



Chief of Staff's letter to Airmen

by Gen. Mark A. Welsh III
Air Force Chief of Staff

1/2/2013 - **WASHINGTON** -- Happy New Year Airmen!

To those of you who spent the holidays deployed, thank you...and I'm sorry you weren't home with your families. I know you understand that what you're doing is important, but I also know that doesn't make the separation any easier. In these days where self-serving agendas seem to be on display everywhere we turn, your willingness to sacrifice for the good of our Nation and its citizens still inspires me.

Despite the budgetary uncertainty, the fiscal cliff, or whatever else time and circumstances throw at us, I believe 2013 will be a great year for our Air Force! We'll still be doing great work for the Nation, we'll still be coming to work with the greatest men and women on Earth, and we'll still be taking care of each other. And I know each of you will continue to look for new, innovative ways to make us an even better fighting force. It's a great time to be an Airman!

One of the greatest things about our Air Force is the remarkable heritage we share. As 2012 closed, one of our greatest living heroes "flew west" and became a treasured memory. Colonel (ret.) Ralph Parr, a Double Ace and combat veteran of three wars, passed away peacefully on December 7th, at age 88. During the Korean War, in one remarkable 11 day/30 mission stretch, he scored ten confirmed kills and received the Distinguished Service Cross for actions during a particularly harrowing dogfight with 10 enemy MiGs. In Vietnam, he earned the Air Force Cross for extraordinary valor during the Battle of Khe Sanh. In all, he flew 641 combat missions and is the only American aviator to receive both the Distinguished Service Cross and the Air Force Cross. He also wore the Silver Star, 10 Distinguished Flying Crosses, the Bronze Star and 41 Air Medals. We should all stand a little prouder because we follow in his footsteps.

I think we all share the responsibility to protect the legacy that Colonel Parr and so many others built. But the demographics of our Air Force have changed. Images, songs, stories, or "traditions" that are obscene, vulgar, or that denigrate some percentage of Airmen are not the things we value in that proud heritage. I'm a bit surprised by comments I've heard about the recent health and welfare inspection, suggesting it was an attack on fighter pilot culture, a 'witch hunt' to target specific organizations or individuals, or a response to a specific event. None of those comments are true. My intent was two-fold. First, if we're going to get serious about preventing sexual assault, we need to get serious about eliminating environments conducive to sexual harassment or unprofessional relationships. Both are leading indicators of sexual assault and other behavior and performance issues. Second, the Air Force succeeds because of the professionalism and discipline of our Airmen. We have a significant number of Airmen who feel they have to "go along to get along" by ignoring pornographic images, workplace comments, or other material that makes them uncomfortable. That's simply not the Air Force we want to be. EVERY Airman is critically important...and every one of you deserves to be treated with respect. Anything less reflects a lack of discipline and a failure to honor our values. It also marginalizes great Airmen, degrades mission effectiveness and hurts unit morale. We simply can't, and won't, tolerate it. Of course, that's easy for me to say...only you can make it reality. As always, I need your help.

In a couple of weeks, I'll send you a CSAF Vector for 2013. In it, I'll let you know where I think we're headed in some key areas and also lay out a few things I think I owe you over the next year. Things like what the AF values for promotion (hint--the list starts with Job Performance!); my thoughts on performance reports and any required adjustments; etc.

Thank you again for all you do, and for choosing to serve in our great Air Force. Don't let the talk of sequestration distract you from the importance of what you do every day. We'll still need to come to work in 2013 and we'll continue to provide America with one of its greatest asymmetric advantages. It's an honor to serve beside you.

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Chief of Staff