA convention as our brand new seventeenth chief master sergeant of the Air Force. But he's not here by accident folks. He's here because he's had a phenomenal career. He's an air traffic controller by trade when he had this picture taken, despite looking pretty cocky about that ridiculous looking bow tie. It's like "The Flying Nun" of bow ties. He had no idea that he'd go on to be a distinguished graduate of every PME course he went to, and that he'd win things like squadron and wing NCO of the year and major command senior NCO of the year awards, or the DoD command chief at the wing level, the numbered air force level, the expeditionary mobility task force level, and the major command level. Or that by the time he'd be sitting in this front row he'd have a reputation for hands-on leadership all over the Air Force, everywhere he'd been. He's a phenomenal senior NCO. He is going to be a great, great chief master sergeant of the Air Force and it is great to have you on the team, buddy. Welcome to the jungle. [Applause].

Before I move this slide I should probably point out the Chief wasn't just a good air traffic controller. He was the second best air traffic controller in his family. Because Athena is also a retired chief master sergeant in our Air Force, also an air traffic controller, and she taught Jim everything he knows. So we've got a team here who understands being military parents, being military professionals, being military leaders. They've got a son who's a senior airman in our Air Force away on assignment at Osan Air Base in Korea. They've got a daughter who they just pulled from her third high school in three and a half years. They understand the business. They understand the impacts on people. This is going to be a good thing.

Next slide.

Let me start where all things start, by talking about Airmen. 690,000 of them. All components, all walks and races and intellects and backgrounds and concerns and family types. They're just incredible people, as you know. And whether they fly airplanes or defuse IEDs or fix engines or do administrative work in the Pentagon—God bless them, they're remarkable. They believe in integrity. They try and do the right thing. They believe in service. They're ready and willing to go in harm's



way. And they believe in excellence. They work all the time to make things better wherever they are; just like Kat Lilly does.

This is Lieutenant Colonel Katherine “Kat” Lilly. Actually, this is one of those cardboard cutouts of Lieutenant Colonel Katherine “Kat” Lilly. The kids call her “Flat Mom.” [Laughter]. That’s not real complimentary I don’t think in her eyes. Her husband Mike is a former F-16 crew chief, now a GS civilian in our Air Force. He calls this “Flat Kat.” This is “Flat Kat” celebrating Christmas dinner with the family. They take her everywhere. They took her to pictures with Santa. They’ve taken her to school plays, and they send her the videos because she is in Shindand Air Base, in Afghanistan.

The journey to Shindand actually started in Beaver Marsh, Oregon when she was nine years old. Her father, a guy named Jim Wolfe, used to take her to these small town air shows at this dirt strip that he managed. She fell in love with aviation. So she went to the University of Oregon, joined the Air Force ROTC, wanted to be a pilot but her eyes weren’t good enough. So one of her instructors in the ROTC program was a maintenance officer, and convinced her that she really ought to think about that. He arranged a trip to watch the B-1 maintenance team at one of our Air Force bases. After she saw that she was hooked. Later, she worked on those same B-1s. She also worked on KC-135s and F-15s and F-16s. She’s a pretty special lady.

She’s currently on her fourth deployment, this time out in the middle of nowhere in western Afghanistan teaching the Afghan Air Force as a squadron commander of an air advisory squadron, overseeing maintenance training for the new Afghan Air Force. During the time she’s been there—they have a fixed wing squadron and a rotary wing squadron—the sortie generation capability of the fixed wing squadron has increased 400 percent, and the rotary wing squadron 300 percent. The squadron is now generating their own regional command and control for airlift, aeromedical evacuation and air support missions. They never did that before in Afghanistan.

The Afghan Air Force is living, it’s growing, it’s starting to kind of stretch its wings a little bit. They’ve got a ways to go, but people like Kat Lilly and the team with her team there are helping them get there. She’s doing this in a country and a society that doesn’t value the contributions of women at all times. She’s respected by her peers, by her subordinates, by the people she’s training, and she’s setting an example that they’re going to follow for generations. Airmen rock! They just rock!

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This doesn’t. I love this picture. The fiscal cliff is real, folks. It’s staring us right in the face and it’s only a few days away. This is a big deal.

