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CHALLENGE OF 21ST CENTURY LEADERSHIP  
THE CORNERSTONE AND FUTURE BUILDING BLOCKS

by

Charles K. Bergman  
Lt Col, USAF

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Advisor: Col Dale Autry

Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama

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## *Contents*

DISCLAIMER.....	ii
LIST OF TABLES .....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
THE ETHICAL IMPERATIVE .....	4
Self Development .....	4
The Cornerstone .....	6
Foundational Values .....	8
The Future Building Blocks .....	9
THE AIR COMMANDER’S ETHICAL IMPERATIVES .....	12
Overview .....	12
Why We Exist?.....	12
The Ethical Imperative of Air Discipline .....	13
The Ethical Imperative of Realistic Training .....	18
In Summary—What America Really Needs.....	28
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	30

*Tables*

	<i>Page</i>
Table 1. USAF and USN Air-To-Air Kill Success .....	22

*Abstract*

The challenge of 21st century leadership is to reinforce ethical principles and behavior within the profession of arms. Robust individual and institutional development of ethical standards is the responsibility of all who take the oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. Two ethical imperatives that air commanders must concentrate on are air discipline and realistic training. Air commanders have an ethical responsibility to always “keep the tip of the spear razor sharp,” while continually preparing themselves and their followers to make the ultimate sacrifice in defense of the nation. Additionally, the responsibility to defend America carries with it the imbedded challenge of serving as an honorable example of what is right with America. The challenge of the 21st century Air Force leader is to be someone that the American people can trust.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The challenge of 21st century American military leadership will be about understanding and shaping the future for America. Working for, and with, our Constitutionally designated civilian leaders, we must prepare ourselves well to serve as the “armed force” element of United States policy at home and abroad. This aspect of our mission, to support and defend the Constitution, will remain unchanged. There will be aspects of our leadership challenge that are as timeless as our Constitutional mandate and are related to human nature and its interaction with moral leaders. There will be other aspects that will be driven by the accelerating change of technology and information flow and their effects on our American society and the nations of the world. The leadership challenge of the 21st century will be for a leader to be anchored in the timeless virtue of the past while charting a strategic vision for the future that exploits for America the possibilities of the “information age.” In Doctor James Toner’s opinion, “Leaders must be able to respond to the chief challenge of leadership: being technically, tactically, and ethically proficient.”<sup>1</sup>

The essence of effective 21st century leadership, its most important aspect, is a cornerstone of robust ethical standards. This ethical cornerstone rests on a foundation of timeless imperatives. Three of the most important leadership imperatives are integrity,

loyalty, and a dedication to teamwork. The building blocks of effective 21st century leadership will be formed by shaping military technology and tactics that fully exploit the explosion of information in the “information age.” For leaders to attain, and remain in, a position of senior leadership, they must understand, be fluent in, and be capable of articulating a strategic vision in an environment of logarithmic information expansion. Bill Gates, founder of the computer software corporation Microsoft, describes in his book *The Road Ahead*, a revolution “involving unprecedentedly inexpensive communication.”<sup>2</sup> A most important challenge for 21st century leaders will be to extract from the increasingly voluminous data flowing between worldwide nodes a synthesized knowledge core applicable to the people, missions, and technologies required for the effective defense of America. Therefore, information management and strategic vision skills will also be important leadership imperatives for the 21st century. Further, effective leadership will become much more “interdependent,”<sup>3</sup> vice independent. Leadership will be a more collaborative effort, even within the military hierarchy. A blueprint of an insightful strategic vision tying these 21st century leadership imperatives together in a collaborative environment will be paramount. The military leadership that America will require of us in the 21st century will be both timeless and future oriented. Our challenge is to reinforce our timeless ethical foundation in bedrock while building tomorrow’s defense structure from the evolving technologies in our future.

The first half of this paper is intended for all Air Force officers. It will lay out the author’s vision of the ethical foundation or bedrock required for effective leadership in the 21st century. In outlining the challenge of 21st century leadership we will begin with self development; military leaders have an inherent responsibility to develop the

leadership imperatives that their craft requires. Next, the basis of this self-development will be emphasized through its most important aspect—a well-hewn ethical cornerstone. The foundational values upon which this cornerstone rests will be discussed next, stressing integrity, loyalty, and teamwork. Then, the relevant 21st century building blocks of information management, and strategic vision skills will be outlined. Having developed a 21st century leadership perspective whose foundation is based on timeless virtues combined with future technologies developed in a more collaborative environment, I will move to the topic of ethical imperatives.

The second portion of this paper deals with ethical imperatives and is written specifically for squadron, group, and wing operational flying commanders. The author's goal was to outline and codify my own beliefs as I prepare to return to flying as an Operations Group Commander. The ethical imperatives outlined are crucial to fulfilling our Constitutional mandate and our airpower mission. The ethical imperatives are key to what I call “keeping the tip of the spear razor sharp.”

