

Anatomy of Leadership: Images and Reflections—The Pattern of Air Leadership

Gen Ira C. Eaker

Colonel Crabbe, Seminar Director, Gentlemen:

This opportunity to discuss with you this pattern of air leadership, with particular reference to the careers of Generals H. H. Arnold and Carl A. Spaatz, is welcomed and appreciated. I do believe there is a definite “pattern” of air leadership and I also believe it is best represented and illustrated by the careers of these two preeminent US air leaders, Arnold and Spaatz.

I have been an avid student of leadership, more particularly generalship, for 60 years since entering the military service in 1917. I served, in staff or command roles, each of the successive chiefs of the Army Air Corps: Patrick Fechet, Foulois, Westover, Arnold, and Spaatz from 1924 to 1947. I have known all the chiefs of staff of the Eighth US Air Force—Spaatz, Vandenberg, Twining, White, LeMay, McConnell, Ryan, Brown, and Jones and have observed closely the patterns of leadership displayed by these 14 able air leaders.

From this unforgettable experience, I shall make some observations for 30 minutes and then stand for any questions you may raise.

First, what are the differences between air generalship and Army and Navy leadership? Some of my views on this subject were revealed in discussions with Albert Speer, Hitler’s weapons production minister, on 21 October 1976, from which I quote:

Whereas armies and navies have clashed for centuries and nations have risen and fallen as a result, air power has never had similar use, experience, or influence.

Gen Ira C. Eaker retired in 1947 after a distinguished military career. During World War II he was commanding general, Eighth Air Force; commander in chief, Mediterranean Allied Air Forces; deputy commander, Army Air Forces; and chief of Air Staff. His flying firsts include the Pan American Goodwill Flight (1927); world endurance flight record (151 hours) as chief pilot of Question Mark (1929); the transcontinental refueling flight (1930); and the transcontinental blind flight (1936). He is the author (with Gen H. H. Arnold) of *This Flying Game* (1936); *Winged Warfare* (1940); and *Army Flyer* (1942). General Eaker lived in Washington, D. C. and wrote a syndicated weekly column. In 1985, at age 89 General Eaker was awarded his fourth star. The general died on 6 August 1987.

Although Lord Trenchard of Britain, General Douhet of Italy, and Gen William Mitchell of the United States had prophesied that strategic air power could exercise a decisive influence on warfare and the survival of nations, those theories had never been tested before World War II.

Many theories of land and sea combat had been advanced and tried out in combat over the centuries. Great land and sea commanders, like Napoléon and Nelson, had led winning campaigns on land and sea. These battles, strategies, and tactics had been recorded, studied, and analyzed by war colleges of many nations. Strategic and tactical historians, like count Von Schlieffen and Mahan, had written many volumes on the proper usage of land and sea forces.

Air power and its employment had never had any of that treatment. Why? Because the airplane was less than 50 years old. Flying machines as weapons had never been developed with the power and capacity to test the visions of Trenchard, Douhet, and Mitchell. For the first time ever, the US Eighth Air Force, operating out of Britain, and Britain’s own Royal Air Force (RAF) were to be given the resources to test those theories of the use of strategic air power.

Gen H. H. Arnold, head of the Army Air Forces in the United States, was a dedicated Mitchell disciple. His instructions to General Spaatz and me were clear-cut, specific, unmistakable. We were to take the heavy bombers General Arnold would send us and demonstrate what air power could do. Could it, as he hoped and believed, exercise a decisive influence on warfare by destroying the weapons-making capacity of an industrial country like Germany?

General Spaatz was diverted from the test temporarily when he was ordered, in October 1942, to accompany General Eisenhower to Africa to start the campaign to defeat Rommel and seize North Africa. I moved up from 8th Bomber Command to be Eighth Air Force commander. Air Marshal Harris had been RAF bomber commander for six months. This responsibility for the vital test of airpower fell upon us the next two critical years.

