

Leadership and Doctrine

Maj Gen Lance L. Smith

Aerospace doctrine represents our service's historically proven best practices for how to accomplish the core missions of the United States Air Force. Doctrine is inextricably interwoven with the concept of leadership and command and provides the foundation for both. Volumes exist that expound the elements of leadership, the challenges of command, and their inherent necessity in the military. What is often overlooked, however, is the connections between those precepts and doctrine.

Aerospace doctrine exists at the basic, operational, and tactical levels of war, and when read and understood provides the bulwark of learning for leaders and commanders to perform their jobs. Doctrine codifies what we as a service have learned over the years in actual practice and in war games and simulations. Doctrine cannot stand alone; it requires judgment in its application. This is where the facets of leadership and command must come into play. Through judicious selection of the relevant parts of doctrine for a given situation, leaders can take full advantage of their knowledge, training, and experience to make critical mission-related decisions. Lack of understanding of the principles of war, the tenets of aerospace power, or the core competencies and functions of our Air Force diminishes that ability to maximize decision-making capabilities. Great leaders understand and communicate not only what to do, but why they are doing it.

In the aggregate, the concepts of leadership and command carry distinct differences that have doctrinal impact. Leadership is an art. Airmen must work to perfect this art by developing a leadership style that capitalizes on their particular strengths; good leaders are adaptable, balancing their units' needs while remaining focused on mission success. Command complements this art with its inclusion of the authority and responsibility to accomplish the assigned mission. It is vital for airmen to understand the difference between these two concepts, yet to use both together to perform mission tasks in the most efficient manner possible.

The tenets of aerospace power highlight the way the Air Force differs from other military forces in how we fight. Leaders, and especially commanders, must be grounded in these tenets to be able to fully execute the aerospace ele-

ments of an operation. As an example, the key tenet of centralized control and decentralized execution allows a commander to provide coherence, guidance, and organization to a unit's efforts and still be able to focus his or her energies where needed to achieve success at the operational level of war. It simultaneously demonstrates the commander's willingness to entrust subordinates with the authority to execute their missions—essential if commanders are to achieve an effective span of control and foster initiative, situational responsiveness, and flexibility.

As stated above it is good judgment in using doctrine that makes a great leader out of a good one. Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 1, *Air Force Basic Doctrine*, addresses the concept to say “. . . even valid principles are no substitute for sound, professional judgment—but to ignore them totally is equally risky.”¹ We address this fact further in AFDD 1 when we say that the principles of war and tenets of aerospace power “should be understood by every airman” and “the application of the principles and tenets must be left to commanders and their professional knowledge and experience as they strive to craft the most effective employment of air and space power for a given situation.”²

Clearly leadership, command, and doctrine are tied closely together. The credibility one gains by knowing tactical level doctrine for his or her weapons system is self-evident. Operational level doctrine, however, is often overlooked as we move from one tactical level job to the next, but it is at the operational level where wars are won and lost. The Doctrine Center at Air University is at the forefront of developing and writing operational level doctrine for the Air Force and has already published 29 of 33 planned AFDDs. It is designed to ensure that our leaders have the knowledge and understanding necessary to fight and win across the entire spectrum of conflict, from humanitarian relief to total war. We must all read it, understand it, and debate it if we expect to successfully lead tomorrow's aerospace force.

For additional information on doctrine, visit our web site at <http://www.doctrine.af.mil>.

Notes

1. Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 1, *Air Force Basic Doctrine*, 1 September 1997, 12.
2. *Ibid.*, 22.

Maj Gen Lance L. Smith is commander of the Air Force Doctrine Center at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.