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> James H. Toner, “Leadership, Community, and Virtue,” *Leadership Proceedings: Quality Air Force Symposium and Expo '95*, (Nov 1995): 221.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Gates, *The Road Ahead* (New York: Penguin Group, 1995), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 49-51.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Ethical Imperative**

#### **Self Development**

When confronted with the question of what 21st century leadership challenges lie ahead and further, what preparation might be appropriate for them, I must pause for reflection. When I interviewed with Lt Gen Rip Ryan, Eighth Air Force Commander, for my flying squadron commander job, his bottom line after offering me command was to tell me to do what I do best—which was to be myself. His counsel was that it is a mistake to try to emulate any other commander that you have known or admired. His rationale was that whatever leadership skills I had developed to that point should be my guide as I faced my first command. Though it is intuitively obvious that you are most effective at being yourself, it is a point missed by many less than self-assured leaders. Many leaders seek improved performance in a plethora of self-help books that suggest a variety of gimmicks to win over co-workers and followers. Stephen Covey refers to this short sighted, self-improvement fixation as the personality ethic (vice a character based ethic) and claims most literature's "basic thrust is quick-fix influence techniques, power struggles, communication skills, and positive attitudes."<sup>1</sup> Being one's genuine self while focused on character development (pursuing a leadership style anchored in virtue) is a far

better course of action. I labor in the belief that leadership has a whole lot more to do with what you do as opposed to what you say.

General Ryan's advice to be myself was good counsel and worked well in my first command. I believe an equally important concept that follows from being your genuine self is a responsibility to continue developing into what I term your "best self." I would contend that greatness, or even goodness, is the by-product of a concerted attempt to live a virtuous life in a school-of-hard-knocks world. An early French observer of American democratic life, Alexis de Tocqueville, has been quoted as saying, "America is great because she is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."<sup>2</sup> Commenting on de Tocqueville's observation, William Bennett concludes that, "The state of the union comes down to the character of its citizens."<sup>3</sup> He is precisely on target. To serve America best, both as citizens and as military professionals, we have a responsibility to live a virtuous life, constantly attempting to adhere to sound ethical principles. That is not to say that we will remain unstained. Human frailty will insure even the most well intentioned officer is likely to make unethical choices during his or her career. An important lesson from our Vietnam era POWs, now used in SERE (Survival, Escape, Resistance, and Evasion) training for Air Force aircrews, is the "bounce-back principle." The principle, gained through grim POW experiences, recognizes that any person subjected to severe enough circumstances can be forced to do things that are against his will and his duty. The point made by a number of our returning heroes was the importance of being able to "bounce-back" after a failure of will. Shame can be a beneficial sentiment if it motivates change in ethical behavior; it can destroy an individual if he cannot "bounce back" from the disappointment in himself. It is

important, therefore, that we recognize that in pursuing a life of virtue, we will fail and the most important point lies in recaging our ethical gyros and continuing our leadership flight. How do we best fulfill our responsibility for self development? The starting point must be a daily commitment to act ethically, in our work as well as our private lives. Not all can be great, but we can all be good. Goodness comes from daily execution, and yes, the little things do matter. Secondly, we must commit ourselves to a life of study of exemplary leaders to attempt to identify and emulate important foundational values such as integrity, loyalty, and dedication to teamwork. Additionally, our study must be focused on important building blocks of tomorrow to include information management skills associated with the developing information super-highway, as well as continuing to develop a strategic vision for those we lead. Finally, we must seek as broad a base of leadership experiences as our capabilities will allow. The challenges of 21st century leadership will be many. A variety of operations, staff, joint and combined, and academic assignments will provide a broad and appropriate knowledge base for the leaders of tomorrow.

### **The Cornerstone**

The most important 21st century leadership “functional imperative” is a solid ethical cornerstone. What do we mean by a well-developed military ethic? Doctor Toner’s definition of ethics, “the study of good and evil, of right and wrong, of duty and obligation in human conduct, and of reasoning and choice about them,”<sup>4</sup> reveals his contention that ethical behavior should have a preeminent place in the everyday lives of professional soldiers. In fact, our ethical cornerstone and the foundational values that

support it are the very core of our military profession. It is what binds us together and what allows us to pursue the profession of organized violence in a selfless manner. Through continued moral reflection we must insure there is linkage between military means and political and humanitarian ends. Not all within the ranks adhere to such high principle. The concept that the military professional has a responsibility to shoulder the burden of high ethical behavior has become outdated for many. For more than a few of the “Burger King generation—the have it your way crowd,”<sup>5</sup> ethical principle, duty requirements and service before self have become subordinated to individual careerism and self-aggrandizement. James Toner’s book *True Faith and Allegiance* is a call to arms to reverse a trend that he observes in the military specifically and in American society in general. It is a well-written moralistic think piece by a self-described political theorist intended as a wake up call for the military profession. He makes a disturbed and passionate argument that ethics are vital to the military profession. He sets the stage in the preface by stating:

Ethics itself is fascinating because it raises the timeless questions and inveigles us into the Great Conversation about what it means to be human and about which values ennoble us. It is vital because it deals with the greatest issues: life and death, honor and shame, courage and cowardice, virtue and vice. And the military must deal virtuously with one of the greatest vices: killing human beings.

I agree with Toner’s core belief that soldiers not only can be moral but, more to the point, *must* be moral. If a robust ethical core is key to effective leadership and there has been an erosion of this unifying imperative within the ranks, then how do we correct this discrepancy? How do we bolster ethical standards, deliver on our commitment to the American people, and thus fulfill our Constitutional mandate?