Our Air Force is facing a shortfall if sequestration occurs of about \$12.4 billion in FY13, the remainder of the year, and an overseas contingency operations funding shortfall of about \$1.8 billion based on the continuing resolution that we’re still under. And all this is on top of the \$200 billion or so during the last year of Secretary Gates’ administration and the \$487 billion—our share of that—from the Budget Control Act of 2011. This is a big deal.

The cuts are significant. They’re deep. They’re going to hurt. And they will change the way we see the future. That’s what’s coming.



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Last week the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the OSD comptroller and the service chiefs testified before the House and the Senate Armed Services Committees about the effects of sequestration on the readiness of the United States military. We spoke with a very unified voice. We talked about the different actions each of the services has taken. And when we were done with that, we answered questions from the committee.

From the Air Force perspective we've taken lots of actions that we could in the near term—things that we consider reversible. All those actions combined though will probably get us about 20 percent of the way toward that \$14.2 billion total we'll be fined if sequestration occurs.

The rest of the cuts are going to come from people, modernization, readiness, and infrastructure accounts—this on a force that's been at war for the last 22 years.

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Let's talk about some of those impacts.

We've already released thousands of temp and term employees—several thousand folks. We've already got a civilian hiring freeze in place.

On [Wednesday] the department released a furlough notice to all of our civilian Airmen—180,000 of them—advising them that starting mid- to late April they could be furloughed for as much as 22 days over the rest of the fiscal year. That's a significant impact. Just from an operational perspective, that's about 31.5 million man hours of work in some very specialized areas in many cases over the rest of this fiscal year—31.5 million hours.

More importantly, it's a breach of faith in my view with a critical part of our population.

Our civilian work force hasn't had a pay raise in the last three years, and now we're talking about furloughing them without pay, which will cost them about 20 percent of their pay for the remainder of this fiscal year. This is a significant chunk of our population, and a critical piece of it. Forty percent of our cyber force is civilian. Fifty percent of our space force is civilian. There are some mission areas where it's 100 percent civilian managed and run. Laughlin Air Force Base in Texas is our largest pilot training production base. Maintenance is civilian. Simulator training is civilian. It's the same at other Air Education and Training Command bases. This will have an impact, and it's just one example.

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Our readiness levels have been declining in the Air Force since 2003; we're not doing great even before all this stuff starts.

We've essentially set aside full spectrum training because we had to to support the current fight. Our attempt this year with a big push by the Secretary in our program is to kind of get back to that full spectrum training and improve readiness again. This is going to make it very hard to do.



We'll lose about 30 percent if sequestration occurs of our remaining flying hours and weapon system sustainment funding. What that means in practical terms is that while we'll continue to support the fight in Afghanistan and other named operations, we'll continue to support nuclear deterrent activity, we'll continue to do initial flight training—virtually everything else is impacted.

Mike Hostage is going to have to take the active duty combat air forces and starting the first of March we'll start to curtail flying training. By mid-May they will be below acceptable combat levels and about 70 percent of our CAF will be completely non-mission capable by July. We'll close about 10 training ranges here in the U.S. about the same time in July, including places like the Utah Test and Training Range and the Nevada Test and Training Range. This is a big deal. We'll stop doing exercises like Red Flag, and Green Flag, and Commando Sling, and Cope Tiger.

On the mobility air forces side we're going to have curtailed airdrop training. We could lose as many as 21,000 training jumps for the United States Army. We'll lose the ability to do air refueling training both for our own forces and for coalition partners because we simply won't have the flying hours to fly. We're going to lose about 200,000 flying hours in this effort in the last six months of the year. It's a big deal.

On the training side of the house, we'll continue to protect the resources to do initial flight training, but on the first of April, Ed Rice will stop doing advanced flight training programs, things like instructor pilot upgrades, requalification for experienced pilots coming back from staff jobs, those kinds of things. All of these things are gifts that keep on giving. And it will create a bow wave that will be very difficult to recover from. It will take a long time.

That 30 percent weapon system sustainment support reduction we talked about means that we'll have about 150 aircraft and about 85 engines that won't go into depot. All the work that happens in the depot supported by small business in the local area providing spare parts, et cetera, is now going to be affected. Those businesses will be affected.

