

**Gen. Michael E. Ryan**

November 6, 1997–the present



**M**ICHAEL E. RYAN was born on December 24, 1941, in San Antonio, Texas. He graduated from the Air Force Academy in 1965 with a bachelor of science degree. After finishing pilot training at Craig Air Force Base, Alabama, in October 1966, he was assigned to the 16th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, where he flew F-4s. In October 1967 he joined the 13th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand. He flew on 138 combat missions, including 100 over North Vietnam. In August 1968 he transferred to the 7th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico, where he again flew F-4s. After completing Squadron Officer School in 1969 and graduating from the Fighter Weapons Instructor Course at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, in January 1971, Captain Ryan served as an exchange officer for Mirage III fighters with the 2d Operational Conversion Unit, Royal Australian Air Force.

In July 1973 he returned stateside, assigned as an F-4 pilot with the 311th Tactical Fighter Training Squadron, Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, and from September 1974 to August 1975 he was wing weapons officer with the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing, Kunsan Air Base, South Korea. After graduating with distinction from the Air Command and Staff College, Ryan earned a master's degree in business administration from Auburn University. Promoted to major in June 1976, he headed to Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, as staff officer in the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans, Headquarters Tactical Air Command.

Newly promoted to lieutenant colonel in April 1979, Ryan assumed command of the 61st Tactical Fighter Squadron, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, and was responsible for overseeing the unit's transition from F-4s to F-16s. He later was assistant deputy commander for operations, 56th Tactical Fighter Wing, at MacDill.

In August 1981 Colonel Ryan was assigned to Headquarters U.S. Air Force, Washington, D.C., as chief of the Checkmate Group. Located in the basement of the Pentagon, the Checkmate Group was a separate Air Force planning cell studying counterstrategies to Soviet initiatives. Ryan later was named deputy assistant director of joint and national security council matters at the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Operations. After graduating from the National War College in June 1984, he became commander of the 432d Tactical Fighter Wing at Misawa Air Base, Japan, where he reestablished U.S. fighter operations after a

twelve-year absence. He became executive to the chief of staff, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, in June 1986. After receiving his first star in May 1988, he was assigned as deputy chief of staff, plans, Tactical Air Command Headquarters, until January 1990 when he became deputy chief of staff, operations.

Promoted to major general in January 1991, he returned to Washington to become vice director of strategic plans and policy at the joint staff. Two years later, Lieutenant General Ryan became assistant to the chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. In September 1994 he went to Europe as commander, Allied Air Forces Southern Europe (North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO]), Naples, Italy; and as commander, Sixteenth Air Force (U.S. Air Force in Europe [USAFE]), Aviano Air Base, Italy. In those command positions, Ryan directed the NATO air combat operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which directly contributed to the Dayton Peace Accords. In April 1996 he received his fourth star and became commander of USAFE and of Allied Air Forces Central Europe, Ramstein Air Base, West Germany. General Ryan served in this capacity until he became chief of staff of the United States Air Force in November 1997. With that appointment he became the first officer in U.S. history to assume his father's former post as the most senior officer of a military service.

Ryan faced a major challenge. Despite a 33 percent reduction of force structure and personnel and a loss of two-thirds of the USAF's foreign basing, the service confronted requirements of the National Command Authority to intervene in numerous overseas deployments. The resultant high operation tempo damaged the long-term sustainability of the service. To remedy the situation, Ryan implemented the aerospace Air Expeditionary Force (AEF), which was specifically designed for rapid global deployment.

The new expeditionary aerospace force that embraced the entire USAF was projected to include about ten AEFs that would be on call or deployed for up to ninety days, every fifteen months, with two AEFs on call at all times. His mid-1998 plan called for creating five thousand positions to support deployed forces and home bases by switching authorizations from specialties less likely to deploy.

Although overall readiness of the Air Force had remained steady over the previous eight years, Ryan believed that there had been a 9 percent decline in major weapon systems. He noted that the average U.S. Air Force aircraft was twenty years old in 1999, and that the older a piece of equipment was, the more difficult it was to procure parts for it. That was his rationale for pursuing force modernization with the F-22, the C-17, and the Joint Strike Fighter programs.

General Ryan believed that the United States had the greatest air force and superb people who do all "we ask them to do." He held that the concept of an expeditionary aerospace force would allow the continuance of "exceptional aerospace forces to accomplish our global mission and to better care for our folks as we do so."