



Letter to Airmen

Honorable Michael W. Wynne
Secretary of the Air Force

Wednesday, May 10, 2006

Letter to Airmen: Service Before Self

This past February, in my Letter to Airmen addressing our three *USAF Core Values*, I shared these thoughts on ***Service Before Self***:

It is not the same as "service," a value also claimed by some civilian institutions and corporations. Our service requires sacrifice and commitment to our Nation. We understand we make decisions in an environment where freedoms are on the line, and lives are at stake. *Service Before Self* begins with duty, but it means more: It means that, in our Air Force, as we fly and fight in war and peace, *going above-and-beyond- the-call-of-duty is not the exception--it is the rule.*

It is the rule because every Airman is an expeditionary Airman, whom the Joint Team counts on every day to be trained and battle ready. Delivering sovereign options for the defense of the United States of America and its global interests requires self-sacrifice.

As I visit and work with Airmen around the world, I could not be prouder of the many ways that you sacrifice for *Service Before Self*, whether the mission is combat operations or humanitarian relief. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina provides a great example. Many of our critical search and rescue Airmen who had just returned from Operation Iraqi Freedom deployments immediately went to rescue Americans from rooftops in New Orleans instead of taking a well-earned leave.

Another example of such *Service Before Self* is the remarkable number of Air Force Reservists and Air National Guardsmen who volunteer for deployments. At great sacrifice to their families and often at the expense of their private businesses, they continue to volunteer to contribute to the fight. Their service allows our Air Force leaders to integrate them into units creating a truly seamless Total Force for the Joint Team.

Your service in the Air Force--with all the risks and sacrifices that service demands--is service to our nation, to its values, and to its dreams. The participation in "wingman" programs to enhance relationships and security to fellow airmen is yet a further example.

Everything we have done--and everything we will do--begins with an oath that changes our lives. We understand that the nation depends upon us to live up to that oath. We understand that, as we serve on the front lines of freedom, our promise to serve must come before all else.

On behalf of the Air Force, and on behalf of a grateful nation, I thank you for your dedication, your devotion, and your *Service Before Self*. I salute you all.




Michael W. Wynne
Secretary of the Air Force