We had no precedent, no textbooks, no heritage from former leaders of strategic airpower campaigns. We had to develop our operational techniques and test them by employment over Nazi-occupied Europe. We had also, by trial and error, to determine what changes needed to be made in our aircraft and their armament so that they could survive against the Luftwaffe, which had already been fighting more than two years.

So, during 1942 and 1943 this process continued, cooperatively, out of Britain—the RAF by night, the US Eighth Air Force by day.

Next, I shall review some of my personal recollections and experiences with Arnold and Spaatz, in keeping with my agreement for your program today.

When I first met Arnold in December 1918 at Rockwell Field, North Island, San Diego, California, he was a colonel, just returned from a brief tour of inspection overseas, in the closing days of World War I, and recently appointed commanding officer of Rockwell.

He was 32 years of age and the most handsome Army officer, with the possible exception of General Pershing, I had ever seen. He was six feet tall, erect, wore his uniform with pride and grace; his instant trademark was a quick, engaging smile, but he possessed a reserve and dignity of bearing which did not encourage familiarity.

During the next six months, our principal duty consisted of reducing our garrison from its wartime strength of 12,000 to its peacetime complement of 250 men. Rockwell had been the Advance Flying School for Pursuit and Aerial Gunnery in World War I, and it was in the process of being transformed into a supply and maintenance depot, its postwar status. I had an opportunity at Rockwell to observe two men who were to be in later years successively chief of Army aviation—the commanding officer, Hap Arnold, and his operations officer, Tooey Spaatz. I decided then that these two were going places, and this would be a good team to join. I know of only one better long-range career prediction than this, and Arnold was its author.

In 1911, while serving in the Philippines as a second lieutenant, Arnold returned from a mapping detail in the jungle and told Mrs. Arnold that he had met a first lieutenant who one day would be chief of staff of the Army. The admired lieutenant's name was George C. Marshall, the Army's great World War II leader who was made chief of staff 30 years after Arnold's prophetic prediction. The friendship and mutual respect and admiration formed then was to have profound consequences for the Army and for its Air Force in the climactic, dramatic events of later years.

In 1919 Arnold became air officer, Western Department, and was reduced to his permanent grade of major. While serving in this capacity he came up with ideas to keep the Army Air Corps before the public, keep its pilots busy, and promote the mission of military aviation. Among these efforts were the forest patrol, aerial refueling experiments, and the border patrol.

In 1923 he became chief of information in Washington under General Patrick, the chief of Air Corps. This almost culminated in disaster.

Arnold had long been a longtime admirer of the assistant chief, Gen Billy Mitchell. As chief of information, he helped Mitchell in his public relations campaign that resulted in the famous Mitchell court-martial of 1925. He and Spaatz were warned that if they testified for Mitchell, it might jeopardize their future careers. Both, despite this warning, became wit-

nesses for the defense. A year later a news release highly complimentary of the Air Corps but disparaging the General Staff of the Army appeared surreptitiously. It was traced to Arnold by the Army inspector general. He had used a government typewriter and paper and was charged with misappropriating public property in a project inimical to the Army. The inspector general recommended Arnold's court-martial; but at General Patrick's intercession, instead he was relieved of duty on the Air Staff, banished from Washington, and assigned command of one air squadron at Fort Riley, Kansas, a cavalry post.

Turning adversity to advantage, an Arnold habit that became a trademark, he there developed new methods of cooperation between air and ground forces, new signaling devices and techniques. He also took the opportunity to form close friendships with officers who were to hold senior command and staff assignments in later years.

In 1933 Arnold was made commanding officer of March Field, Riverside, California. Here occurred a series of events that were to play significant roles in his career and in the Air Corps's future. As one of his squadron and later group commanders, I had the opportunity to observe this important period in Arnold's career development.

For example, there was his appreciation for public relations. Then came the Army airmail, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt canceled the civilian airmail contracts. Arnold was appointed commander of the Western region, with headquarters in Salt Lake City. Within three hours after receiving the telephone call from Washington assigning him to the task, he had outlined his organization, named his route commanders (I was given CAM Route 4, from San Diego to Los Angeles to Salt Lake City), selected his staff, and moved to his new headquarters in Salt Lake City. Incidentally, he authorized each of his commanders to commit the US government for thousands of dollars in hangar rentals and communications with only verbal authority. Partly because of more favorable weather, but due also to foresight and organization, his was the most successful segment of the Army airmail effort, sustaining fewer casualties, and with the highest rate of on-schedule delivery.