It's not just the depot work force that's furloughed. We now have a problem in the businesses that support us. Industry partners here know all about that. This is a big deal.

Next slide.

On the infrastructure side, we've already delayed 100 plus projects in 52 different places around the world. We've got 14 more we'll delay if sequestration occurs, sustainment projects, and another 12 bases. We've got dormitory projects we won't start. Twenty-two milcon projects have been delayed. We've got about 220 energy-focused projects that we can't start. There is lots of stuff impacted by this.

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In our modernization accounts, we're not really sure what the impact will be. The F-35 program will lose up to three aircraft this production year if sequestration occurs.

The RDT&E accounts will also be affected, which puts software development at risk, which affects IOC dates for us.



The KC-46 program, we hope the cuts will be below the 10 to 12 percent range overall which means that that contract is not threatened, which is a great thing for us. But who knows what future top line will mean to program structure? We'll have to wait and see.

We intended to buy a second SBIRS satellite on this year's contract, but because of the continuing resolution we can't change the quantities of the current award, which means we have to wait to buy the second satellite later. That will cost us an additional \$1 billion over the initiative that we had worked out with our industry partners this year.

Our test and evaluation programs are all going to be delayed. It could cause as much as a tripling of our test costs across all of our programs, and of course delay fielding capability.

Then programs like the Long Range Strike Bomber and others, we'll have to wait and see the impact.

Next slide.

Okay, so that's the good news.

[Laughter].

Actually that's just what's happening. It doesn't change how great our Air Force is, but it may affect what we do in the future, what we look like in the future, how big we are in the future.

During all of this change I think it's important that we have some kind of stability. We released a new vision for our Air Force. It's actually pretty simple. It's focused on three things—Airmen, mission, innovation. The theme for this conference. Imagine that.

It highlights the significance of Airmen as the power of our Air Force. It talks about and reminds us of the five enduring missions that we were assigned when we first became a proud Air Force in 1947. They haven't changed and they're not likely to change in the future. It kind of embraces innovation as almost a genetic trait of every Airman. It's kind of in our DNA. We came from technology and we have to figure out how to harness it and use it to our advantage in the future. It's pretty simple. It's a thousand words long. You can read it in three minutes. If you haven't seen it, let me know. I'll send you a copy.

Next slide.

Here's the mission areas it talks about. It talks about those five enduring missions. We've added space. It used to be just air superiority, now we've added space superiority. We also added cyber and space enablers to do those other missions. But the basic missions have remained unchanged since 1947. They're still accomplished by incredible Airmen. And the net effect, the product that we provide for the nation is Global Vigilance, Global Reach, and Global Power. It's a pretty simple concept, and we are incredibly good at it.

I've been talking a lot about Airmen and innovation lately, so today I want to talk about just those three things—the meat of what we do. The centerpiece of that vision—our mission.



I wish I could stand up here and talk to you about all the aircraft we're going to do it with, manned and unmanned, the systems that we're going to put together to make it happen, the new technology we're going to invest in, the acquisition programs that will breathe life into it. I wish I could tell you about all that stuff and weave you the tapestry the Secretary has designed. Unfortunately right now we have no idea what it's going to look like, until we figure out, as the Secretary said, a reliable string of numbers. What's the topline going to look like for the next 10 years? Really? What does that mean to the Air Force and how does that change what we're planning?

So until I can come back and have that conversation with you with some kind of certainty, let me look at Global Vigilance, Reach and Power through a different lens.

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The discussion about Global Vigilance these days tends to center on remotely piloted aircraft, for good reason. Your Air Force Airmen have flown almost 1.5 million combat hours in the Predator and Reaper, and there are some industry folks in this room who ought to be very proud of that.

Global Hawk has flown almost 60,000 combat hours now, or somewhere in that vicinity. They do incredible things every single day, all over the world.