I believe three principles must be enforced to foster virtue within the ranks. First, there can be no reward for unethical behavior. Second, there must be sanctions and forgiveness, in the longer term, for “mistakes.” Finally, there must be criminal charges filed or retirement ordered, as appropriate, when the UCMJ has been violated or there has been “dereliction of duty” apparent. The tragic and unnecessary loss of life in the recent Fairchild B-52 crash should serve as a wake up call. Leaders are morally and legally bound to take corrective action when confronted with flagrant violations such as breaches of air discipline. This action is the imperative of command—at the core of our profession.

### **Foundational Values**

Over the years I have adopted three foundational values upon which my ethical cornerstone rests. These values serve as an important guide to my leadership style and daily decision processes. These personal leadership principles are integrity, loyalty, and a dedication to teamwork. From my time as a captain leading an aircrew, through my time as a lieutenant colonel bomb squadron commander, I have attempted to project these qualities through example and have tried to build these foundational values into my people and organizations.

Integrity is the essence of leadership. With respect to people, this value says to all that I am who I say I am and can be counted on to do what I say I’ll do. With respect to the mission, it says we are ready and able to meet the nation’s requirements—and if we’re not, we’ll report our lack of readiness accurately in the “C” (combat ready) status.

Loyalty, on the other hand, is the mortar that holds the organizational foundation together. Loyalty to your superiors, peers, and subordinates translates into overall loyalty to the mission. I have experienced a few times in my career a superior that was not loyal to the mission, to the people, or to me. These have clearly been my greatest leadership challenges. In retrospect, they may have been the times of my greatest personal and professional growth. I learned and have internalized two important precepts when faced with a boss with no loyalty: the first is “whatever doesn’t kill me, just makes me tougher” and the second is “everyone can serve as an example, even if it is a bad one.” I have found that during these times, the expression of my loyalty to the mission gave me the opportunity to lead where a void had been created and to be successful in the process.

Finally, the value of teamwork has been evident throughout my career. My most important contributions, both as a leader and as a follower, have been made when consensus was reached and a team-focused effort was made. While there are countless other important leadership building blocks, these three are certainly among the most important.

### **The Future Building Blocks**

The 21st century is already being described as the information age. Inexpensive, worldwide communication of an exploding information base is rapidly becoming a reality. To say that this will alter national and international relations is an understatement; the real question is how it will affect these relationships. For example, the utility of putting high schools on-line so that all students have equal access to quality education could reverse decades of “sociological problems that society has yet to solve in

the physical world.”<sup>6</sup> This concept has obvious application to worldwide military training. Whether facilitating technical training updates for jet engine mechanics or software training for office personnel, real time access to the most current data available will be universal. The savings in terms of TDY and travel costs should be significant and productivity increases should also bolster personnel effectiveness. The real challenge for 21st century leaders will be, after having provided all Air Force members access to the superhighway, to determine how we will focus their “just in time” learning to best support Air Force mission requirements. I would propose each career field integrate an information superhighway expert team into its ranks to keep leadership plugged-in to worldwide resources. The most important aspect of the utility of the “information age” will be in focusing a better-educated military force. The ability of leadership to provide strategic vision will, therefore, take on increasing importance in the 21st century. Burt Nanus effectively captures the power of vision:

There is no more powerful engine driving an organization toward excellence and long-range success than an attractive, worthwhile, and achievable vision of the future, widely shared.<sup>7</sup>

One of the most important contributions of the Air Force quality movement has been to construct a strategic vision: “Air Force people building the world’s most respected air and space force...global power and reach for America.”<sup>8</sup> It is important that leadership embrace this vision. It can serve as a powerful roadmap to the future in shaping our 21st century airpower for America’s defense. We must clearly articulate our vision, for “where there is no vision, the people perish.”<sup>9</sup> Building on this Air Force vision and making it reality is the best means of protecting America in the 21st century.

Thus far, we have exposed the bedrock which is required for effective 21st century leadership, beginning with a set of robust ethical standards both for the individual officer and the institution. The importance of self development, the functional imperative of “doing what is right,” and the foundational values of integrity, loyalty and teamwork have been stressed. Additionally, we have examined some important future building blocks for leadership including information management and strategic vision. Having defined the key requirements of 21st century ethical behavior for Air Force officers, I will apply this model and develop two key ethical imperatives applicable for air commanders in preparing combat forces for the challenges of the 21st century.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>2</sup> William J. Bennett, *The Moral Compass* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 695.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 694.

<sup>4</sup> James H. Toner, *True Faith and Allegiance: The Burden of Military Ethics* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 9.

<sup>5</sup> A popular, well known phrase in the Air Force personnel community used to refer to those service members who wish to be released from a particular assignment because they believe it is not optimal for their career development. The concept of service before self or mission requirements driving a assignment is often met with “why can’t you send somebody else?”

<sup>6</sup> Gates, 258.

<sup>7</sup> Burt Nanus, *Visionary Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1992), 186.

<sup>8</sup> Susan Holmes, *The Quality Approach* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Force Quality Institute, 1994), 12.