Another Roosevelt innovation was the Civilian Conservation Corps. Arnold was again designated Western region commander, administering 33 camps in the national forests, with his subordinates in command, and winning commendation for outstanding performance.

In 1935 when the General Headquarters (GHQ) Air Force was formed, Arnold was given command of its 1st Wing, as two of his groups at March Field comprised half of this experimental force. This brought him his first star. His wing of the GHQ Air Force participated in many maneuvers and worked out tactical formations and strategic doctrine, which, incidentally, were later validated against the Luftwaffe.

I remember, he often told a story he had picked up on a visit to England. It appears that two English poachers were arrested for killing the king's deer. They were brought

before the lord of the manor. Before pronouncing the usual death sentence upon the hapless miscreants, he asked if either had anything to say. One of them stood mute, but the other said, "My lord, you have in the courtyard a donkey, a favorite with the children of the manor. I believe if I were given a reprieve for a year, I could teach that donkey to talk." The idea intrigued the lord, and the reprieve was granted for one year. As the two prisoners were being returned to the dungeon, the one who had remained silent said, "You fool, you know you can't teach a donkey to talk." Whereupon the reprieved prisoner replied, "Let me remind you that tomorrow you'll be dead, while I will be alive. Also, in a year many things can happen. The lord may die. The donkey may die. And besides, with so much at stake, with my life depending on it, I may just be able to teach that donkey to talk."

I didn't think that story very funny, either, the first few times I heard General Arnold tell it. Then, suddenly, I perceived its significance. It explained much about the Arnold compulsion and motivation.

One of the burdens he bore, considering the quality of the personnel he had surrounding him, was that he always faced the necessity of teaching donkeys to talk. Thereafter, I always had the uneasy feeling that I was one of the donkeys.

No one was ever in doubt for very long about Arnold's opinions or ideas. He always knew where to put the emphasis.

In 1936 General Arnold was selected by his friend, Gen Malin Craig, the chief of staff of the Army, to be the assistant chief of the Army Air Corps. He was back in Washington in triumph, just 10 years after he had been banished in disgrace!

He saw World War II on the horizon more clearly than any of us and worked all of us unsparingly to be ready, and to have Army aviation ready to play a significant role. He followed closely the Spanish civil war and watched with especial interest the latest weapons and tactics as that war unfolded between the German and Russian air forces. He selected air attachés with especial care and put them in sensitive spots in the European capitals. He arranged to have selected aircraft and engine manufacturers, like Dutch Kindelberger, visit England, France, and Germany to bring back the latest in aircraft and engine design.

I remember one experience of those years that was very typical. One day he called Colonel Spaatz and me into his office and said, "I am going to the White House to be with the President when he makes a national broadcast which will be very significant. Listen to it on my radio set." That was the speech in which President Roosevelt announced his plan to build 50,000 military planes that year.

When General Arnold returned, in high spirits, we said to him, "How could you let the President make such a preposterous statement? The whole aircraft industry in this country built less than two thousand planes last year, 50,000 next year is ridiculous." His response was, "If I had asked for 25,000, I would have gotten but 15,000. Now I have asked

for 50,000 and if I don't get 25,000 you boys won't be here a year from now."

Of course, General Arnold got only 10,000 planes that year; and most of those went to France and Britain; but he built the factories and laid the foundation for the phenomenal expansion that followed and ultimately produced 50,000 planes per year, which was the way he planned it all along.

During the war years, I saw General Arnold only when he came, as he frequently did, to visit the war theater; but I corresponded with him constantly, answering his queries on our tactics, our losses, our target selection, and the results of our bombing. He summoned me from my Eighth Air Force headquarters in England to the Casablanca Conference when our daylight bombing seemed doomed. This strategy proved effective for Prime Minister Churchill, after our conference, withdrew his request to President Roosevelt that we join the RAF in night bombing. We were allowed to continue, the Luftwaffe was destroyed, making possible Eisenhower's channel crossing in June 1944, and the rest is history.

