

WRIGHT'S RALLYING CRY FOR RESILIENCE

CMSAF Kaleth O. Wright's voice boomed out through a packed ballroom, where the crowd overflowed into the hallway. "Out of the night that covers me," he began, reciting the Victorian-era poem, "Invictus," from memory. "Black as the pit from pole to pole/ I thank whatever gods may be/ For my unconquerable soul."

Wright's recitation at the 2018 AFA Air, Space and Cyber Conference was all about resilience and the need to persevere.

"I think this poem serves to remind us that our fate is up to us, to ensure we remain undefeated, that we have to make the choices essential to our soul the ones we won't regret," Wright said in the talk that followed the poem.

Resilience is a skill that must be cultivated by actively taking responsibility for those things one can control and by intentionally pursuing self-care. This is [Wright's vision](#) for building better airmen.

William Ernest Henley, who lost a leg to illness in his youth, wrote the poem while recovering from medical interventions that saved the surviving one.

"Invictus" is Latin for "unconquered," and the poem has long inspired others, including survivors of the North Vietnamese Hoa Lo Prison, better known as the "Hanoi Hilton."

The late Navy Vice Adm. James Bond Stockdale recounted in a 1993 essay how a fellow POW secretly passed part of the poem to him after he returned from a period of solitary confinement. The poem's last verse had been inscribed "with a rat dropping."

Nelson Mandela also used it as inspiration during his time as a political prisoner in South Africa during the apartheid era.

But one need not be on the edge of life and death to find strength in "Invictus."

"I found poetry when I was a young man," Wright told *Air Force Magazine*. Writing poetry is a "great" avenue for self-expression, is "refreshing mentally," and remains a key part of his own mental resilience, he said.

By **Jennifer-Leigh Oprihory**,
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