<sup>9</sup> *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Proverbs 29:18.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Air Commander's Ethical Imperatives**

#### **Overview**

The two key ethical imperatives that are crucial to effective airpower application in the 21st century are air discipline and realistic training. These imperatives are crucial in preparing air warriors for battle. The air commander's first priority must be to "keep the tip of the spear razor sharp." The air commander is ethically bound to continually prepare his forces for maximum readiness. In doing this, he will gain the trust of the nation and the respect of both allies and potential enemies. By continually focusing on mission requirements and integrating these ethical imperatives, he will best fulfill his Constitutional mandate. The air commander must insure that his forces can do what they say they can do; he must insure they can do what they are tasked to do. He must insure the Air Force mission "to defend the United States through control and exploitation of air and space" is accomplished.

#### **Why We Exist?**

The commander's ethical burden to "keep the tip of the spear razor sharp" is at the core of what military service is all about. James Toner states, "military ethics is a burden precisely because the profession of arms is centrally concerned with killing but also must

be a paragon of virtue, able always to distinguish the honorable from the shameful.”<sup>1</sup> The profession of arms is a serious business with ethics at its very core. In a speech on integrity to Air Force Academy cadets, Chief of Staff of the Air Force Gen Ronald R. Fogleman defined the standards for military professionals:

As a practical matter, why is it so important that Air Force officers—Air Force leaders—demonstrate integrity. In short, it’s because of the nature of the business we’re engaged in. We belong to a very special profession—the profession of arms. The U.S. Air Force exists for one reason, and one reason alone. That is to fight and win America’s wars when called on to do so. That’s the only reason we exist as an institution.<sup>2</sup>

We are air warriors. We are ethically bound to never forget that and to continually prepare to defend the nation through the violent application of airpower.

### **The Ethical Imperative of Air Discipline**

Why is air discipline so important to the air commander in “keeping the tip of the spear razor sharp?” The reason is that air discipline is so important to the air commander in setting the right climate in his combat organization. Col Don E. Waddell defines a requirement of senior leaders as “creating the appropriate operational and ethical atmosphere where everyone knows what is expected of them, this is what I have called climate control.”<sup>3</sup> The bottom line is for the air commander to clearly communicate that if you are going to fly in my organization, you will exercise sound air discipline. The climate of a flying organization is very important. The commander’s influence on air discipline is crucial to ensure that the climate of day-to-day operations is not a “flying club” atmosphere, but rather is focused on warfighting and preparation for combat.

To establish the importance of air discipline to the ethical fabric of a flying organization, I would like to review two examples. The first is a B-52 crash that occurred

at Fairchild AFB in June 1994. The second involved a T-37 aircraft from Barksdale AFB that crashed on a 1993 cross-country. Through these two examples, I hope to highlight the deleterious effects of a lack of air discipline within a flying organization. The premise is that the lack of air discipline in each of these examples led directly to the deaths of the aircrew members, as well as the loss of valuable taxpayer resources and combat capabilities. The loss exceeds what can be measured in dollars; the loss to the families of the aircrew members that needlessly died in the crashes cannot be meaningfully measured. The lack of air discipline impacts not only combat readiness and morale in the units but also has negative effects that continue for lifetimes.

The Air Force Times article titled, "Several Officers May Face Discipline in the B-52 Crash"<sup>4</sup> gives an excellent short review of the facts of the case. The end result of the breach of air discipline was that the Wing Commander, a brigadier general select, retired and the Operations Group Commander faced three dereliction-of-duty counts. The real tragedy was that the unit's Squadron Commander, Operations Officer, Vice Commander, and the Chief of Standardization/Evaluation died in the air show practice demonstration. The aircrew members that died in this B-52 crash were all highly qualified with numerous flying hours and very capable of flying the airplane. What led them to fly a perfectly performing airplane dangerously close to the ground, outside of established flight manual norms and in violation of command directives on aerobatic flight? It was simply a lack of air discipline existing at Fairchild AFB. This lack of air discipline can only be attributed to senior leadership. Responsibility must rest with senior leaders who failed to establish the proper climate for flying operations.

An excellent article in the Leadership and Ethics text for Air War College highlights at least four additional serious air discipline violations by the accident pilot.<sup>5</sup> The first involved a May 1992 air show exhibition. A fellow stan/eval flight commander described the maneuvers used as “a little bit insane.” The Deputy Ops Group Commander called to the attention of the Operations Group Commander his concern about the flight profile. The then Ops Group Commander told the accident pilot that he was “never going to fly in another air show as long as he was the Ops Group Commander.” But there was no documentation of these decisions and the Wing Commander was not told. Later when the first of a number of changes of command occurred, no verbal or written history of the breaches of air discipline was maintained. In April of 1993 there was another incident where the pilot in question flew close visual formation with other B-52s, which is strictly prohibited by command regulations. Again proper documentation was not made and the situation was essentially covered up. In August of 1993 there was another violation at an air show demonstration where extreme aggressiveness was used in larger bank, pitch and roll angles than were allowed for such demonstrations. The Ops Group Commander was later asked by the accident board, which occurred almost a year later from this point, why was this allowed to occur again? He said that he had counted on the accident pilot to coordinate properly with authorities and essentially he was not aware that the profile violated regulations and flight manual guidance.<sup>6</sup> The point is, that’s what commanders are there for! They are morally bound to know the parameters, to know what is safe and what is not, to know what builds combat capability, and what is a needless risk of lives and resources. We can not accept testimony that says, “I did not know”<sup>7</sup> when one is a commander of a flying organization. A commander must not only make himself aware of

the regulations and flight-manual procedures that are applicable, but he must also have an intimate knowledge of the people that operate those airplanes. The commander must be prepared to take swift and certain action whenever those aircraft are not flown safely and with the discipline that air operations require.