Arnold's leadership, drive, experience, and imagination were the primary factors in this unprecedented accomplishment. No other man could have done the job. The close relations he was able to establish with President Roosevelt; General Marshall; Mr. Hopkins; Mr. Robert A. Lovett, the assistant secretary of war for air; and finally, with the leaders in Congress, were decisive.

Through the force of his personality, he won full membership on the US Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Allied Combined Chiefs of Staff. This gave the Army Air Forces parity at all military and political conferences where the vital decisions were made—Quebec, Casablanca, Cairo, Yalta, and Potsdam.

When I returned from overseas in May 1945 to become his deputy while he was in the hospital recovering from a severe heart attack, there was ample evidence of the frightful burden he had carried and of the influence he exercised on all major national decisions. Arnold, our Army Air Forces chief, was one of the eight or 10 most influential military leaders in Washington at the most dramatic period in our history.

Upon his retirement, Congress made him general of the Air Force; he had been for four years general of the Army. He has been the only airman to wear five stars. Hap Arnold was an authentic genius in military management and leadership. Selecting and inspiring subordinate Air Force commanders and principal staff officers was his forte. His eight years as chief of Air Corps and commanding general Army Air Forces was the most remarkable and significant period in military aviation history. There has not been, nor is there likely to be, his equal again.

Carl Andrew Spaatz, who was destined to be the last commanding general of the US Army Air Forces and the first chief of staff of the US Air Force, came from Pennsylvania. His grandfather had immigrated from Germany shortly after the Civil War. His father published a weekly newspaper in

Boyerstown. The son, Carl, was his only assistant, typesetter, and apprentice printer.

The father was popular and influential in the Dutch community. In 1910 he announced for Congress as a Democrat against the incumbent, a Republican. But he withdrew after his opponent promised to appoint his son Carl to West Point.

Carl Spaatz entered the US Military Academy in 1910 and was promptly given the nickname "Tooeey." (A redhead in each class was called "Tooeey" in those days.) He graduated with the class of 1914. On the day of graduation he was walking off demerits, of which he had the maximum allowable, and had but 20 minutes to dress for his graduation parade. He was always, thereafter, a fast dresser. I used to marvel at how he could sleep until a quarter to eight and appear at Eisenhower's conferences in Algiers promptly at 8:00 A.M. freshly shaved and well-turned out, bright, and alert.

Upon graduation from the US Military Academy, he chose the infantry rather than the cavalry or field artillery because of his dislike of horses. His first station was with the 25th Infantry at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii. There he had the good fortune to meet the 17-year-old daughter of a cavalry colonel, Ruth Harrison, who became his wife three years later.

One day in 1915 Colonel Harrison said to his wife, "Mother, I see our daughter, Ruth, keeps company with that Lieutenant Spaatz. I want that to stop immediately. Today, he put in for aviation training and there is obviously no future in that."

The daughter was more prescient. The father retired as a colonel and the daughter's husband—with a major assist from her—became a four-star general.

Spaatz was accepted for aviation training, received his wings in 1916, and saw his first combat service with the 1st Aero Squadron chasing Villa with Pershing's Expeditionary Force in Mexico. Spaatz went to France in command of a squadron in 1917. He was soon placed in command in Issoudon, the largest US pursuit training base. In the last weeks of the war he escaped to a frontline squadron commanded by one of his former students, shot down three German planes, and won the Distinguished Service Cross.

His first station, postwar, was Rockwell Field, San Diego, California, where he was operations officer for the commanding officer, Col H. H. Arnold, and where I, the assistant adjutant first met him. Early in 1919 he flew an SE-5 British-built fighter in a transcontinental air race, making the best time across the continent in a single seater.

When Arnold became air officer of the Western Department in 1919, he took Spaatz with him. It was obvious then that Spaatz was his favorite assistant, a relation which was to continue for the next 30 years, eventful years for both of them and significant, too, for US military aviation.