But the face of Global Vigilance is not an unmanned aircraft. It's Phil Miller. He's a 2005 graduate of the United States Air Force Academy—distinguished graduate, in fact. When he graduated, he went on to graduate school at the University of Colorado in Boulder and got a degree in civil engineering. A pretty smart kid. After that he went to pilot training and became one of our first pilots to go directly into the U-28, that aircraft you see in the picture, flying with Air Force Special Operations Command. In the four years of so he's been doing this mission for our Air Force, he has 1,800 combat hours. He's now in the top one percent of all Air Force pilots in combat flying hours. Not bad for a new captain. He's a pretty impressive guy. Phil Miller believes in this mission, he loves doing it. He has identified, tracked and helped eliminate known terrorists. He supported and defended coalition and joint and U.S. Airmen on the battlefield. He's done it all relentlessly, often flying back-to-back, long endurance missions.

If you're going to be vigilant you've got to be where the action is.

Young Captain Miller, when he finishes up the weapons instructor course he's going through right now, the first one for the U-28, he'll head off on his next deployment, his ninth—also, not bad for the rank of captain.

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I believe Veronica Cox may be here, today. Veronica, are you here? No? Veronica [Cox] is an intel Airman. When this picture was taken she was assigned to Kadena Air Base in Japan. This was in 2011. She was acting as an intel analyst when the earthquake actually devastated Japan and all the aftermath that came. Because she spoke fluent Japanese she volunteered to help any way she could. So one night, sitting on a Pave Hawk helicopter doing damage assessment and intel collection from that helicopter they flew over an area of the local landscape where she saw a bunch of rocks arranged on the ground in the low light that looked like Japanese characters. So she asked the pilot to descend. She saw that no kidding, it was a sign calling for help. She directed him to go lower, and



they found 200 isolated civilians. She hoisted down to the roof of the building they were in and when her feet hit the top of the roof she yelled in Japanese, “We’re the U.S. Air Force and we’re here to help.” I wish I had a tape of that. I should have asked Hawk Carlisle to yell that in Japanese. [Laughter]. What an incredible story. She helped save 200 lives that night. And on nine more combat search and rescue missions she saved a lot more.

If you’re going to be vigilant, you’ve got to be engaged. This young lady is. This is what Global Vigilance looks like to the rest of the world.

Next slide.

Air mobility Airmen do absolutely incredible things. Whether they’re supporting humanitarian relief operations in pick a place—Haiti, Pakistan, Libya, Tunisia. You pick one. Whether they’re moving coalition troops in places like Mali, or moving to support noncombatant evacuation in the Levant or elsewhere, or whether they’re supporting our operations in the Middle East with more airdrops last year alone than in the entire Korean War at 40 different forward operating bases they do phenomenal work.

They’ve also done incredible work in the aeromedical evacuation business. They moved 170,000 patients since 9/11—170,000 with about a 97 percent survival rate. Every two minutes, every hour, every day, every day of the year, a strategic airlift sortie launches for the United States of America.

That’s what Paul Selva and his team do. Every day they move four million pounds of cargo. Every day they offload 600,000 gallons of fuel on average. What an incredible story. Major Joanna Jackson is a doctor. She’s a part of that aeromedical evacuation system. In 2011, she volunteered to depart TDY from her base at Joint Base Langley-Eustis—she’s an emergency room doc—and to go forward as part of one of the first tactical critical care evacuation teams—an AMC initiative that basically put medical care in the form of an emergency medicine doc and two nurse anesthetists as far forward as possible to grab casualties as close to the point of injury as they could to escort them back to better medical care. She was on the first team.

They responded to a mortar attack in eastern Afghanistan, and when they got there Army Specialist Donny Eslinger who you see in this picture was lying by the side of the road, a victim of that mortar blast and he was bleeding to death. He had terrible injuries, including a massive hole in the side of his head, the left side of his head.

She him there in the dust, she put lines into his chest, she put lines into his heart, she put lines into his arteries. She basically kept him alive and escorted him back to the forward operating base where he was then medically evac’d to Bagram to Landstuhl to Walter Reed. He made a full recovery; actually received a Purple Heart from President Obama, which is pretty cool. Of course Doc Jackson never did come back. She stayed in Afghanistan because she had other wounded warriors to save. But when she returned to Langley about seven months later Specialist Eslinger came to visit. That’s when this picture was taken. She was so astonished by his recovery she had to touch the place that she’d last—where she’d seen the hole in the side of his head and bandaged it on that battlefield. What a moment this must have been—for both of them.