A later incident highlighted in the Air War College article occurred in March 1994 just a few months before the accident where the accident pilot flew a bombing range mission closer than 500 feet to the ground which is in violation of regulations. In fact, the lowest crossing was less than 30 feet from a ridge and a crewmember had testified that “if he had not intervened and demanded a climb and then assisted with the controls, the aircraft would have hit the ridge.”<sup>8</sup> The aircraft also flew low crossovers over people, which is prohibited and the pilot also did an unauthorized formation with an A-10 aircraft that was not planned or pre-briefed. This is also contrary to flying regulations. Just a few months prior to the mishap, a series of major violations occurred. Despite these lapses of air discipline, no serious action was taken. After this last incident the Squadron Commander, later killed in the accident, asked the Group Commander to restrict the accident pilot from further flying. The Ops Group Commander verbally reprimanded the accident pilot, calling the actions at the bombing range “a breach of air discipline.”<sup>9</sup> Clearly at this point he knew that the pilot in question had a history of not flying safely and prudently. However, when the accident pilot assured the Ops Group Commander that there would be no violations in the future, the Ops Group Commander did not take formal action, did not document the incident, and nothing was entered into the pilot’s record. Later, a flight surgeon came forward to the Chief of Safety and informed him that a patient he had seen did not want to fly with the accident pilot because he “was overly

aggressive in flying.”<sup>10</sup> Again, wing leadership was aware of this and no action was taken. When the accident profile was briefed to the wing leadership in April and May, it was rejected as being too aggressive and some modifications were made to it. However, when the Ops Group Commander flew this corrected profile, he reported back to the Wing Commander that “the profile looked good to him; looks very safe, well within parameters.”<sup>11</sup> What would happen later in June 1994, the crash of the B-52, is a direct result of a lack of air discipline, not only by the pilot in question, but within the flying organization. As we have said this is directly attributable to wing, group, and squadron leadership of course.

The accident investigation board discovered a pattern of repeated flight discipline violations by the accident pilot. Yet in every case, the wing senior leadership either did not recognize the seriousness of the violation and did nothing or chose to deal with it in an unofficial manner. The investigation revealed much about “a climate” in the wing where junior officers participated in, witnessed, or later learned of flight discipline violations and did nothing.<sup>12</sup>

In this case, it is clear that there was a pattern of repeated violations that shows leadership was not involved in enforcing air discipline. A climate of air discipline did not exist at Fairchild AFB in June 1994.

The second example I’d like to use in highlighting the importance of air discipline is a result of a T-37 accident which occurred in 1993. A T-37 from Barksdale AFB was cross-country with two co-pilots flying under the Accelerated Co-Pilot Enrichment (ACE) program. This ACE program had been flying for nearly 20 years without a Class A mishap related to a breach of air discipline. The accident in question occurred when the two co-pilots attempted to do an aerobatic demonstration low level for one of the families of the co-pilots. They flew at tree top level during this demonstration while one of the

pilot's families was gathered to watch this demonstration. This demonstration was in violation of regulations, and yet it apparently was very carefully planned to be witnessed by one of the pilots' families. Flying at low levels, the T-37 impacted a tree, spun out of control and struck the ground, resulting in the death of both pilots. The failure of commanders in setting the climate and in aircrew members in adhering to established standards of air discipline should be apparent. The tragedy is not limited to the loss of a T-37 and the loss of life. A mother had the opportunity to watch her son die because he flew an airplane outside of safety parameters. A serious breach of air discipline had significant and continuing affects on combat capability, resources and families.

Why is air discipline so important for air commanders in keeping the "tip of the spear razor sharp?" Air discipline is key in setting the climate, where aggressive, but safe, prudent training is conducted. It is an environment where warriors are prepared for air battle but do not take unnecessary or unwarranted risk. Flying is not without risk, but ethically motivated leadership can minimize and focus that risk into producing combat power, which fulfills the mission.

*Aviation in itself is not inherently dangerous. But to an even greater degree than the sea, it is terribly unforgiving of any carelessness, incapacity or neglect.*

—Author unknown

### **The Ethical Imperative of Realistic Training**

If the imperative of air discipline sets the climate for developing air warriors, then the next most important aspect in producing trained warriors is the imperative of realistic training. The effect of a well-trained, well-armed, tactically-sound force, was evident in the Gulf War. Secretary Les Aspin was quoted as saying that, "air power was the most