Dr. Freeman wrote a well-known history of the Civil War called *Lee's Lieutenants*. Well, Arnold never had but one lieutenant, Carl Spaatz. In any crisis Spaatz was al-

ways at his side. In any war, when Arnold could not go, he sent Spaatz.

In the years between World Wars I and II, Spaatz always had command of fighter groups, of air bases, or senior positions on the air staff. During these years he was always on the boards that tested and selected each new series of fighter planes. About 1930 he was president of the Pursuit Evaluation Board, with Capt "Monk" Hunter, Captain Elmendorf (a field in Alaska now bears his name), and me. There were three experimental planes in the competition. I remember the week we spent in competitive test flights at Wright Field principally because of the report we rendered.

Serving as recorder, and well knowing Major Spaatz's reputation for brevity, I prepared a report one page in length. He thought it much too long and redundant. As he finally approved and signed the document, it read, "The Boeing P-12 won the fighter competition. It is a better plane; it more nearly meets the specifications. We recommend its early procurement." McNamara's whiz kids would have been hard put to spend two years analyzing that report, as they did with the F-111.

Brevity of reports and speech became his framework. He was a miser with words. If he had brought down the Ten Commandments from the Mount, there would have been but one, "Always do the right thing." He was fond of saying, "I never learned anything when I was talking."

When the Germans crossed the French border in the fall of 1939 to launch the blitzkrieg, Arnold sent Colonel Spaatz and Capt "Monk" Hunter as US observers with the RAF. During these critical days US Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy Sr., was sending back gloomy reports to Washington indicating that Britain was doomed and that Germany would launch an early and successful invasion. Spaatz learned of these reports and urgently cabled Arnold his own estimates, in defiance of the ambassador. He believed the RAF would stop the Luftwaffe bombers. He concluded, "Air superiority over the channel is essential to any invasion of Britain. The Germans, in my judgment, will never gain that requisite air superiority."

The Spaatz prophecy, accurate by a very narrow margin, impressed President Roosevelt favorably and endeared Spaatz to British leaders. He was thus a logical and certain choice to head our own air effort in Europe in World War II.

In June 1942 he arrived in England with the headquarters and Fighter Command of the US Eighth Air Force. I had preceded him in February with the headquarters of the 8th Bomber Command. When Eisenhower arrived in July to command all US forces in Britain, there was a reunion of old friends. Eisenhower, of the West Point class of 1915, had marched as a file closer behind Cadet Spaatz of the class of 1914. Their cadet friendship was probably enhanced by their common German origin.

In October 1942 when General Eisenhower went to Africa to launch the African invasion, Spaatz accompanied him to head the air effort. Early in that campaign

Eisenhower called Spaatz to a fateful conference. He said, "Tooey, my morning report shows you have four hundred planes, while the British have two hundred and the French show one hundred. Rommel has only five hundred planes by today's intelligence estimate, yet every day he clobbers us. How come?"

Spaatz said,

Ike, your figures are about right; when Rommel's planes hit me they outnumber me 5 to 4; when they hit the British they have the advantage, 5 to 3. The Germans have overwhelming superiority over the French, 5 to 1. Our tactics have been all wrong. The airplane is a poor defensive weapon. Airpower must always be used on the offensive. The first mission of the tactical Air Force is to win air superiority over the battlefield. Then only can it be diverted to secondary roles like observation, directing artillery fire, shooting up tanks, or defending headquarters.

Eisenhower said, "Tooey, I get the point. Hereafter, as long as I am in command, you have operational control of all the airplanes made available to me by our government or any allied nation."

The Luftwaffe never won another air battle in the North African campaign. The 800 Allied planes, all under Spaatz's control, took the offensive, destroyed the 500 German planes, and thereafter denied the resupply of the Afrika Korps by sea or air. Without gas, Rommel's tanks were halted. The Afrika Korps was finished.