Global Reach.



Next slide.

Chief Cody and I were at Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait, a couple of weeks ago. We were having lunch with a bunch of Airmen and one of them was Muhamed Mehmedovic. Talk about a story. He was born in Srebrenico, Bosnia. In 1995, he was six years old when the ethnic cleansing began. Eighty percent of his family was eliminated. That's the word he used. Killed in the genocide. For the next several years they left their home, they hid out in the mountain passes, they tried to survive. The only thing that kept him alive was resupply by air from U.S. airlift, principally from C-130s. He told us about running out to find the C-130 pallets, getting the food, and running back into the woods, and that's what kept them alive. His exact words were the United States Air Force saved my life.

Later he was sponsored by a relative who had gotten to the States to move under a new State Department program back to the U.S., and he and his mother and father did that. He went to school in the U.S., learned English, graduated from high school, went to a recruiter and enlisted in the United States Air Force to pay back his country. He's now a transportation journeyman at Little Rock Air Force Base. He loads C-130 pallets. His dream is to fly C-130s and deliver lifesaving aid to people around the world. My bet is he'll make it.

That's Global Reach.

Next slide.

That's Lieutenant Ralph Parr. Anybody here know Ralph Parr? Some of you had to know him. Many of you know of him, I know. This picture was taken in 1944, when Lieutenant Parr was heading off to World War II flying the P-38 Lightning. A pretty incredible life story. After that combat tour he came back, returned to combat in Korea in an F-80 on his first combat tour, returned from that tour, checked out in an F-86, which you see in the picture here. Developed the air-to-air tactics for that airplane and returned for a second tour in Korea flying the F-86. In one remarkable 11-day, 30-mission period, he shot down 10 enemy aircraft and became a double Ace. On one mission he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for single-handedly attacking 10 MiGs. You've got to like that. Pretty amazing guy. In the interwar years, early sixties, he helped develop the F-4C, bringing it into the operational inventory as one of our first instructors. Along with many of you he became an F-4 squadron commander. He flew the F-4 in two combat tours in Vietnam. By the time he retired in 1976, Colonel Parr had flown about 6,000 hours in fighter aircraft. He'd flown 641 combat missions, five combat tours, four different aircraft, three wars. He wore 60 decorations including the Distinguished Service Cross, the Air Force Cross awarded for extraordinary valor in Khe Sanh. He wore the Silver Star, the Bronze Star, 10 Distinguished Flying Crosses, and 41 Air Medals. And he carried our respect.

December 7th, Ralph Parr peacefully passed away and flew west, and became a treasured memory of our Air Force.

We should all stand a little prouder because we follow in his footsteps. We should all celebrate because we share that Global Power legacy that he began and that he passed on to...

Next slide.



That he passed on to Megan Sylvester. All 5'0" of her. Megan is a pretty impressive young lady. She works at Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota. She was born in Rapid City, South Dakota to an Air Force Airman, a young A1C who later was commissioned, is now a communications officer in our Air Force and works on the Joint Staff. Megan runs a convoy response force. Her job is to lead a 42-person, specially-trained security forces team that moves nuclear weapons to and from missile fields and then recovers them if there's an issue. She's really good at it. She's led 100 nuclear weapon convoy missions during her time at Minot—100. And if you talk to her Airmen, they'll tell you how impressive she is.

As she was showing us a demo of this convoy she decided she wanted to show us something a little bit different so she said, would you guys mind just waiting here? I'm going to go rearrange something. We said okay. Whatever she said. [Laughter].

We stood by the side of the truck. As we were standing there one of her flight chiefs, a guy who was obviously a new airman first class in the unit came walking around the back of the truck and stood around the corner from us. They didn't know we were there. They were talking. The A1C was asking questions about how often do we do this, where do we go, how far away are the missile fields? So, he was clearly the new guy. As Lieutenant Sylvester came running by to get something arranged, he saw her go by and made a comment to the master sergeant after she got out of range. "She's not very tall, is she?" The master sergeant, as soon as the words were out of his mouth I took out a pen and wrote down exactly what he said. He said, "Airman, it don't matter how tall she is. LT Sly has got game." LT Sly has got game. Yes, she does. And she is Global Power for America. She needs to know that. We need to tell her.