significant factor in winning the Gulf War.”<sup>13</sup> How we got to be the world’s finest air force took many years of training. The precision guided weapons flying through windows and through hanger doors to destroy bunkers and aircraft, seen on the CNN channel, impressed the American public. It had taken the Air Force a long time to train to that level of lethality. It took years of realistic training to identify the weaknesses in personnel skills, in weapons systems, and in a variety of tactics. The recognition that realistic training was the most important factor for wartime readiness occurred sometime after Vietnam. Col L. M. Johnson, the Director of Collective Training at the Army’s Training and Doctrine Command, states “You need to train as you intend to fight, because you will fight like you train.”<sup>14</sup> The Gulf War was an excellent example of fighting like we train. We had trained in a realistic scenario and we demonstrated that capability very effectively during the Gulf War. While the effect of our air power in the Gulf War is impressive, in a post war draw-down atmosphere of austere budget restrictions, the question will undoubtedly be raised “Are we doing too much realistic training—can we scale it back to save some money?” I think the answer to that most difficult question goes back to the heart of what a military force—what the United States Air Force—must be prepared to do. As stated so succinctly before, General Fogleman’s standard of why we exist—“to fight and win wars,” provides the initial answer to that question. Looking further into that question, however, General Sir John Hackett used the term “unlimited liability”<sup>15</sup> to describe the requirements of the military profession. That unlimited liability is simply that you are called to lay down your life for your country, for your family, for your fellow Americans and that no other profession entails such a commitment. This unlimited liability clause is a burden to the air commander. Not only must he risk his own life but

his sole purpose, through realistic training, is to prepare his troops to ensure they are in a constant state of readiness, so that if they are deployed they will not be wasted due to their lack of preparation. Through realistic training commanders can assure themselves that their troops are combat ready and that through this we can “sustain the trust of the American people who count on us to take care of the nations most treasured resource—its sons and daughters.”<sup>16</sup> The question of whether we can afford such realistic training, considering the cost in terms of the loss of our sons and daughters, and the possible loss of a conflict and national objectives of the United States, is answered by realizing that we cannot afford not to. Budget limitations may cause us to scale back military forces but must not drive the adequacy of our training or the capability of our forces to meet their missions. We must continue to reform ourselves into a smaller but ever more potent Air Force for America. Air commanders have a continuing ethical responsibility to ensure realistic training plays the important role that it did prior to Operation Desert Storm.

If air commanders remain true to their ethical mandates and continue to provide realistic training to ensure combat capability, how must this be focused? Clearly it must be based on as realistic a threat scenario as we can imagine. “To be effective, realistic combat training must be a dynamic process incorporating the constant changes of the international arena with the national interest and evolving threat environments.”<sup>17</sup> This requires a great deal of judgment and a constant review of intelligence sources. Commanders must also continue to push the limit on air power capabilities and doctrine. Through realistic combat training they can ensure that their troops can gain “expertise, knowledge, and fog of war experience in a non-hostile environment so that they may effectively employ combat forces in future operations.”<sup>18</sup>

In making the case for realistic training and its positive affect on force readiness, and in an effort to convince those who would say budget cuts force further degradation in training levels, I think that it is important to review how we got where we are. Key events during the Vietnam War drove the military services to design the more realistic training institutions such as Red Flag, the National Training Center (NTC), and the Navy's Top Gun flight school. The Air Force's air-to-air combat experience in Vietnam was a large disappointment. In essence, it was a failure of a country with superior airpower to meet the threat of a small air force with older, yet very maneuverable aircraft. "During the Rolling Thunder Campaign, 1965-1968, the United States Air Force and the United States Navy achieved approximately the same kill ratio over the North Vietnamese Air Force, about 2.3 to 1."<sup>19</sup> The Air Force's reaction to this was to study the problem in Vietnam. These teams discovered that aircrews had really been poorly trained for aerial combat.

The results of these briefings in a series of demonstration flights, proved that our combat crews were not totally familiar with air combat tactics and were not proficient in maximum performance maneuvering of their respective weapons systems. Similar deficiencies exist in other areas of combat tactics such as proper capping procedures, escort procedures, and aerial engagement procedures at low altitude. Many of these areas had not been explored and consequently not developed. The entire air combat tactics area was sadly neglected.<sup>20</sup>

During the war some changes were tried at the training level back in the states, but really very little statistical evidence exists that we improved our air-to-air combat capability significantly. The Navy, on the other hand, got into the realistic combat training business earlier than the Air Force and their kill ratio improved significantly

during the Vietnam conflict. The following table illustrates USAF and USN air-to-air kill success:

**Table 1. USAF and USN Air-To-Air Kill Success**

<b>Periods</b>	<b>MiGs Killed</b>	<b>US Losses</b>	<b>USAF Ratio</b>	<b>USN Ratio</b>
1965-1968	110	48	2.25	2.42
1970-1973	72	28	1.88	12.50

**Source:** Von Gilder, Walter L., “Realistic Training: The Key To Success in Aerial Combat,” Research Paper for USAC & GSC, June 1993, 29.

For example, from 1965 to 1968, United States Air Force kill ratio was 2.25 to 1, the US Navy’s 2.42 to 1. During the period 1970 to 1973, the Air Force ratio had gotten even worse bottoming out at 1.88 to 1. However, the Navy had improved its kill ratio by about a factor of 6 to 12.5 to 1. In other words, the Navy shot down more than 12 North Vietnamese fighters for every aircraft that they lost. In Peter DeLeon’s words, “Improved air combat skills largely honed by the new training emphasis thus seemed to be the only new variable that could have resulted in the Navy’s singular success.”<sup>21</sup> Lt Randy Cunningham, the leading Navy ace in Vietnam, related the reasons for his success when he said:

When I met my first MiG, I had over 150 ACM training flights. During my MIG engagements, I used tactics I had practiced against adversary aircraft. Pappy Boyington once said “The air battle is not necessarily won at the time of the battle, the winner may have been decided by the amount of time, energy, thought, and training, an individual has previously accomplished in an effort to increase his ability as a fighter pilot.”<sup>22</sup>

