



CHIEF's Sight Picture

9 May 2003

Resuming the AEF Battle Rhythm

Once again, our great Air Force, in the finest tradition of America's armed forces, has served this country proudly in battle. Our airmen were absolutely vital to the success of the recent campaign. They demonstrated to the American people -- and to the world -- a remarkable level of commitment, competence, and steadfast professionalism. Along with thousands of dedicated soldiers, sailors, marines, coastguardsmen and our coalition partners, you have done a service for our nation and the world from which many generations will reap the benefits. Whether in southwest Asia, the Pacific, or Europe, protecting the homeland or sustaining our force, each of you committed your lives to defend our interests and our values. All airmen -- active, reserve, guard and civilians -- should be justifiably proud of what we've achieved.

For the first time in the history of the Air Force, we relied on the Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) to present the full spectrum of our capabilities to combatant commanders around the world. Through our 10 AEFs, our AEF Prime capabilities, and our AEF mobility assets, we demonstrated our ability to package forces, carefully selecting the most combat ready forces from our Total Force; build and present expeditionary units; and flow them to the theaters of operation in a timely and logical sequence. We rapidly delivered them to the warfighters, while preserving a highly capable residual force to satisfy our global commitments.

To meet the tremendous demand for air and space power for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), I directed a variation from our rotational AEF battle rhythm. Yet, consistent with the inherent flexibility of AEF operations, we tailored our response based on the needs of the combatant commanders in southwest Asia and in the Pacific, drawing forces from multiples AEFs. This flexibility delivered the right capabilities in the right places at the right times, assuring victory in Iraq and demonstrating our resolve in the Pacific. With the threats from our adversaries now diminished, it is time to return to pre-OIF operations and resume the rotational AEF battle rhythm.

We are acutely aware of the need to get our airmen home and return stability to our people's lives. Yet, we have pushed the AEFs hard. Consequently, it will take some time to reset the AEF properly. Because many of our airmen were so heavily tasked over the last several months, we need a transition period to restart the AEF rotational cycle. During this transition period, we will restart AEF rotations using our residual force (those who did not deploy over the last 6-8 months) to the maximum extent possible. The AEF Center has begun the challenging task of restructuring this limited residual force into two transitional AEFs. The first one will be fielded for a minimum of 120 days starting in July 2003. The extended vulnerability periods are necessary due to the high numbers of airmen currently deployed. And, while July 2003

represents the official restart of AEF rotations, nothing precludes selected personnel from returning early if the component commanders and the AEF Center agree. This transition phase will provide a manageable adjustment period that will allow those who were deployed to reconstitute and recover before we ask them to deploy again in a steady-state battle rhythm in 2004.

At the same time we are working to reset the AEF cycle, we are also working to reduce the employment levels for our low density/high demand assets and our stressed career fields. Collectively, they are the backbone of our reconnaissance and strike capabilities and made distant operations in an expeditionary environment possible. We need to continue to train and sustain those vital capabilities so they are ready to meet the call when it comes again.

During this transition and reconstitution period, our focus will be on taking care of the airmen who have served so admirably and restoring our capabilities to meet future AEF requirements. Our people need time for their overall health, family matters, professional education, and promotion testing. Our units need to resume training, repair equipment, reduce backlogs, and restock consumables to ensure UTCs are fully reconstituted. Also, we need to recapitalize assets and reposition war reserve stocks to ensure we sustain the high state of readiness for which we are renowned.

You proved the AEF is agile, flexible and lethal; and you confirmed it is highly effective in presenting the full capabilities of the Total Force to our combatant commanders. It is the right warfighting construct for our 21st Century Air Force, and has proven its worth in delivering decisive capabilities while providing a mechanism to give our people a sense of stability and predictability. Once again, I want to thank each and every one of you for your dedication, professionalism, and service to our nation.




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