Next slide.

So is this guy. This is Davell [James]. His mom and dad are both Army NCOs. He's from South Carolina. He's a chef at a missile alert facility at F.E. Warren, Wyoming. He spends 16 days a month in the missile fields, four days at a time. He starts work at 5:00 in the morning. He leaves work about 8:00 at night after finishing cleaning up the kitchen after dinner for the missile crews and the security guys are always wanting an after dinner snack. He's a pretty amazing guy. He knows he's responsible for morale. He has a huge part in that. He kind of thrives on that knowledge.

If you talk to Davell, you feel good about yourself. You feel good about life. You feel great about our Air Force. If our missile alert crews and the teams that support them, can't operate in the missile fields, we can't do nuclear deterrence. Without Davell [James], they can't. Without them, we don't have nuclear deterrence. Said another way, no Davell [James], no Global Power. Davell [James] needs to understand that. We need to understand that.

Next slide.

You've heard all about these guys. One of them is sitting right over here. He's one of our outstanding Airmen of the year. There's a great Air Force one star named Jack Briggs who works down at Air Combat Command. He tells a story about flying an F-15E two-ship in the battlespace in Afghanistan, and as he arrived at an ambush site in eastern Afghanistan where an Army patrol had been ambushed, they knew there were wounded on the ground. They responded to a troops-in-contact call and were trying to figure out how to best help. When they arrived they initially connected with the



ground control party: the joint tactical air controller and tactical air control party Airmen supporting him—the two guys you see on the slide. After they got the situation on the ground, which is an incredible thing that happens here in this transition, because their job is to take the ground commander's perspective on what's going on, translate it to people in the air, explain what the ground commander wants them to do, the effect he wants them to create, and then makes sure it's executed perfectly. All in the confusion of battle with bullets flying by your head and dust swirling, whatever the conditions on the ground are, affecting everything you do.

So as they first made radio contact with Airman First Class Corey Hughes, he was yelling in the mic to make sure he could be heard over the gunfire they could hear in the background. He was making short, kind of staccato radio calls so he could put the mike down and fire his weapon in between. At one point in time as he started to give them the game plan, he stopped and said stand by, then everything went quiet. They were overhead wondering what was going on. Later he came back on the radio. He gave them the plan. He wanted them to do a show of force pass, create some space so he could get helicopters in to pick up the team on the ground and evacuate them. The plan went perfectly.

After getting back to Bagram that night General Briggs was headed over to the Craig Theater Hospital, which he did often to see and visit with wounded and see if they were any from battle that day. In fact, there were some already in the emergency room by the time he arrived in the ICU. So he visited with them for a while and of course they thanked them for the help airpower was able to provide. As he got ready to leave one soldier in the back of the room was kind of yelling at him frantically, telling him to come over. When he got to him, the guys lying there without a shirt on, there's blood everywhere. He'd been shot through both legs. He said, "Sir, thank the TACP for me." Jack says, "Okay, can you give me a little more than that?" He goes, "Yeah, I don't know who he is. I just know that I got shot, I went down, I couldn't move, I was in the middle of the hot zone, and this guy came out of nowhere and picked me up and carried me about 200 meters in a fireman's carry over his shoulder, to get me out of danger." He said. "I wish I knew his name, but all I know is as I was bouncing along on his shoulder I saw the patch that said TACP. Thank him for me, would you?"

So General Briggs went back and found the TACP—Airman First Class Corey Hughes. It turns out when he said stand by, what he had done was see a soldier go down, ran over and picked him up, he carried him to safety, made sure he was situated, ran back, picked up the microphone, start firing again, and finished the mission brief. This whole time with suppressing fire was being provided by Senior Airman Gardner, who was talking to other aircraft on another frequency.

Global Power for America.

I don't know, they're 10 years old. [Laughter]. They're lethal. They're unbelievably talented. They're scary good at what they do and they just make us proud.

Next slide.

Our Air Force is pretty darn good. The people in it are unbelievably good, and we're going to get through this financial mess that we're kind of mired in right now. And when we come out the other end we're going to be exactly what we were when we went in to the front of it. We're going to be the best Air Force in the world. You and I are going to make sure that happens.