Spaatz was always, thereafter, Eisenhower's principal air advisor, stationed at his headquarters and in daily contact. When Eisenhower returned to England, Spaatz accompanied him and assumed command of all US Strategic Air Forces in Europe. That job he held until final victory in Europe. He then transferred to the Pacific theater, where he was given the same role, coordinator of all the US Army Strategic Air Forces against Japan, engaged in burning down Tokyo and destroying the war-making potential of the warlords. This concluded abruptly when the two atomic bombs incinerated Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

When President Truman made the decision to drop the atomic bombs, he handed me a letter directing General Spaatz to accomplish that mission. Spaatz requested that he be authorized to advise General MacArthur, and he flew to Manila and briefed the supreme commander in the Pacific.

Spaatz was the only air commander present at both surrender ceremonies. He and Gen Beedle Smith represented Eisenhower at the Nazi surrender in Berlin. He was also aboard the battleship *Missouri* for the capitulation of the Japanese warlords.

When General Arnold—tired, worn, and ill—elected to retire in 1946, General Spaatz inevitably became his successor. His immediate primary tasks were to dismantle the world's most powerful air force, effect its reduction from 2.3 million men to 400,000 and from its operational strength of 90,000 planes to a peacetime inventory of less than 10,000.

He had also to plan the organization, composition, and status of the postwar Army Air Forces. A fundamental deci-

sion faced him. Should the Army Air Forces be content to remain in the Army or should we campaign for a separate service, coequal with the Army and Navy?

Navy aviators, faced with a similar problem, decided to stay in the Navy and eventually run it. They suggested that Army aviation should follow the same course.

General Spaatz, an advocate of coequal status for the Air Force since the days of Billy Mitchell, made a hard decision to "go for broke." He reasoned we would never have a better opportunity—with our war record, with the probable support of Generals Marshall and Eisenhower, and with powerful friends in Congress.

When General Spaatz presented the original plan to President Truman, the commander in chief said, "Tooey, I don't want two armed services, or three services, I want only one."

Armed with that guideline, the planners came up with a defense department and three coequal branches—Army, Navy, and Air Force. That compromise President Truman approved upon the decisive recommendation of the Assistant Secretary of War for Air Stuart Symington. It was submitted to Congress and resulted in the National Defense Act of 1947.

General Spaatz's success as a military leader and manager was due primarily to his possession of two indispensable qualities, to an extraordinary degree. He possessed absolute integrity. He never vacillated, trimmed, or hedged where principle was involved. Many times when it seemed certain it would jeopardize his career, he took the unpopular course, often contrary to his military superiors, because he believed it was right; and he would not compromise.

The other quality that he possessed, which accounted for his phenomenal success, was wisdom. He was always wise beyond his years. He was one of the most perceptive, quick-witted men I ever knew. Common sense dictated all his decisions and motivated his conduct.

Spaatz was the wisest defense leader I ever knew, the only general who never made a major mistake.

I will conclude with this brief analysis of the "pattern of air leadership" as I perceive it from my knowledge of the careers of Arnold, Spaatz, and the other 12 chiefs I have been privileged to observe.

All of them possessed great courage, physical and moral—the one certain, common characteristic of all successful military leaders.

All of them believed and advocated that airpower (aerospace power) had come to join armies and navies as a third essential, to complete the military triad.

All believed and advocated that it must be cooperative with armies and navies and always subject to overall civilian control—responsive to the acts of Congress and the orders of the commander in chief.

All believed and advocated that airpower had two vital constituent elements, manpower and weapons. The provi-

sion of adequate manpower always came first. But weapons and equipment were vital, too, and these must be continually modernized by current programs of research and development.

All believed and advocated that air power should be operated according to sound principles of strategy and tactics.

The key to these principles must always be that a war-fighting, war-winning capability is the only true measure of a valid war-deterrent, peacekeeping posture.

Now I would like to close, as I began, by suggesting (from my 60 years of observing military leadership) that the characteristics and capacities which pattern air leadership are almost identical with those that make successful leaders on land and at sea. For example, I believe that Gen George Patton and Adm Arleigh Burke could have been great air leaders, had fickle fate or a kind providence given them that opportunity.