As a parallel point to Cunningham's quote, the only US Air Force pilot to become an ace during Vietnam was Captain Richard S. Richey. His opinion addressing air superiority training is as follows:

The pilot most likely to succeed is the one most highly trained. Stated another way, a superior pilot in an inferior aircraft will defeat an inferior pilot in a superior aircraft. I feel that our F-4 crews assigned to Southwest Asia were not properly trained to engage MiG's in route package six and combat is certainly not the place to train. We *must* prepare our aircrews for worldwide air combat *before* the war begins. From my experience during Linebacker, I am convinced that proper aircrew preparation requires a complete renovation of all our training programs from UPT to continuation training.<sup>23</sup>

The training revision called for by Capt Richey and the many experienced aviators who survived the war, came together in the form of what was termed the Red Baron Study. The study concluded that the trade-off between safety and realistic training was "out of balance and that the lives saved through coddling training programs were not equal to the lives lost through inadequate preparation for war. It was a difficult decision that the US Air Force decided to embark on a realistic combat training program."<sup>24</sup>

The Air Force Red Baron Study highlighted the need for realistic training. Each of the services had their failures from Vietnam, and although it may be said that we never lost a major battle in Vietnam, certainly from the political outcome, one must conclude that the US lost the Vietnam War. How the various services dealt with their failures were addressed in part by creating a realistic training environment. The Air Force turned to a program called Red Flag, the Army's efforts were largely wrapped up in the National Training Center Development, and the Navy's Top Gun School in San Diego was their air-to-air combat program for realistic training. What each of the services were looking for was "a sort of mythical battlefield where troops could engage in free play force-on-

force combat and live to pass along its lessons in combat survivability. It has spread to training grounds and exercises around the globe from a virtual rainbow of Air Force flag exercises to specialized training grounds such as Navy's "Strike U" and the Army's Joint Readiness Training Center."<sup>25</sup> It took decades for the military services to develop their realistic training programs. General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said of the Army's National Training Center, that it was absolutely key to our development. He is further quoted as saying, "We thought we were pretty good and our battalion commanders were supposed to be so hot, and we tripped over ourselves time and again. I was just appalled at how badly they did, and I was really appalled at myself because it was clear that I had a lot of work to do to. But we buckled down and started to do the work and we learned."<sup>26</sup> In General Powell's statement he defines how the Army, through trial and error, improved their combat effectiveness. A key the lesson of the Gulf War is how very effective our combat forces were after several decades of realistic training. In fact, in the 100-hour ground war, not a single Soviet built tank killed a US M1A1 tank. The M1A1 shoots on the move, the T-72 Soviet tank must stop before firing. The technology and training combined in a highly fluid, free play training scenario trained our troops well for the 100 hour desert war. Similarly, the Navy's Top Gun and the Air Force's Red Flag realistic training programs also had proved during the previous several decades to have prepared the Navy and Air Force forces for the battle that would be so successful in the Gulf War. Each of the services in many ways was vindicated of their Vietnam failures. The failures and the realistic training scenarios of the late 70's and 80's became its successes of the desert war.

Red Flag, the National Training Center, and Top Gun were answers at the national level for the services to create realistic training programs. However, the air commander must focus closely on the in unit training that his aircrews accomplish on a daily basis. The realism of air combat must also exist during daily training, and is even more important than the limited exposure that aircrews get once or twice a year at the national level. With respect to realistic in unit training, one might ask, “What should a new squadron, ops group, or wing commander do upon assuming command to ensure that realistic training is taking place in his unit?” What can the new air commander do to ensure the maximum combat capability of his aircrews? One answer is to provide advanced training for the right people. Selecting the right people for instructor status and weapons school, for example, is key to building solid training programs. A commander who selects instructor, flight lead, and weapon school candidates based on career advancement or favoritism as opposed to his very best aviators is doing a disservice to the combat capability of the organization. He has also failed the test of being ethically committed to a realistic training program.

A second issue to consider in designing realistic in-unit training should begin with a review of the unit design operational capability (DOC). Many units have multiple DOCs; the guidance that comes from the JCS in classified documents about a unit DOC may have a number of taskings. It is the commander’s responsibility to read and understand these taskings and to prioritize them as best he can within the existing resources. The taskings may exceed his ability to train due to resource limitations. If a unit is not able to meet its DOC, it needs to be reported and those limitations need to be highlighted to higher command so that the shortfalls can be addressed and fixed. Combat units are

required to report their level of combat capability periodically through “C” status. Many commanders are very reluctant to report their units less than fully mission capable. There is an ethical problem with reporting a unit fully combat capable when it is not. A 1988 study on ethics, conducted at Air University by a Col Kenneth Wenker, found that one of the most frequently reported ethical failings was “false reporting, especially in operations.”<sup>27</sup> Suffice to say that the unethical commander, who inaccurately reports his combat ready status, overestimating his unit’s capability, does a disservice to the national command authority and the American people. Beyond that, the real ethical dilemma is that he denies his aircrews the solutions to the problems that hold them back from full combat ready status. The maintenance or training shortfalls cannot be solved and the budget that would be required to bring them to full ready status cannot be garnered because the problem is buried. This is an ethical challenge which air commanders must face with courage. It brings us back to the most basic point in ethics: we must be who we say we are; we must be able to do what we say we can do. The air commander is responsible for ensuring that the training his airmen receive brings them to the highest levels of combat readiness and maintains them there. Any degradation needs to be reported, addressed and solved.