The Secretary would get rid of me in a heartbeat if he doesn't think that's where we're headed. So I'm not worried about that because we've got them, and they can do anything. Anything if we help them.

Next slide.

One of the things that surprised me since I got in this job is the number of reports I get every day about life as it affects the Air Force. Not technology, not mission area stuff, not innovation, just life.

Since I took the job we've averaged about 1.6 deaths per day in our Air Force. Not combat deaths, just deaths. I'm surprised by that. And every now and then, I think it's important for us to kind of step back and realize all the things that affected the Air Force when so many of you served are the same. We share this lifestyle, this inherent risk of mission, this love of, the thrill of things like flying and working on the battlefield and doing incredibly difficult things. We share that. We share it across national lines, we share it across service lines, we share it as an institution of the profession of arms. Every now and then I think it's good to remind ourselves that that's important to us.

Next slide.

A couple of years aback I had a chance to speak at the final F-16 training course graduation from the Springfield Air National Guard Base in Ohio—fantastic base, fantastic training unit, fantastic course. One of the guys who graduated in the class that night was a young lieutenant named Luc Gruenther. Kind of a tall, lanky drink of water. Fired up guy. Excited about life. Excited about the Air Force. Had a reputation for being kind of everybody's buddy. Loved the world. Happy all the time. Loved what he was doing. Couldn't wait to get out in the Air Force and make a difference like so many of our great Airmen. And he did. He ended up at Aviano Air Base in the Triple Nickel Fighter Squadron. He became a great F-16 pilot. He was the chief of safety at Aviano. On January 28th of this year he was flying a four-ship and during the four-ship he separated from his flight and he went missing somewhere over the Adriatic Sea. For three days in terrible weather, they looked for him. At the end of the second day they found a debris field in the water. On the morning of third day they found Luc, his body.

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Luc is married to Cassy. She's a great lady, they're a great couple, they're energetic, they're engaged, they're outdoor people, they like to do a lot of things. They were just kind of the model young Air Force couple.

Next slide.

Last week at the beginning of the week they had a memorial service at Aviano Air Base in Italy in Hangar 3. There were a thousand people at the memorial service. In that memorial service there were members of the 173rd Airborne Brigade from Vicenza, Italy, who came over, who knew Luc from being supported by him in Afghanistan. The teams had worked together pretty closely. They knew him, they respected him. They came to pay their respects. There were a thousand others in that hangar. A great ceremony from what I heard. His buddies made everybody laugh. His wife made



them cry with her eulogy. His wife Cassy was there with her mom and his mom along with members of the family.

At the end of the ceremony they walked outside and watched the missing man formation approach base. Luc's brother, who's also in the Air Force, saluted. I like to believe as number three pulled into the vertical on the missing man flyby, that Luc was riding with him. I think his mom thought so too because the picture I can't find here, I'm sorry, is actually his mom waving goodbye as that airplane pulled up into the vertical. I think Luc just kept right on going and touched the face of God.

The next morning Cassy delivered their first child. A beautiful little girl she named Serene. Now she'll never know her father, but she'll know all about him. And as Secretary Donley said, she will always be the daughter of an American Airman.

So the line goes on. So many of you stand in it, and I'm so honored to stand with you.

Not too long ago one of our young Airmen asked me why I still liked being in the Air Force. After reminding him that I didn't like being in the Air Force, I loved being in the Air Force, he said yeah, but why? I started to say the typical, "Well, cause of the Airmen." Then I stopped and realized it's more than that. It's not just the Airmen. It's what they stand for.

I just said hi before I started this morning to a young senior airman I've never met, right here in the second row. I'll tell you what I love about our Air Force. I've known you now for about 40 minutes, but I'd die for you. So would Craig McKinley, so would Ed Rice, so would Janet Wolfenbarger, and so would everybody else in this front row. And so would almost everybody sitting behind you. And I'm just naïve enough to believe that you'd do the same for me. How could you not love being in this business?

It is such a privilege to serve, and it's an honor to be here with you. Airpower...gots to have some!

Thanks everybody.