



# ***Letter to Airmen***

***Michael B. Donley***  
***Secretary of the Air Force***

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Thursday, June 18, 2009

## **Teamwork**

Earlier this year General Schwartz and I had the privilege of presenting the Air Force Cross, the Air Force's highest distinction of valor in combat, to Staff Sergeant Zachary Rhyner for his efforts on April 6, 2008 in Afghanistan. Family, friends and comrades gathered to honor the extraordinary heroism of Sergeant Rhyner and his Joint teammates -- and to be reminded of the remarkable tenacity of the American warrior. Like all of America's Airmen, Sergeant Rhyner's story is one of **teamwork** -- teamwork that began well before combat started.

As Sergeant Rhyner and his Army teammates fought their long and grueling battle, they were not alone! Contributions came from many corners and Services. Acquisition professionals and industry partners ensured that the team deployed with reliable and effective equipment. Veterans of recent expeditionary operations ensured that the team's tactics, techniques and procedures were first-rate by passing on hard-won knowledge. Finally, combat power from the skies above helped secure the team's position by multiplying their firepower.

This remarkable experience reminds us that teamwork starts with YOU. By joining the Air Force, you have joined a cause greater than yourself -- one where success comes from collective efforts. Daily, you build on a rich legacy of Americans who pooled their talent to change the world -- from launching American military aviation with the Wright Flyer ... to catapulting the Project Mercury astronauts into space ... to being a critical component of the Joint cyber team. And, while domains of air, space and cyberspace continually evolve, our heritage demonstrates that teamwork is the linchpin of success.

We have added Sergeant Rhyner to a long list of distinguished Airmen -- rightfully so, as the actions of his Joint team reflect the finest traditions of American warriors in battle. In the process, we are reminded that *all* Air Force stories -- including your own -- begin with Airmen who commit to working together to serve our Nation. Thank you for all that you do for our continued success as a Total Force team.

  
Michael B. Donley  
Secretary of the Air Force