Having reviewed my unit DOC as a new B-52 squadron commander, I asked myself, “what single innovation in our training program would result in the maximum increase in combat effectiveness?” The answer to that question in 1992 was to develop a night vision goggle (NVG) training program. Although night vision training had been done in the past in the B-52 fleet, the program had not been formalized command-wide and, at that time, no B-52 unit had an effective NVG training program. Our DOC required the

capability to deploy and employ worldwide anytime, under various weather conditions. Clearly, this included low level flying at night. In other words, on B-52 flights which may last as long as 36 hours, with the strike portion of the mission conducted at night, no unit in the command would be night vision goggle (NVG) capable. Since there was very little training data and courseware to draw on, I sent my best instructors out to scour various NVG training programs. The Marine Corps had an excellent program in the F-18 fighter program. Some very dated but useful material was garnered from Minot and Barksdale's older programs. Some limited data was gained from the Combat Crew Training School at Castle Air Force Base. Combining courseware from a number of sources we wrote a training plan. We trained and tested the very best instructors in the squadron, learning many lessons in the process. It took eight months to train the entire squadron to NVG qualification. The success of the program was later apparent when the Air Combat Command Quality Air Force Assessment (QAFA) Team rated the program "a benchmark—the best observed in ACC." ACC adopted the training program we had developed as the command-wide model for NVG operations. The success of this program is apparent, but it began with a simple question: "How can I, within my existing DOC most improve our combat effectiveness?" The answer in this case was the NVG training program and it was a success. It is an example of the types of questions a commander ought to ask when assuming a new command.

Air commanders have an ethical imperative mandating maximum combat effectiveness. One of the important tools for building maximum combat effectiveness is realistic training. Both innovative in-unit training and national level training exercises are key avenues for achieving the realistic training scenarios that lead to tactically

proficient combat pilots. The bottom line in this whole realistic training equation is that we are prepared to win wars. The ethical air commander does everything in his power to insure his unit is ready to defend US national security interests. Professionally trained airmen, as part of the world's most respected Air Force, will win not only the trust of the American people, but the air campaigns which they are tasked to win in defense of the United States.

### **In Summary—What America Really Needs**

In attempting to formulate a personal view of what our changing role must be as Air Force leaders in the 21st century, I asked my best friend, “What is it that America wants most?” My wife Sherry answered immediately, “That’s easy, honey, they want someone they can trust.” Someone the American people can trust is what we need to be in the 21st century. In recent years I have read numerous newspaper public opinion polls which place the military at the top of institutions that the American people have faith in. By many measures our Congress, our courts, our clergy, and our schools, to name a few, have failed to inspire trust in the American public they serve. We are blessed to enjoy the confidence of the American people and it is a confidence that we must not betray. As I have outlined in this paper, the best way to fulfill our Constitutional mandate and serve America is to begin with a strong personal and institutional commitment to robust ethical standards. Our challenge is to reinforce our timeless ethical foundation while building tomorrow’s defense capabilities from evolving technologies. Our focus must be on managing the explosion of the information age and continuing to refine and build on our strategic vision of providing air and space forces for America’s defense. Further, as air

commanders we must strive to create a climate where air discipline and realistic training combine to produce the most respected airman in the world. In this way we can not only effectively defend America and our democratic way of life with the world's finest Air Force, but serve at the same time as an honorable example of what is right with America.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Toner, 23.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. Ronald R. Fogleman, "Integrity," *Air Force Magazine*, (Feb 1996): 90.

<sup>3</sup> *Leadership and Ethics*. Air War College Text, 1996: 8,9.

<sup>4</sup> Muradian Vago., "Several Officers May Face Discipline in the B-52 Crash," *Air Force Times*, 10 October 1994, 6.

<sup>5</sup> *Leadership and Ethics*. Air War College Text. \*Most of the facts concerning the B-52 crash came from this text and class discussion in ethics curriculum. The conclusions are the authors, except where further cited.

<sup>6</sup> *Leadership and Ethics*; 185.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>13</sup> AFDD-1, First Draft. 15 August 1995, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Terino, John; "Joint Training - Its Pay-off, its Future," *National Defense*, November 91, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Gen Ronald R. Fogleman; "Integrity," *Air Force Magazine*. (Feb 1996): 91

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>17</sup> Davee, John T., "Air Power Training in the USAF: Realistic and Joint," Research Paper for AWC, 1 Mar 1995, 9.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Von Gilder, Walter L., "Realistic Training: The Key To Success in Aerial Combat," Research Paper for USAC & GSC, June 1993, 24.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>24</sup> Colley, James A., "Red Flag - Is the Realism Worth the Cost?" Research Paper for USDC & GSC, Aug 1988, 52.

<sup>25</sup> Kitfield, James. "Training By Fire," *Government Executive*, July 1992, 28.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>27</sup> Wenker, Kenneth H., *Ethics in the USAF: 1988*. (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1990), iii.

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