

# New Space Force Guardians Sworn In On Maui

The six officers have new insignias but remain assigned to the Air Force Research Laboratory Detachment 15 at a military installation at Maui's Haleakala Observatory.

By [Kevin Knodell](#) / February 8, 2021

Maui's first Space Force Guardians have been sworn in to the newest military branch, but they won't have to travel to a galaxy far, far away.

The six former Air Force officers have new insignias but remain assigned to the Air Force Research Laboratory Detachment 15 at a military installation at Maui's Haleakala Observatory.

"As a new member of the Space Force, your mission here does not change," the detachment commander Lt. Col. John Zingarelli said during the Feb. 1 swearing-in ceremony. "You will continue to lead the discovery and development of critical space technologies for our nation."



Six Air Force officers took the oath to become U.S. Space Force guardians last week at the Air Force Maui Optical and Supercomputing Site at Maui's Haleakala Observatory.

The Space Force, which was formed at the direction of former President Donald Trump to tackle space-based threats and weaponry, officially became active in December 2019.

It operates as part of the Air Force but has its own separate command structure and commanding four-star general. In December, the Space Force announced that members of the service would be called guardians.

Before taking the oath of office, each of the new guardians exchanged their Air Force insignia for the Space Force insignia, but "their duties will remain the same," according to a press release on Monday.

The six officers at the laboratory's Directed Energy Directorate Air Force Maui Optical and Supercomputing site will join more than 2,400 airmen nationwide in assuming their new roles.

“As a native Hawaiian, it’s exciting to have a (Space Force) presence here,” Capt. Cody Felipe, one of the newly minted guardians, said in the press release. “It’s a great opportunity and exciting to be a part of history, especially for Det. 15, as the island’s first Space Force members.”

The six were the first sworn in on Maui. Another Space Force unit, the 21st Space Operations Squadron, is located at Keana Point on Oahu.

The prospect of creating a Space Force has been controversial and frequently lampooned, including in a Netflix series with the same name starring Steve Carrell.

Critics complained that it was a waste of money, likely violated international treaties against space weapons and was little more than a vanity project for Trump since the Air Force already did much of its proposed mission.

The U.S. and other militaries for decades have used satellites for intelligence gathering and communications. The military has operated on the Haleakala Summit since the 1960s tracking missiles and formed United States Space Command in 1985.

## Controversial History

Many doubted it would ever actually come into existence. Hawaii Sen. Brian Schatz called it a “dumb idea” in 2018. “Although ‘Space Force’ won’t happen, it’s dangerous to have a leader who cannot be talked out of crazy ideas,” he said in a tweet.

However, the initiative gained bipartisan support in Congress amid a recognition that the United States needs to defend assets in space. President Joe Biden’s new administration announced last week that it has no plans to

eliminate the Space Force and that the new military branch has its “full support.”

Despite international treaties agreeing not to militarize space — the definition of what constitutes a “militarization” or “space weapons” has varied and has never been internationally agreed upon.

In practice, nations as varied as China, Russia, India and Iran have had military systems focused on space for decades, including anti-satellite missiles, and satellite communications jammers — and nearly all use some form of satellite-based surveillance or targeting systems.

Last year South Korea, Japan and France also began expanding or setting up new military organizations with an eye toward space.

The Chinese and Russian militaries have increasingly invested resources on cyber warfare programs, training hackers to break into systems to steal secrets and disrupt operations.



Hawaii’s new Space Force officers exchanged their Air Force insignia for the Space Force insignia during a Feb. 1 swearing-in ceremony on Maui.

The global economy is increasingly dependent on satellite GPS to move goods, manage infrastructure and maintain steady communications. A 2013 threat assessment by the Department of Homeland Security warned that

“often, these critical dependencies do not become apparent until a GPS disruption occurs.”

The report went on to warn that “the increasing convergence of critical infrastructure dependency on GPS services with the likelihood that threat actors will exploit their awareness of that dependency presents a growing risk to the United States.”

The Pacific region has been the site of increasing competition between the U.S. and Chinese governments. Just months before official activation of the Space Force, the island nation of Kiribati — just south of Hawaii — severed ties with Taiwan and re-established relations with Beijing.

Kiribati is the site of a mothballed satellite tracking station that belonged to the Chinese space program until 2003 when the island nation recognized Taiwan’s independence. The Chinese space program officially falls under a defense agency, and though Beijing insists its space technology isn’t for offensive purposes, much of its program is shrouded in secrecy.

Security analysts suspected the Chinese facility in Kiribati was used to spy on American forces in Hawaii and the Marshall Islands. Some now wonder if Chinese officials hope to reactivate the facility.

The new Space Force officers on Maui are Hawaii’s first, but certainly not the last.

Last year, the Hawaii National Guard announced that it would be among the first National Guards in the country to raise a Space Force unit — expected to be called the 293rd Space Control Squadron — on Kauai at the Navy Pacific Missile Range Facility.

**About the Author**



## **Kevin Knodell**

Kevin Knodell covers the military and veterans in Hawaii and the greater Pacific for Civil Beat as a corps member for Report For America, a national nonprofit that places journalists in local newsrooms.